

## ***A SUMMARY OF ED WILSON'S RUNNING CAREER***

*As remembered by Old Ed Wilson - November 2010*

*Little Eddie Wilson was born near Ferndale, California on Sept. 5, 1931- the seventh and youngest child of Jim and Jo Wilson. At a very early age he was responsible for keeping the kitchen wood box filled and at the age of nine he joined his father and older brother in milking the cows in the early mornings and evenings. By the age of 12 he was cutting down trees for stove wood and working in the fields with the rest of the family. In addition, he enjoyed playing baseball, basketball, horseshoes and other sports with his larger classmates. He found that he was faster than most of his older and taller friends.*

*At home, on their hilly cattle ranch near Ferndale, he loved to race with his dog Lindy who beat him in every race. As a result of this scientific experiment, he concluded that four legs were better than two legs, unless you could fly like a bird.*

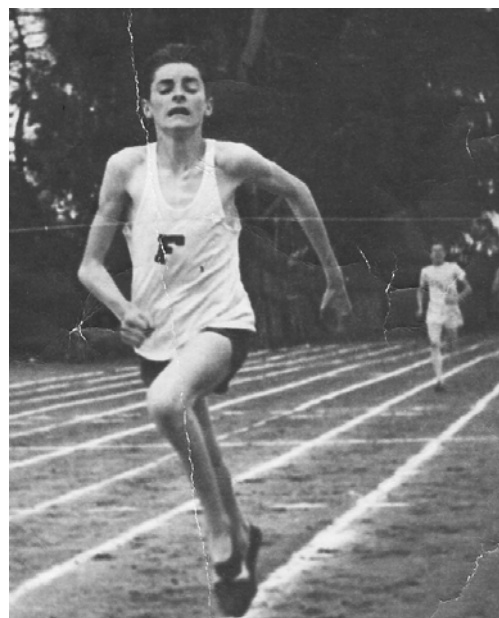
*In 1948 at the age of 17, Eddie was 5 feet - 6 inches tall and weighed approximately 105 pounds and was a Junior in Ferndale High School. He was too small to play football; however, he became one of the equipment managers and was able to travel and be a part of the team.*

*He then tried out for the basketball and baseball teams and did not make either team. Finally, Eddie was qualified to run in the Humboldt County High School track meet - where he easily won the 660 yard race in the "B Group".*

*In the summer of 1949, Eddie and his family moved to the big city of Sacramento, where, he graduated from Christian Brothers High School – a small school that did not have a track team.*



***Eddie, at age 13, and his dog Lindy***



***Eddie winning his first race***

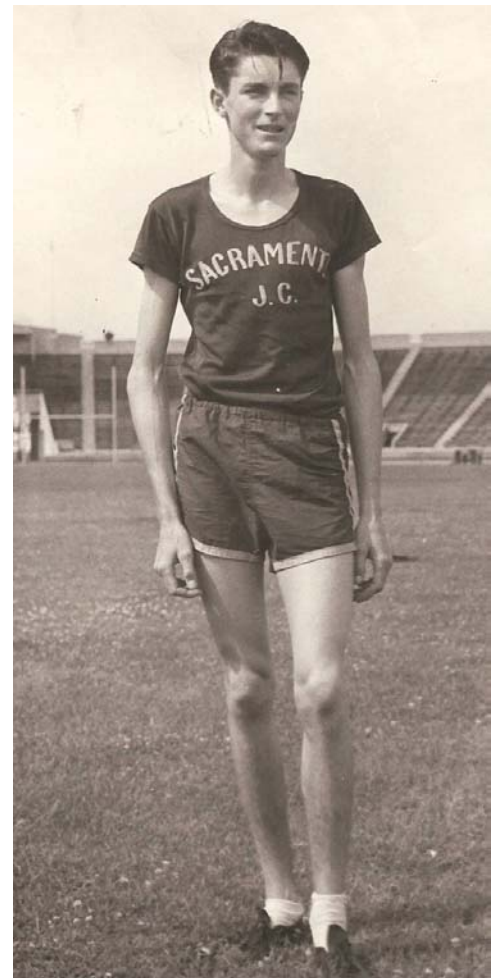
*In the Spring Semester of 1951 Ed was taking a physical education class in basketball at Sacramento Junior College. In the middle of the semester the PE instructor told the class, of 50 young men, to run a race of approximately one mile distance. Ed easily won the race by at least 50 yards.*

