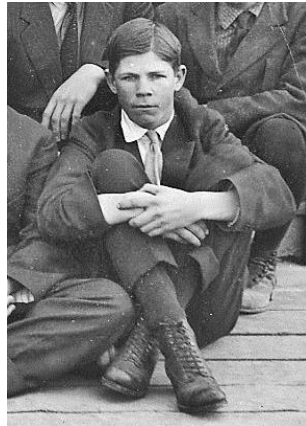


Dan Kelly: Baker City's Athletic Superstar

by
Gary Dielman

Dan who? That was the reaction I got from long-time *Baker City Herald* sports reporter Gerry Steele, when I asked him in the fall of 2009, if he'd ever heard of Dan Kelly. Same reaction from Baker High School Principal Jerry Peacock, who confirmed my suspicion that Kelly's photo does not hang in the gymnasium gallery of BHS sports greats.



*Earliest known photo of Dan Kelly.
Detail from 8th grade class photo in the 1900 Nugget.*

But life-long Baker City resident ninety-eight-year-old Chet Smith had heard of Kelly. "Yes, I've heard of Dan Kelly. His family home was on the southwest corner of 7th and Broadway, present location of a church. For me Kelly was sort of a myth. Only thing I remember is that he ran the 100 yard-dash in less than ten seconds and broke the world record."

The passage of a century has dimmed Baker City's memory of Kelly. Nevertheless, Kelly's eclipse is hard to fathom given his amazing athletic accomplishments. On June 23, 1906, running for the Multnomah Athletic Club of Portland while attending the University of Oregon, Kelly broke world records in both the 100-yard and 220-yard dashes at the same track meet in Spokane, Washington. And in between the two events he won the broad jump.

Then, at the 1908 Olympics in London, England, Kelly won a silver medal in the broad jump as a member of the United States track and field team. His coach at both the Spokane and London events was none other than famous track coach Bill Hayward, namesake of University of Oregon's famous Hayward Field. In fact, Hayward's initial fame was built on one athlete: Baker City's Dan Kelly.

Daniel James Kelly was born September 1, 1883, in Pueblo, Colorado, and came to Baker City with his family at age two. Dan's parents were Daniel M. and Mary G. Kelly. The elder Dan was born March 20, 1852, in Youghal, County Cork, Ireland, and immigrated to Missouri with his parents, date unknown. As a young man, he lived in Colorado Springs, Colorado, where he was a member of a world

champion hose cart team, which depended on the running speed of its members for victory. Later he worked in railway construction at Pueblo, Colorado, where he and Mary were married and where he served a couple of terms as county sheriff. Within a couple of years of the family's arrival in Baker City, he was elected to city council serving with Baker City's first mayor, Syrenus B. McCord.

Mary Kelly was born May 19, 1859, and bore six children: Mae, Dan, William, Helen, Leo, and Louis, who died in infancy. Late in life, after the death of her husband, Mary and daughter Helen kept up work on the family's Kelly Mine in the Rock Creek area, not a common endeavor for women in those days.



Daniel M. Kelly's horseshoeing and wagon making business, located on NW corner of Broadway and 1st streets.

Dan grew up working in his father's blacksmith and wagon-making shop, which was originally located at 2004 Broadway, present site of a barbershop. In about 1908, the elder Kelly moved into a new building he had constructed just north of the Baker City Opera House on the east side of the 2200 block of Main Street. Later, probably because of financial problems, the shop was relocated to 2700 Broadway, a block from the family home at 2045 7th Street. After his son became famous as the king of the 100-yard dash, newspaper articles made much of Dan's small-town roots, including his blacksmith and horseshoeing experience.

By the time Dan graduated from Baker High School in 1904, he had no doubt set BHS track records for the 100-, 220-, and 440-yard distances, plus high jump and broad jump. Later news articles described Dan as "red-headed" and

“freckled-faced,” five feet ten-and-one-half inches tall, and weighing 150 pounds. A New York Times reporter wrote, “He is rather stockily built and hardly impresses the casual observer as a sprinter, but second glance shows the wonderful development of his legs, which furnishes him with his great speed.”



