

race walker

Schneider has the bronze but he doesn't have a team

By NICK DAWSON
Of the Emerald

There is an athlete at Oregon who won a bronze medal in an international competition that not many people know much about — and in a sport that even fewer know anything about at all.

The man is Steve Schneider, an 18-year-old freshman from Horace Greeley High in Chappaqua, New York. It was at the 1977 Maccabiah Games in Israel (an equivalent to an Olympics for Jewish athletes only) that Schneider won his third place medal in the 3,000 meter race walk.

That's right, race walk.

"Race walking is one of the toughest events in track and field," said Schneider. And though some people would argue that point with him, they undoubtedly would not convince Schneider they were right.

But certain problems have beset Schneider this year, including health problems (strep throat and the flu), and more importantly, a lack of support that he said he was promised by the track and field coaching staff, but has yet to receive.

Schneider visited the campus during November of his senior year and had an interview with head track coach Bill Dellinger. Though there is no official race walking event in the NCAA, Dellinger pledged a limited kind of support.

"He said they would be able to take some films of me. I also knew of the Oregon Track Club (OTC) and I knew it was pretty impressive," said Schneider, who had hoped for sponsorship by the OTC for invitational race walks.

But the promises made in November didn't come through when Schneider arrived on campus. "I thought I came to the wrong school. I didn't expect coaching, but I did expect to be part of the team with sweats and a uniform."

"It's been a real down year for me because I was expecting so much of Dellinger and the track program," he said.

But Dellinger said the Oregon track program is willing to help Schneider by providing such items as track gear and a locker, and by filming Schneider. Dellinger added because of a manpower deficiency, Schneider would have

to coach himself because none of the current coaches has worked with race walkers before. One thing that is working against Schneider, believes Dellinger, is the fact that there is no NCAA walking event.

Schneider still is hoping to get the needed equipment from the athletic department. He points out that Bob Rozencrantz, who won the race Schneider finished third in at the Maccabiah Games, gets sweats and locker facilities, besides travel money, from Washington.

Schneider said he had to spend \$40 to travel to Seattle for an invitational meet and also had travel expenses for a trip to Portland.

And though Schneider does have alternatives to the situation at Oregon, he has found the area to be very appealing. "Walking means a lot to me but there are some priorities I have to put in front of that."

But a question that must be answered is when, and how, did Schneider get into race walking.

The lanky Schneider started race walking, he said, out of necessity.

"When I was in high school I started as a lonely hurdler — I was 17th out of 20 on the team. I really wanted to get my letter my first year and we had only one other race walker." From there, it was easy to see where Schneider's destiny lay.

During his freshman year at Horace Greeley, Schneider walked to a 9:46 mile time, which was by no means impressive. "My sophomore mile was 7:47 and at that time the national record was 7:01," said Schneider. "I figured I only had about 40 seconds to drop to be one of the top (junior) walkers in the country."

That set the stage for his 7:06 mile and 6:39 national high school record for the 1,500 meters. "I dropped 30 seconds in that meet. That was the really big breakthrough," he said.

"It's fun to be a high school athlete. It's nice to succeed, but I wanted to make myself known."

Schneider's senior year was not as successful as he had planned. He had hoped to set the national high school record in the mile, but fell two seconds short of that mark. An attempt at making a junior team touring Russia fell through when Schneider got heat stroke two miles into a six mile

race at the Junior Nationals in Knoxville. He tried to do all this even after he discovered his right leg was shorter than his left by 1/4 inch, which affected his style.

"It was a pretty depressing year, except I found out the first week in June I qualified to be on the Maccabiah team," Schneider said.

Which is where the bronze medal came in.

Because of his Jewish background, Schneider applied for a spot on the United States' team to the Tenth World Maccabiah Games in Tel Aviv. Since there was no qualifying meet for the Maccabiah team, Schneider, a relatively untested 17-year-old, had to make the team strictly on what he could do in meets in the New York metropolitan area, where the hotbed of competition was.

Henry Laskau, a four-time gold medal winner in race walk events in the Maccabiah Games, saw Schneider in those New York races and liked what he saw.

"I first came across him about two years ago," Laskau said Tuesday morning. "When the games came up, I saw him compete in some meets on Long Island. I could see that he was really improving. Judging by that I told him that he had a really good chance to make the team."