*The PE instructor, Tom Weems, was also the Track and Field coach and the purpose of the race was to identify potential members for his Track Team. The coach told Ed to come out and practice with the team every afternoon at 3:00 PM. He explained to the coach, as an engineering student, he had laboratory classes four afternoons each week. Since there were only three home meets left in the season, the coach suggested that he run the 880 yard race in these meets, since the team needed another runner at this distance.*

*Ed ran the next Saturday and placed about fifth in a field of nine. He then started practicing alone, between his classes, at 10 AM each day. In the last meet of the season, with a time for the 880 of 2 minutes and 5 seconds, he took second place in the race. It was then he realized hard work and the desire to win was the key to be successful at the sport. He was looking forward to the next track season. Also as an engineering student, he believed the application of the principles of minimization of energy and conservation of momentum could be used to improve his running form.*

*In early January 1952, Ed was 6 feet tall, 130 pounds and started training for the Spring track season. Due to his afternoon engineering laboratories, he continued to run alone, with a stop watch, between morning classes. When track season started in February, he was able to work out three afternoons a week with the team. More important, he was able to make good friends with his teammates and was a part of a real sports team. In addition, he met a life long friend, Al Baeta, a middle distance runner.*

*A typical meet in the 1952 season, Al would run to win the mile race and Ed would run to capture second place. In the 880 yard event, 45 minutes after the mile, Ed would run to win and Al would run to take second place. In the 4 by 440 yard relay, 45 minutes later, both ran all out, along with their sprint teammates, to win the final 4 by 440 mile relay event.*



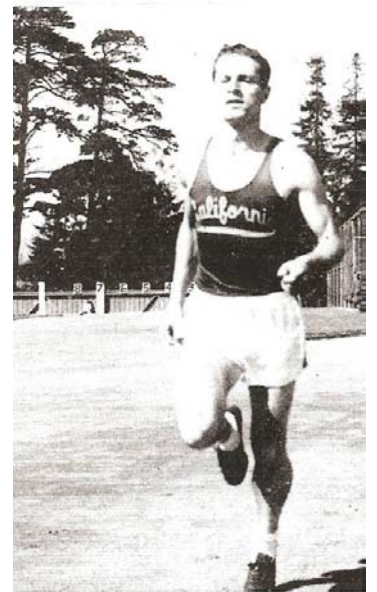
*The result of the season was the Sacramento Junior College team won the conference championship.*

*In the California State Junior College championship meet in Santa Rosa, the team placed second. Ed won the 880 yard event at the State meet with a time of 1 minute and 58.5 seconds. It was a great year for Ed since he won all of his 880 yard events.*

*Al Baeta and Ed were selected as co-captains of the 1952 Track and Field Team.*

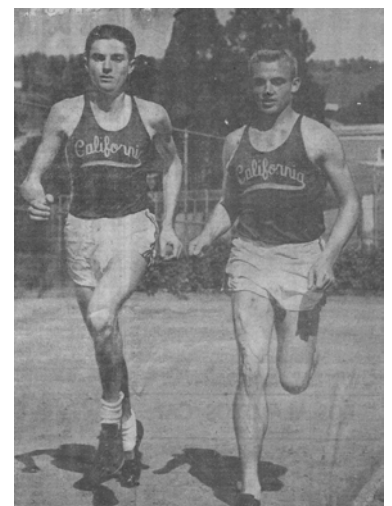
*Ed transferred to CAL at the end of January 1953 to complete the last two years of his requirements for his BS degree in civil engineering. He started to work out with the track team and found he was not in the best physical shape and most of his teammates had started training a few months earlier. In addition, Coach Brutus Hamilton (who had been the USA head coach for the 1952 Olympics) did not approve of him working out after 5:00 PM on the days he had engineering laboratory classes; therefore, he was not entered in the scheduled meets with other schools. After a few months, Ed was running the 880 under 1 minute and 57 seconds and was the second fastest 880 runner in practice except for the great runner Lon Spurrier. At that time, Ed asked Brutus if could run the last few intercollegiate meets of the season. Brutus did not respond to his request (later, Ed realized Brutus did not want him to run during the 1953 season in order to save his eligibility for the 1954 and 1955 seasons).*

*In the fall of 1953, Ed was 22 years old, 6 feet 2 inches tall and weighed 145 pounds. He started training to make sure that he would be in great shape at the start of the 1954 Track Season. Even when it was raining, he ran alone in the hallways above the basketball court in Harmon gym. Early February 1954 was the formal start of training for the Track and Field season. In the Spring Semester Ed only had a bridge design lab on Friday afternoons and could work out with the team four days a week. In addition, his close friend Al Baeta from Sacramento Junior College had transferred to CAL to run the mile and 880. Al (shown to the right) was a natural leader, athlete, teacher, writer and became a very successful coach in Northern California, in addition to being the USA assistant track and field Coach for 1992 and head manager for 1996 Olympic Games*



