**The following is one of several feature stories I wrote for a book I co-authored that**

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**SHELBY'S MAGICAL YEAR WITH THE BIG BOYS**

         The State of Michigan had its own version of the fictional city Hickory, popularized in the hit movie "Hoosiers”. The tiny West Michigan community of Shelby took on the "Big Boys" in 1910 and became the only small school in Michigan prep history to win a major state title.  What was especially noteworthy about the Shelby effort was its total team participation.

         It has not been uncommon in track lore to have a one, or even a two-man track team, win a state championship.   Although the 1910 Shelby track squad certainly had more than its fair share of individual stars, eight out of the nine members of the Tiger's team figured into the scoring at the two big state meets in East Lansing and Ann Arbor.

         Orin Kaye was the only member of the Shelby powerhouse that failed to score, although Kaye placed just out of the money with a fifth-place finish in the 880-yard run.

         Shelby opened more than a few eyes a year earlier when they finished a surprising third at the University of Michigan Invitational.  With all members of the 1909 contingent being underclassmen, 1910 would provide Shelby a golden opportunity to earn a bundle of hardware.

         Coached by J.J. Nufer, the Tigers began their season with a highly publicized dual meet with the defending state champions from Muskegon.  Shelby displayed their incredible team depth by pulling out a 68-58 win in front of a shocked crowd in Muskegon.  Legendary Muskegon Coach Bob Zuppke threw in the towel before the last event was to be run, conceding the 880-yard relay to the visiting Shelby squad.

         Just days before their heralded dual with Muskegon, Shelby suffered a big blow when their ace pole-vaulter, Stanley Sargeant, broke his hip during practice.  Sargeant had already vaulted over the 10-foot mark, a respectable height during the early part of the century.

         Muskegon did regroup to successfully defend its state championship in East Lansing the following week.  Zuppke's crew tallied 28 points, with their rivals from Shelby taking home the runner-up trophy with 22 points.  Feelings ran high between Shelby and Muskegon.  Muskegon's annual, the "Said & Done", clearly depicted the growing animosity between the two west side schools.  Following Muskegon's triumph in East Lansing the annual wrote:  "It was a lot of satisfaction to step on Shelby High School."

         However, when the tables were turned and Shelby won the Michigan Interscholastic the following week in Ann Arbor, the annual marched to the tune of a different drummer.  "Luck was surely against the local team (Muskegon), while Shelby was covered with horseshoes," reported the Muskegon periodical.

         The Tigers, not content with a runner-up trophy, defeated Muskegon as well as other schools from throughout the Midwest at the prestigious invitational.

         In the very early years of state high school competition the meet at the

University of Michigan was most coveted by state track powers.  The state meet in East Lansing was limited primarily to public schools from within the Wolverine state.  The meet held in Ann Arbor attracted schools from throughout the Midwest, public and private schools alike vying for a share of the impressive hardware served up by the university.

         Placing in 10 out of the 15 events offered, Shelby compiled 35 points to defeat Muskegon and more than forty other schools to win the much sought-after cup.  Leading the way for the Tigers were sprint stars Steve Lyttle and Vern Souter.  Lyttle upset the form chart by winning the 100 and 220-yard dashes with Souter also piling up valuable sprint points.  Souter placed fourth in the 100, second in the 220 and 440-yard dashes, and teamed up with Lyttle, Clifford Harrison and Erwin Anderson to place third in the 880 yard-relay, behind Detroit Central and Grand Rapids Central.

         Warren Sargeant, brother of the injured Stanley Sargeant, took home a first-place medal by winning the high jump, defending his first-place title earned a year earlier in Ann Arbor.  George Rider earned a fourth place in the hammer throw, Andrew Beam took fourth in the two-mile run and Charles Wright became the eighth Shelby team member to place with a fourth in a strong mile field.

         When news of Shelby's victory eventually reached the homefolks back in West Michigan the celebrations had begun.  Steve Lyttle recounted his memoirs of the Ann Arbor meet in an interview with Lewis L. Forsythe in 1949.

         "Thirty-nine years is quite a while to remember, but my impressions were so vivid of that year that I couldn't forget them if I wanted to.   It just happens that I was the captain of the team for the little town that made the big scoop. I still have the gold medals for winning the 100 and 220-yard dash.  Well, it was quite an experience because we traveled by train and of course, the Muskegon boys were on the train with us and Bob Zuppke, who was the coach there, was very friendly to us.  We stayed at the same fraternity but just where or what, I don't recall.  The businessmen of Shelby furnished the funds for traveling and the fraternity cared for us while at Ann Arbor."