C. Bamberger R. Sherred W. McConnell R. Waltz W. Robinson Omir Garrison
 C. Johns A. Hogoboom A. Gale W. Mitchell R. James John Allen A. Brown
 Bernard E. Spencer Charles Carson J. F. Donnelly
 R. Dodson Dan Kelly Jesse Richardson Herbert Chandler

BHS 1902 Track Team, Sophomore Kelly sitting 2nd from left

Dan, having grown up in an Irish-Catholic family, spent his first post-high school year at Columbia University, a Catholic institution, today’s University of Portland. During his year there, Kelly played football but made his lasting mark in track by setting school records in the 50-, 100-, and 220-yard dashes, plus competing in the shot put and hammer throw. One reporter described him as “almost the whole team.”

In the fall of 1905, Kelly transferred to Eugene to study law at the University of Oregon, where he was a halfback on the football team and a standout sprinter and broad jumper under the tutelage of track coach William Hayward. In 1904, Hayward, an exceptional athlete from Toronto, Canada, became head track and basketball coach at UO, where he coached for 44 years.



*BHS 1904 graduating seniors.
Kelly at upper left.*



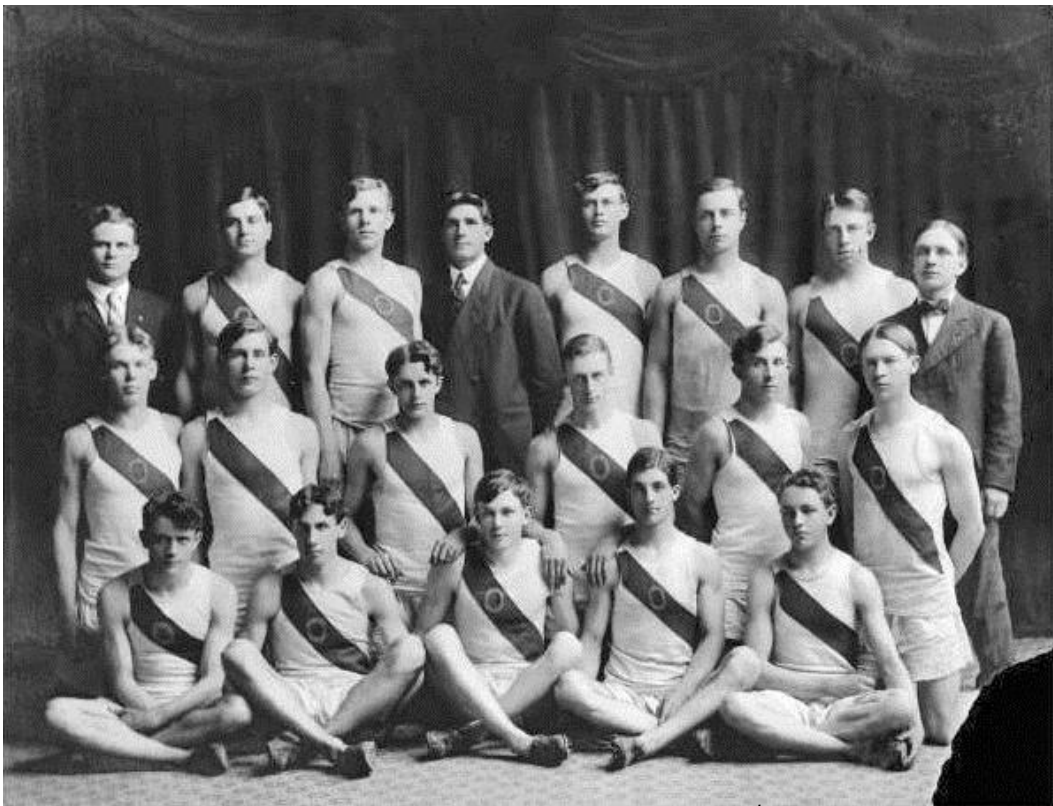
Detail of Kelly from class photo.

Kelly's potential as a track man blossomed into full bloom at the May 18, 1906, track meet between UO and Oregon Agricultural College (OSU). UO won 76-46 with Kelly responsible for 18 of those points. The sports editor of the *Oregonian* called Kelly's performance "little short of wonderful." Kelly tied the world 100-yard dash record in 9 $\frac{4}{5}$ seconds, ran the 220-yard dash in 22 $\frac{4}{5}$ seconds, and jumped 24 feet 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches, making him one of only three American broad jumpers to exceed 24 feet, and tied in the high jump at 5 feet 2 inches. The reporter predicted, "Kelly should develop into a world-beater."