*In 1954, after a few weeks of training, Brutus instructed the group of want-to-be 880 runners to run two 60 second laps back to back. After the first 60 second lap, Ed was ready to show Brutus he was a runner that could not be ignored and completed the 880 yard race under 1 minute and 56 seconds – the best time of his life. His teammates did not understand why he broke the suggested rules for the practice race. Brutus just smiled because his purpose of the race was to identify a runner who really wanted to win. Ed then realized he had made the team and Brutus was his coach.*

*The first meet of the 1954 season was with the San Francisco Olympic Club and Fort Ord on March 27, 1954. Lon Spurrier (shown to the right along with Ed) won the 880 in a time of 1:53.9 and Ed placed second at 1:54.2. Ed also ran a very fast 440 in the Cal winning mile relay. Cal won the meet with 79 points to Ord's 57 and O-Club's 23.*



*A year later in 1955, Lon, running for the San Francisco Olympic Club in a meet with CAL, set a World Record of 1:47.5 for the 880.*

The following week on April 3 in a meet with Santa Clara Youth Center and San Jose State, Lon took first in the 880 with a time 1:52 and Ed placed second with a time of 1:53. At that time, these were close to the fastest times in the nation for the 880. Cal won the meet with 70 points to SCYC 64 and San Jose 23

On April 10, 1954, the Kansas Jayhawks and Wes Santee, the very best middle-distance runner in the USA, came to Berkeley to meet the California Golden Bears. The local sports writers predicted that Santee would break the world record in the mile of 4:01.4 set by Sweden's Gunder Haegg in 1945. Santee had previously ran near 4:02 and the 12,000 seat capacity of Edwards Field was sold out.

It was a warm spring day, without wind, in Berkeley at the start of the mile. After the first few laps, it was apparent that Santee was not going for the record. He had a comfortable lead and easily finished the mile 4:05.5.

Forty five minutes after the mile, Wes and Kansas team captain Art Daizell were ready to race Lon and Ed in the 880. After the first 440, all four runners were in a small group with Lon leading, Wes second, with Ed and Art following closely. At that point, the group heard the official say 62 – 63 seconds; then, Wes passed Lon and started sprinting for the last 440. Wes had a 10 yard lead, before the other three runners started their sprint for the finish line. Wes won in a time of 1:51.5, Lon was a few yards behind, and, Ed and Art tied for third after both ran 52 seconds for the last 440.

Forty five minutes after the 880, Wes beat Lon and Ed again in the 4 by 440 relay when he ran the last 440 in approximately 47 seconds. The final Score of the meet was Kansas 70 ½ and California 60 ½.

Wes was responsible for scoring 15 points that afternoon. He ran to help Kansas win the meet and gave up an excellent opportunity to set a world record in the mile.

Approximately four weeks later, the great Roger Bannister broke the world record and the 4 minute mile barrier by running the Miracle Mile in 3:59.4 as shown to the right. This historic event took place on May 6, 1954 during a meet between British AAA and Oxford University at Iffley Road Track in Oxford. It was watched by about 3,000 spectators.



**Wes was raised on a ranch in Kansas and also ran with his dog SARGE; therefore, because they had similar backgrounds, Ed was hoping that he would be successful in his quest for the sub 4 minute mile record**



**ACHIEVES GOAL**—Roger Bannister, former Oxford ace, was clocked in 3:59.4 today in a mile run in England to better the world record of 4:01.4 set by Sweden's Gunder Haegg in 1945. He is the first athlete to achieve the much sought after 4 minute mile. AP Wirephoto

*On April 17, 1954 the CAL track team traveled to UCLA to compete with their “baby brothers” in Los Angeles (it was Ed’s first airplane ride). Brutus decided that Lon would run the mile and Ed would be responsible to win the 880. Ed did win the 880 in 1:54.0 breaking Lon’s meet record of 1:54.2 set the previous year. However, Ed ran into an unbreakable tape at the end of the race as shown to the right. As the tape ripped across his neck, Ed attempted to stop, seriously spraining his ankle, and then fell to the track. Lon, who was watching the race after running a 4:16.8 mile, hurried to help Ed to his feet as he stated “who was the SOB that did not let go of the tape?” Lon responded, “be quiet it was President Sproul.” (The 1:54.0 record Ed set at the 1954 UCLA meet was broken in 1958 by almost 6 seconds by Don Bowden – the first American to run the mile under four minutes. He was really world class! He lives in the Bay Area and Ed talks to him every few years at track functions.)*

