

‘Masters of Endurance’: ‘I had a good life. I always thought of Seaside’

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Grelle attended Lincoln High School in Portland (Class of 1955) and lived for several years in Gearhart, while Miller was living in Seaside, but is now in hospice care in Portland.

Their distance running days are over, but they see and speak to each other often, and can still spin some entertaining stories on their days with the Ducks.

The first tale is how Grelle — who was already running for Bowerman when Miller arrived — is partly responsible for Miller’s college track career.

“I got to Oregon, and Jimmy was my roommate,” Miller said. “I told him I used to run a little, and he said, ‘Why don’t you work out with us?’ So I did. We’d go on these long runs, and it was just killing me. But I had to stay up with Jim, because he was so nice to me. Grelle went to Bowerman and said, ‘I’m trying to break him on those runs, and he stays right with me.’ You should really take a look at him.”

Bowerman did more than that, as he gave Miller a scholarship.

The former Oregon coach, who died in 1999, was “one of the most influential men in my life,” said Miller, a Duck letterman in 1959 and ’60. “He had three full scholarships, and he gave me half of one.”

February 1960

The focus of the article in Sports Illustrated was on Bowerman and his distance runners.

In a two-day span that winter, Bowerman sent two runners (George Larson and Miller) to Pennsylvania to run in the Philadelphia Inquirer Games at Convention Hall.

He sent two more (Dyrol Burleson and Vic Reeve) to New York, to compete in the New York AC Games at Madison Square Garden; and the same day, the Ducks had three runners (Grelle, Bill Dellinger and Roscoe Cook) running in the Los Angeles Times Invitational.

“It was my first indoor meet,” Miller recalls of his trip to Philadelphia. “Jonny Rippet sent me a telegram — I still have it — that said ‘bring home the bacon.’”

Some of those Oregon legends are still around. Dellinger, however, suffered a stroke and is in poor health, Miller said. Burleson will turn 80 in April.

At Oregon, he was “The Undefeated” Dyrol Burleson.

The 1957 state cross-country champion from Cottage Grove never lost a race when wearing the green and yellow of Oregon, from 1958-62.

“I never lost one in college,” Burleson said in a 1997 interview. “I didn’t even have any close calls. That sounds really egotistical, doesn’t it? But I didn’t. There was no one that I was afraid of. During that time period, I was the best at the college level.”

Which brings a laugh from Miller, who says, “Burleson wouldn’t run in anything he thought he could lose. His ego is something else.”

Still, he said, “the first time I ran against Burleson was in the Willamette Relays, and I figured ‘I got this one whipped.’ But Burleson went past me so fast, I looked down to see if my feet were moving.”

Burleson was part of the world record-setting 4-mile relay team in 1962, and set American records in the 1,500 and the mile.

He was the second American ever to run a sub-four minute mile, and the first to do it at legendary Hayward Field (accomplished on April 24, 1960, in a dual meet with Stanford).

Burleson went on compete in the 1960 Olympics in Rome, then again in 1964 in Tokyo, finishing sixth and fifth, respectively, in the 1,500.

It’s the shoes

As Miller tells the story, “Bowerman was working on shoes back in Lincoln, Nebraska. He had a shoe that he made for me, and I said,



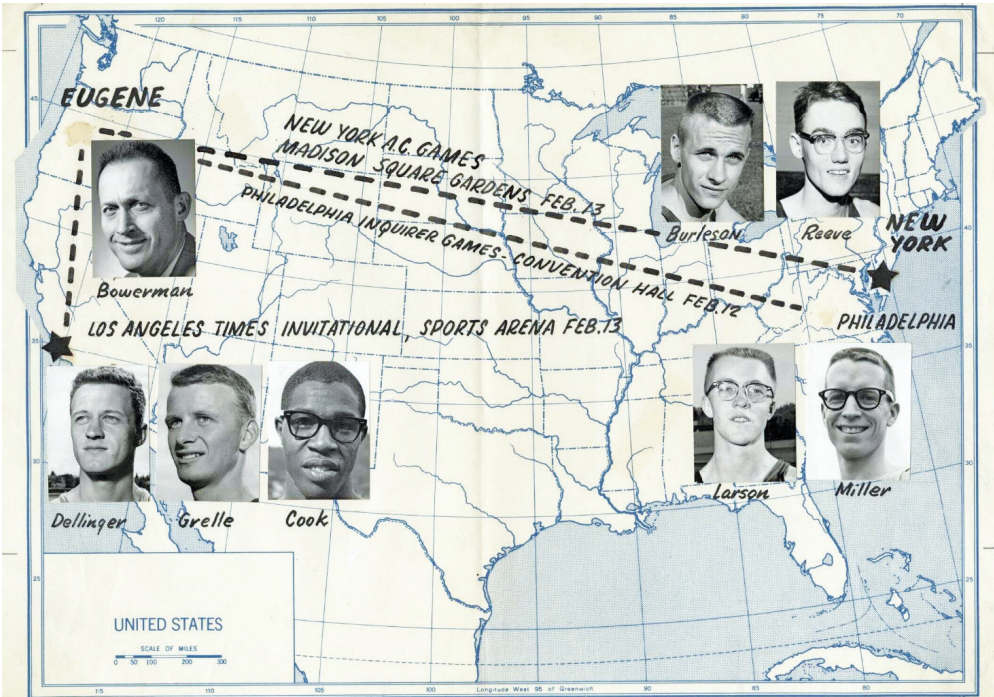
University of Oregon Archives

A reunion of Oregon track athletes from the 1950s and ’60s, in June 2016. Dick Miller is in the middle row, seated fourth from right. To Miller’s right is Jim Grelle.