When Bill Hayward started coaching Kelly, Hayward's star as a track coach had yet to ascend. That changed on June 23, 1906, at the Spokane track meet.

Here's one reporter's account of Kelly's record-breaking performances in three events: "Dan Kelly, the phenomenal boy athlete from the University of Oregon, was the hero of the day. This husky, freckle-faced youth, who hails from Baker City, Oregon, breasted the tape in the 100-yard dash in $9 \frac{3}{5}$ seconds, according to the decision of five timers, one of whom caught him in a shade under that, beating the American amateur record. He won the broad jump with an astounding leap of 23 feet $9 \frac{1}{2}$ inches, breaking the northwest association record, and then went without cooling off right out on the track and equaled the American amateur record in the 220-yard dash, doing the distance in $21 \frac{1}{5}$ [seconds]."

What the reporter didn't know at the time was that Kelly had broken the world record in the 100-dash and technically broke the world record in the 220-yard dash. Kelly's time in the latter race was achieved on a curved track, whereas the record had been established on a 220-yard straight track.



*University of Oregon 1906 track team, Kelly 2nd row, right end.
Coach Bill Hayward top row center.*

It wasn't until November 1906 that the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) certified Kelly's time in the 100-yard dash at a world-record-breaking $9 \frac{3}{5}$ (9.6) seconds. (Well into the 1900's, AAU accepted only times recorded on stop watches that measured in fifths of a second.)

The significance of Dan Kelly's accomplishment at the Spokane track meet can only be appreciated in the context of the history of the 100-yard dash. Consider first of all, until more modern times, track surfaces were cinder or turf and running

shoes were primitive. Also, there were no starting blocks, just toes of running shoes dug into the cinders or grass.

Over the years, breaking the 100-yard dash record didn't happen very often. In 1870, the world record was 10.5 seconds. That record stood until 1878, when W. C. Wilmer ran the first 10-second-flat 100-yard dash. The "10 flat" record was the time to beat for twelve years. In 1890, John Owen, Jr., ran the first sub-10-second 100 in 9.8 seconds. That's the record Kelly broke sixteen years later in 1906 with a world-record time of 9.6 seconds.

Coach Hayward correctly predicted that Kelly's new record would stand for a long time. **In fact, no one broke Kelly's 9.6-second record for 23 years!** It finally happened in 1929, when Eddie Tolan dashed 100 yards in 9.5 seconds. In those intervening 23 years, only four other runners achieved Kelly's 9.6 time: Howard Drew, 1914; Charles Paddock, 1921; Cyril Coaffee, 1922; and Chester Bowman, 1927. The famous Jesse Owens' best 100 was 9.4 in 1933. The present record of 9.0 was set in 1974 by Ivory Crockett. Since then the 100-yard dash (91.44 meters) has been replaced by the 100-meter sprint (109.36 yards).



UO 1907 track team, Kelly right of trophies, Hayward top middle.

Kelly never again ran a 9.6-second 100. In the summer of 1907, Kelly was the favorite to win the 100 at the AAU national championships in Jamestown, Virginia. Coach Hayward accompanied Kelly to Jamestown, which was celebrating its tri-centennial. The sultry heat took its toll on Kelly, who finished in fifth place in the 100 and failed to finish the 220. But he didn't come away empty

handed. He won the broad jump with a leap of 23 feet 11 inches, the best jump by an AAU athlete in 1907, making Kelly OU's first national champion.

While he was in the East, Kelly was recruited by the best universities and amateur athletic clubs. He turned down an offer to join the Irish-American Athletic Club in New York City in favor of the attending the University of Michigan with its highly touted law school. But he ended up dropping out due to the expense.

In January 1908, the *Morning Democrat* announced "Dan Kelly may go to Olympics." Four months later Kelly confirmed the rumor in a telegram to his parents dated New York, June 9, 1908. "Chosen for Olympic team. Sail for England June 25. Dan Kelly." Coach Hayward accompanied Kelly and two other Oregon athletes to London. Their events: Kelly, broad jump; Albert C. Gilbert, 110-meter hurdles; and Forrest C. Smithson, pole vault.

The trio of Oregonians came home triumphant. Kelly received a silver medal with a running jump of 23 feet 3¼ inches; Gilbert, who later earned fame and fortune as inventor of the Erector Set and other toys, won a gold medal with a pole vault of 12 feet 2 inches; and Smithson earned gold and set a world record running the 110-meter hurdles in 15 seconds flat. Following the Olympics, they and nine other American athletes toured Ireland and Sweden competing against the locals at exhibition meets.