*Cal won the meet 90 to 41 points for UCLA. However, the accident was an embarrassment for the President and virtually ended the track season for Ed.*



**BIG BRASS**—Robert Gordon Sproul, president of U. of California, holds tape at finish of 880 in Westwood meet. Ed Wilson wins race in 1:54, meet record. Times photo

*The next Saturday, April 24, the powerful University of Southern California track team arrived at Berkeley for their annual dual meet with Cal. Brutus’ track teams had never beaten USC since he started coaching at Cal in 1932. The team really wanted to win the meet for the Coach; however, it was not possible. Ed had not been able to work out during the week because of his sprained ankle in the UCLA meet. He did run the 880 and took third place with a slow time of 1:55.*

*After a two week rest, on May 8, Ed won the 880 in the Big Meet with Stanford. However, his time was only 1:54.5. Clearly, the sprained ankle was not healing as fast as was hoped. Cal won the meet and scored 80 points to 51 for Stanford.*

*On May 15, Cal won the distance medley at the West Coast Relay held in Fresno. Don Timmerman ran the 440, Lon the 880, Ed the 1320, and Len Simpson the mile.*

*On Friday, May 21 the CAL Two-Mile Relay Team was invited to participate in the Los Angeles Coliseum Relays. The world record of 7:29.2 was set in 1952 by an all star team of Americans competing in England. Prior to the race the team (Al Baeta, Ed Wilson, Len Simpson and Lon Spurrier) was told by Brutus they were capable of breaking the world record. The two mile relay, composed of the top teams in the nation, provided great thrills for a crowd of 47,611 track fans. The lead changed several times during the race. Michigan led at the start of the anchor lap, followed closely by Fordham’s Tom Courtney and Cal’s Lon Spurrier. Courtney and Lon immediately passed the leader and ran great 880s. Fordham won with a time of 7:27.3, Cal was second at 7:28.5 and Occidental third. The first two teams broke the world record of 7:29.2. Ed Wilson 1:51.5, Len Simpson 1:52.1 and Lon Spurrier 1:49.5 ran the fastest time of their lives. Tom Courtney ran 1:48.2 for his 880, also the best of his life. In*

addition, in the same meet, shot putter Perry O'Brien broke his own world record with a throw of 60 ft. 5 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (In the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, Tom Courtney won the 800 meters and Lon Spuuriior placed forth.)

The following day, May 22, California's same two mile relay team competed at the California relays at Modesto. The only competition was the Los Angeles Athletic Club that was an older group of experienced runners anchored by the great Mal Whitfield who was the current world record holder in the 880 and had won the 800 meters at the 1948 and 1952 Olympics. They were hoping to break the world record Fordham had set the previous night. However, they only ran the relay in 7:35.1 and the Cal team was not far behind at 7:36.8. It was apparent the young men from Cal were very tired. However, all were very satisfied with their performances during the weekend.

On Sunday, May 23, Ed returned to the Berkeley Campus with a significant amount of academic work to be completed before the following Friday when the track team was scheduled to fly to University of Washington to participate in the Pacific Coast Conference championships meet on Saturday May 30. It would be the third Friday in a row that he would not be able to attend his bridge design laboratory on Friday afternoons. Since the semester bridge design project was due on Friday, he and his laboratory partner had to complete the project by working at night.

By the time he arrived in Seattle on Friday evening he was mentally and physically exhausted. The next day he placed fifth in the PCC 880. Ed was very happy not to have qualified for the final NCAA meets, scheduled to be held during final examination week and beyond.

The day after his last final, Ed reported for his summer employment with the California State Bridge Department, as he had in the summer of 1953. When he returned to Berkeley after two summers as a field engineer building bridges, he realized working on real structures was far more important and satisfying than the temporary running records he may set as a runner.

During the fall semester 1954, Ed completed all academic requirements for his BS in civil engineering, was accepted to graduate school in structural engineering and was offered a teaching assistant position for the spring semester. In addition, Ed ran on the cross country team in order to be in good physical condition for the 1955 track season.

When Ed returned to his home in Sacramento for the 1954 Christmas vacation, he opened a letter from the local Draft Board informing him to report for induction in the Army on January 4, 1955. Since Ed had already received two deferments and the fighting in Korea had stopped, he decided not to appeal and to comply with the order. After 4 months of basic training and 4 months of radio repair school, Ed then spent 15 months in Korea.

In January 1957, at the age of 25, he returned to Berkeley to earn his MS and D. Eng. degrees in Structural Engineering.



**The light was not good in the tents. However, Ed loved Korea because he was able to read hundreds of historical books.**