When he found out he had made the team, Schneider was ecstatic. "It was incredible. I was really excited I made the team. Then I started to get nervous. Here I was, a 17-year-old. International competition at 17 — it was beyond my imagination."

Schneider had only one month to train for the Games, spending it working on longer distances because his high school background involved what might be considered sprints to walkers — the mile or 1,500 meter walks.

"He was a very, very enthusiastic trainer," said Laskau. "I could see during the training (during which Laskau coached Schneider) that he was improving greatly every day. I told him that his potential is good and that he could make something of himself."

The training seemed to do the trick. As Laskau had figured, Schneider had potential to place and he did when, while he was in fourth place, an Israeli walker was thrown out of the race for illegal technique with two laps to go.

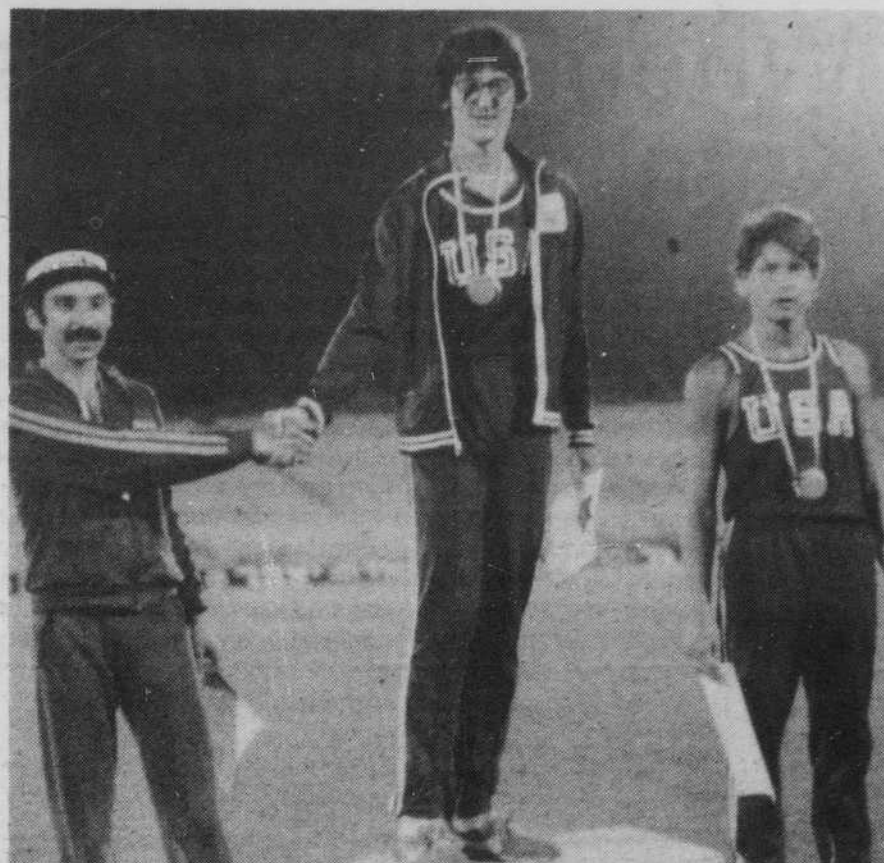


Photo courtesy Steve Schneider

Steve Schneider stands stunned on the victory stand after winning a third place medal in the 3,000 meter walk in last summer's Maccabiah Games in Israel.

At that point, Schneider knew he had third, so he slowed down his speed and concentrated more on his own technique. "I was kinda relieved and excited," Schneider recalled.

But the most exciting thing about the Games was the entrance ceremonies, believes Schneider.

"It was the most unbelievable experience I have ever had in my life — 60,000 people cheering and screaming," he said.

The closing ceremonies featured athletes from countries trading just about anything they had for something an athlete from another country had. Schneider ended up with a British hat and South African tee-shirt, among other things.

"That was just a kick in the butt. I can't wait to go back," he said.

Which brings us back to Schneider's plans for the present and the future.

"Right now I don't know what I'm training for," said Schneider. "I'd like to get in good shape and be in top condition on some kind of national caliber. This summer I plan on going down to the United States training camp in Squaw Valley. My goal is to qualify for the Olympic trials, but I can't do these things without help."

"I'm not asking much from Dellinger. What's it to him to give me a locker, sweats, uni(form), rain gear and put me on the OTC?"

I came to Oregon because this was supposed to be the track capital of the world, but I've found that to be a lot of bullshit so far."

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