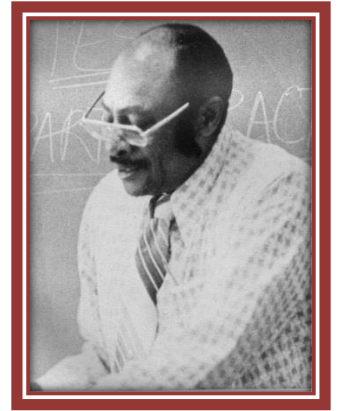


Earl LaJesse Foster

Earl LaJesse Foster, a native of New York City, was a classroom teacher of biology and the coach of the varsity boys' cross-country and track teams from 1970 to 1985 at Amherst County High School.

Coach Foster attended North Carolina Central University in 1943 and then again after World War II from 1946 to 1948 where he was a scholar-athlete. While majoring in biology, Coach Foster was North Carolina Central's premier track and field competitor. He won the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA) championships in the mile and the two-mile runs in 1943, the Robert L. Vann Memorial Championships in the mile and the 880-yard runs in 1946 and 1947, and the mile and two-mile Vann championship in 1948. He also won the 880 and mile at the Alabama Relays in 1948 and was a member of the 1948 CIAA Championship Medley Relay Team.



Coach Foster arrived at Amherst County High School in the fall of 1970 and became the first African-American head coach of any boys' varsity sport at the school when he took the reins of both the cross country and track teams. Coach Foster quickly reinvigorated the cross-country and track programs and was instrumental in the rapid growth of student participation levels. In the fall of 1972, the boys' cross-country team won the Lynchburg Invitational and the Regional AAU Jr Olympic meet and then won the first ever Western District Championship in cross country for Amherst County High School. Amherst moved to the Seminole District in 1974 and Coach Foster then led the boys' cross-country team to an undefeated regular season and a co-victory in their first Seminole District Championship. While the ensuing years in Coach Foster's tenure did not produce additional championship teams, his enduring contribution was to instill a love of sports and the pursuit of life-long fitness in all of the young men he coached and mentored through the years. Coach Foster served as an influential mentor through his consistent encouragement to always think positively and learn from life's experiences.

Coach Foster also led by example as he was a nationally acclaimed senior athlete himself and routinely participated in National Masters level running events for athletes over the age of 40. In 1981, he took first place in his age-group for both the 440-yard dash and the 440 yard hurdles at the National USA Masters Track and Field Championships in Atlanta, Georgia. Coach Foster was also very active for many years in the development and leadership of track and cross-country programs for youth at the local, regional and state levels, serving as the Vice President of the Virginia Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) and as Chairman of Virginia Junior Olympics Cross Country. In 1984, Coach Foster was inducted into the North Carolina Central University Alex M. Rivera Athletics Hall of Fame. Coach Foster passed away in Lynchburg, Virginia in 1995.

Submitted by: Mike Henderson in honor of Coach Foster