

JOHN BAKER

Shakespeare wrote "The good that men do lives after them." For the late-John Baker, this is a vast understatement. John's talents touched more lives than he ever could imagine.



His 'Last Race' against cancer and his dedication to youth have been recorded by author Bill Buchanan in READERS DIGEST, by the BYU Motion Picture Studio and CBS Television ("A Shining Season"). But the mark that will endure the sands of time is his devotion to youngsters as coach, teacher and counselor, resulting in the ultimate establishment of one of the finest young track teams in the U.S.

The Duke City Dashers' annual dominance of track and field marks for elementary and mid-school ages stands as a tribute to John Baker.

John started his track career at Mark Twain Elementary, continued it at Monroe Jr. High, then saw it blossom at Manzano High under Bill Wolffarth. John was Manzano's first letterman. Under veteran UNM mentor Hugh Hackett, he achieved greatness for himself and the Lobos in the early-'60s, climaxed by his most famous mile run against mighty USC in 1965. He became the rallying point for an awesome $92\frac{1}{2}$ - $31\frac{1}{2}$ rout of the mighty Trojans at University Stadium before 8500 screaming loyalists.

He never ran a four-minute mile, but his victims on the cinder track were famous: Kansas' Jim Ryun. . . Tom Von Ruden. . . Peter Scott. . . USC's Bruce Bess. . . Bob Siciul, to name a few. His finishing 'kick' was as renowned as Mel Daniels' dunk.

John now set his sights on the 1972 Olympics - the same event that would see Cathy Carr (Hall of Fame, 1978-79) win a pair of Golds.

In early-1969, he learned he had terminal cancer. Few of his friends or teammates knew of the illness and his all-out enthusiasm with his budding youths for the next 18 months of his life blanketed suspicions. The Dashers won the national age group cross-country championships in St. Louis shortly after John's death Nov. 26, 1970.

The trophies of John Baker today are on display at John Baker Elementary School, formerly Aspen Elementary. The influence of the man is seen in the sweat and tears of Albuquerque's youthful track stars.