Kelly, Oregonian reporter Petrain, Smithson, and Gilbert on their way to Oregon after victories at 1908 London Olympics.

After arrival back in the U. S., President Theodore Roosevelt hosted the American Olympians at his Long Island home, specifically commenting on the three Olympians from Oregon. *Oregonian* reporter W.J. Petrain accompanied Kelly, Gilbert, and Smithson from New York City to Oregon via train sending dispatches along the way, as he witnessed the three Oregon Olympians hailed as national heroes.

Back in Oregon, the triumphant trio was feted with parades and banquets in both Baker City and Portland. When they arrived in Baker City on September 13, 1908, a committee escorted them from the depot to the Geiser Grand Hotel. After visiting informally with friends and admirers, they had “a tally-ho ride” around town followed by a reception and speeches in the Elks club room. Following an evening banquet, a procession accompanied the athletes to the depot from which they and reporter Petrain departed for an even more rousing reception in Portland.

In June 1909, a headline proclaimed, “Kelly’s Career is Ended.” Coach Hayward announced that Kelly was laid up with a badly sprained ankle. A news story about “the famous red-haired sprinter” lamented, “The news of Kelly’s injury comes as a blow to the sporting fraternity of the Northwest. The speedy western boy, after winning his brilliant race in Spokane went East to conquer but never succeeded in rounding into shape. In the broad jump he still retained some of his old time form and made the Olympic team which represented America in London...taking second in the jump.”



In Kelly’s day, cinder tracks, no starting blocks, crude running shoes make his track records all the more amazing.

Out of the sports limelight and back in Baker City, Kelly returned to work in his father’s blacksmith and farm implements shop. Six years later, in March, 1914, Kelly again made headlines in the *Oregonian*. “Dan Kelly Fights, Is Bitten. Fast Sprinter Loses End of Finger in Saloon Brawl at Baker.” Kelly, still dressed as an

Irish comedian after having participated in a St. Patrick's Day theatrical, and Hollister Bulger—had both been drinking—"quarreled as to Kelly's ability as an actor, which led to blows and the biting by Hollister, who fled from the police and is still missing."

The next, much sadder news story about Kelly appeared in the *Baker City Evening Herald* April 9, 1920. The headline read, "Dan Kelly, Renowned Athlete, Well Known Baker Boy is Dead." Around 1918 Kelly had left his father's shop to work as a logger in the woods near Fernie, British Columbia, Canada, 350 miles from home. It was from Fernie that his parents received a telegram with news that Dan had died April 8 of pneumonia. His body was shipped back to Baker for burial in the family plot in the Catholic Circle of Mt. Hope Cemetery, a few yards from the graves of the famous Baker County pioneer couple William H. and Johanna Packwood. His father, Daniel M., who had been ill for some time, died September 4, 1920, just five months after his son's death. His mother, Mary, who died in 1944, and siblings Mae, Leo, and Louis are near Kelly's grave at Mt. Hope Cemetery.



Kelly's grave marker, Mt. Hope Cemetery, Baker City, Oregon.

Although Dan Kelly is not a household name in his home town, he has not been forgotten at the University of Portland, which in 2000 published in the *Catholic Sentinel* a short biography of its outstanding freshman athlete. And the University of Oregon has enshrined Kelly's name in its Athletic Hall of Fame. "In 1907, Dan Kelly became Oregon's first NCAA [then called Amateur Athletic Union] All-American in the long jump. Since then, more than 300 Oregon track and field stars have followed in his footsteps."

In 1980, Kelly was in the first group of nine track and field athletes inducted into the Oregon Sports Hall of Fame and Museum located in Portland. Inductees today number 34 track and field athletes, including, besides Kelly, such

superstars as runners Steve Prefontaine, Alberto Salazar, and Mary Decker Slaney, high jumper Dick Fosbury, and decathlete Dan O'Brien.

A 28-minute documentary "Legends of Hayward Field" produced in 1991 promises to "take you back a century to the very start of this great tradition at the University of Oregon—from Dan Kelly and Bill Hayward to Bill Bowerman, Jim Bailey, Mel Renfro and Kathy Hayes—and many, many more."

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Revised June 2013