         Continued Lyttle, "the meet lasted two days, Friday and Saturday. The schools were not divided into classes as they are now and as you know we competed with the Detroit High Schools, Scott-Toledo High School and the University of Chicago High School.  The boys from the latter school all seemed to be tall slender fellows.   The townspeople of Shelby were very excited and enthused when we won the meet.  The night we returned home (the train got in about 7:00) a great gathering was at the station to meet us.  I am sorry to report that my timidity caused a fellow trackman and myself to get off at the back end of the train and hide ourselves so we wouldn't have to make a speech at the celebration and bon fire they had planned for us.   Not a nice way for a captain to act, but I was just a green country kid and didn't realize my responsibility said Lyttle."

         "During high school I lived with a Doctor Griffin and the week of the meet I  had been sick with a sore throat and had never had my track shoes on until the preliminaries on Friday.  I remember the doctor gave me condensed milk tablets to eat enroute to Ann Arbor."

         Many of these same athletes excelled outside the track oval and became very prominent citizens.  By 1910 the little school near the shores of Lake Michigan boasted of 26 of its past graduates attending college, a very high percentage for the era.  Steve Lyttle, following his college days, moved to Saginaw where he was the principle of Saginaw High School for many years.  Lyttle, in 1939, was in the stands at MSC watching his son Bob run a leg on the winning 880-yard relay, making the Lyttle family one of the first father/son combinations to win state titles.

         The Shelby class of 1910 consisted of 21 students, the largest class in school history.  In addition to their surprising third place finish at the state track championship in 1909, the football team posted a fine 6 and 1 record the following fall.  Only a season opening loss to the Muskegon Reserves prevented Shelby from posting a perfect record.

         Although many of the members of the Shelby championship team would participate in track in college, it was in the classroom and off the track where the champs of 1910 would make their best marks.  Warren Sargeant placed fourth at the Collegiate championships in 1912 while performing for the University of Michigan and became the second high jumper in Michigan to surpass the six-foot barrier.  His leap of 6'3 in a meet vs. Cornell in 1913 was at that time the best jump ever for a state athlete.  Sargeant was no slouch on the track either as he ran a 4:37 mile the same year after earlier clearing 6'2 in the high jump.

         After earning his degree from dental school at the U of M, the two-time state high jump champion became a dentist for many years in Kalamazoo.  Vern Souter likewise became a dentist, beginning his dental career in Detroit.  Dr. Souter returned to his hometown of Shelby in 1940 to continue his practice until his death in 1954.

         Vern Souter lost his younger brother Hal in 1913, who gave his life while rescuing a young lady.  The younger Souter drowned in his effort to rescue the girl, a heroic act that earned Souter the Carnegie Medal for heroism posthumously.

         George Rider took his talents to Olivet College and excelled in the classroom as well as on the track.  Rider eventually became a college president in Kansas before enjoying his retirement.  Rider's brother, Seymour, was becoming a legend back in his hometown of Shelby.  Seymour was a hunter held in great esteem in the northern continent.  The younger Rider's most legendary feat occurred in the Northwood’s of Canada where he bagged a Moose that tipped the scales at 1800 pounds, the biggest moose shot in Canadian history.  Seymour Rider celebrated his 100th birthday by going hunting.

         Many years later the tiny town of Shelby would be one of but two state schools to boast of a state track champion as well an alumnus of the National Basketball Association.  (Pontiac Central being the other school).  After leading Shelby to their second straight Class C basketball championship, Paul Griffin in 1972 ran a leg on the Tiger's state championship mile relay team.  Griffin had a great career in the NBA as a rugged rebounder for the New Orleans Jazz and the San Antonio Spurs.

         Griffin wasn't the only former Shelby track state champion to have a successful professional career.  Dave Whitsell, the Class C long jump champion in 1954, had a brilliant career as a defensive back in the National Football League.  Elected into the New Orleans Saints Hall of Fame in 1996, Whitsell led the NFL in interceptions with 10 during the 1967 season and had five out of his 46 career interceptions returned for touchdowns. Whitsell's crowning moment as a NFL star came late in the 1963 season. Dave intercepted a pass against the Detroit Lions and returned it for a TD to clinch the Western conference championship.  Whitsell earned a world championship ring on December 29, 1963, as a starter in the Bear's 14-10 title victory over the New York Giants.

        There is very little question that little Shelby High School has had more than their fair share of outstanding athletes.  But as a team, none shown more brightly than the state (All-Classes) champions of 1910, both on and off the track.