



Laura Smit Emerald
A mysterious metal figure that many believe represents Bill Bowerman, the legendary coach who died on Christmas Eve 1999, has been on the back row of the east grandstand at Hayward Field for a year. An anonymous person placed the statue in the east stands.

Community shows support

■ A statute has been put up in tribute to track and field coach Bill Bowerman

By Hank Hager
Oregon Daily Emerald

The man who has been compared to legendary coaches John Wooden, Vince Lombardi and Paul "Bear" Bryant has returned, in a way, to preside over the field where he was once king. The likeness of Bill Bowerman, who led his troops at Hayward Field for 24 years, seems to be back on the home turf.

A mysterious shape that many believe symbolizes Bowerman has appeared in the east grandstand of one of track and field's most historic facilities.

Bowerman, the men's track and field head coach from 1949 to 1972, passed away on Christmas Eve 1999. Almost a year later, a metal figure made its way to the back row of the east grandstand at the stadium. Fitted by woodscrews and washers, the silhouette lies between the "E" and the "G" on the "OREGON" sign.

Women's head track and field coach Tom Heinonen said whoever placed the figure spent a lot of time on it.

Heinonen said although the silhouette reminds him more of a "skinny young guy in a T-shirt" than it does Bowerman, to think that his spirit may be overlooking the field is comforting.

Bob Beals, director of facilities, events and operations for the Athletic Department, said the figure

appeared because someone from the Eugene community placed it there. Who might have done so is still unknown, he said.

"No one has stepped forward and said I have put it there," he said.

The silhouette is in place because the community is in support of the program, said Geoff Thurner, assistant director of media services for the Athletic Department.

"It's there because of the love of the community of the sport," he said.

Thurner said the east grandstand is currently undergoing a re-conditioning of the pillars below the stands, and anyone interested in the figure will have to look at it through a chain-link fence.

He said the Athletic Department has no plans to remove the silhouette because it does not harm the grandstand. He added that the department understands it was affixed there because the community respects the program, and will allow the figure to remain.

Assistant men's track and field coach Tony Veney said the figure is a nice tribute to the famous coach.

"It just shows respect for a man who brought a lot to the community," he said.

Veney said he met Bowerman in 1971 when he was being recruited by the program. Although he attended UCLA instead of Oregon, Bowerman impressed Veney with his demeanor.

"He was just really dedicated to his sport and his athletes," he said.

Born in 1911 in Fossil, Ore., Bowerman lived in Seattle and Portland

before attending the University in 1929. After four years of playing only football and basketball, he decided to run the 440-yard dash and switched to running track. In 1934, Bowerman graduated with a degree in business administration.

Fourteen years later, Bowerman returned to the University and took over the men's head track and field coaching position. Bowerman would remain at the post until 1972, when he retired.

"He was the guy that elevated track at Oregon to a national world-class level," Heinonen said.

Heinonen said even though Bowerman was solely a men's coach, he revolutionized the women's side of the sport. He said Bowerman helped bring jogging to the U.S., which is the basis for the women's sport.

He added Bowerman was a prominent figure, but not the easiest to get along with.

"Bowerman was revered, but at the same time he was tough and hard to get along with," he said. "He worked hard to get his way."

During his tenure at the University, Bowerman provided Phil Knight with the inspiration for Nike. Bowerman's experiment with a waffle iron and rubber materials created the first waffle-soled running shoe, which led to his partnership with Knight and the creation of Nike.

While coaching at the University, Bowerman helped produce 31 Olympic athletes as well as 51 All-Americans. His teams won four NCAA titles and finished in the top 10 during 16 of the 24 years he coached.

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