Seaside High School

The Seaside boys basketball team in 1953-54, with Dick Miller, No. 17.



University of Oregon Archives

Oregon runners, and their schedule of 60 years ago, in February 1960.

‘Bill, it’s not going to stay on.’ And he said, ‘You’re just excited. Keep it.’ I threw the shoe on the first lap, and it was a gravelly track, and they took me off after eight laps of the 5,000 meters.

“He was always experimenting like that. He decided on that waffle iron.” And the Nike shoe was born.

Miller’s running days at Oregon were the days long before Galen Rupp and Alberto Salazar, and even the late, great, Steve Prefontaine.

These were also the pre-Nike days, even though the inventor of the Nike shoe (Bowerman) was the coach, and the runners included Phil Knight, the eventual Nike co-founder, along with Bowerman.

Knight was one of the Ducks’ main distance men in the late ’50s, lettering the same three seasons (1957, ’58 and ’59) as Grelle.

Which brings up more Miller stories.

“When Phil came back from Japan (1962), I had just gotten married and he was staying in my apartment in Seattle. And he said, ‘I’m going into the shoe business. Do you want to go in with me? It’s \$600 each. Twelve hundred bucks.’”

Miller thought it over, and said, “‘Let me talk to Bow-

erman.’ So I went to talk to Bowerman, who said, ‘I don’t know why he’s going into the shoe business. Adidas and Puma have the market.’

“I had just gotten married, and \$600 was a lot then, and I said ‘no,’” Miller said, passing up a nice opportunity, to put it mildly. “When I see him now, I say, ‘I’ve still had a fabulous life. I don’t regret not going with Nike.’ But it sure would have been a great ride. Knight says to me, ‘It still is.’”

Meanwhile, Knight was — and still is — the giving kind, according to Miller.

“When Phil started Nike, he said, ‘What can we do to make your (athletes) life better? Equipment or what?’ And he dedicated himself to doing that.

“I had lunch with him a couple weeks ago, and I said I know what motivates you Phil. You’ve given all that money to Stanford and Oregon and OHSU and others that no one knows about. But I said, ‘Your biggest thrill is that you have 78,000 people working for you, who are making a good living.’”

Sadly, Miller said, “I’m in hospice now, so I don’t have that much longer. Phil says, ‘We have to make it to Hayward Field in May, when they reopen it.’ He’s been a great

encouragement to me.”

In an old photo from the University of Oregon archives, Miller is shown running with teammates Mark Robbins, Wilcey Winchell, Ed Baldwin and Knight, with Mac Court in the background.

“Mark is not doing well,” Miller said. “Wiley and Baldwin are gone. That (photo) is my claim to fame. If you take those other guys out, then it’s just Phil and I.”

Seaside days

In his prep career at Seaside, Miller says, “I don’t think I lost any races. And when I went out for track, I only ran on the day of the meet. I never practiced once.”

Miller also played football, basketball and golf.

In football, “I think I was most inspirational player my senior year,” he said. “But I really wasn’t that good in any other sports.”

In track, “I was the first guy in four years who went to state. They just loaded me on a bus and I went down and ran. I got fifth or sixth. The guy who won it was Mark Robbins, who became a very good friend.”

Miller married Barbara Klabunder of Eugene on July 14, 1962 in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. She died in February 2016, after 53 years of

KNIGHT ON MILLER

“Dick Miller has been one of my best friends for over 60 years. We have both had many highs and lows, but through all of them the friendship remained steadfast. As he approaches his final days he can look back at a lifetime of success: longtime marriage to one woman, Barbara, who ‘never found him dull,’ two loving children and a successful career in life insurance.

“But the one thing he did so very well, that many people don’t know, was run. He ran for Bill Bowerman at Oregon and had many outstanding races which were overshadowed by the greater accomplishments of his good friend Jim Grelle.

“It is his fond hope that his remaining time will allow him to see the new Hayward Field. Let all his many fans cheer him across that line.”

— Phil Knight



University of Oregon Archives

Members of the 1959 Oregon track team, including (front row) Phil Knight, second from left, and Jim Grelle, far right. The runners are posing with former Duck Mack Robinson (center), brother of Jackie Robinson.

marriage.

“We’d go to screen plays in Hollywood, we did arts and crafts there for nine years ... we had an exciting life.”

In 2007, they returned to Seaside, before Miller had to go into hospice care. Miller speaks often with Grelle, and the two attend an occasional high school football game.

(Grelle was a brief U.S. record-holder in the mile. On June 18, 1965, Grelle lowered the U.S. record in the mile to 3:55.4. Nine days later, Jim Ryun broke that mark by a tenth of a second.)

As for running, “When I didn’t make the Olympics in ’60, I sort of drifted out of it,” Miller said. “One of my regrets was that I didn’t keep

running through the ’60s, like Jimmy did.

“Now I go to YouTube and watch all these old races. I watched Billy Mills win the 10,000 meters, and (Frank) Shorter and some of those guys I ran against. I stay up all night watching races.”

Nowadays, “When people ask me what I’d like to do, I tell them, ‘The one thing I would love to do is get my old friends and go for a run.’ There’s nothing like that.

“I had a good life,” he said. “I always thought of Seaside, and I have a lot of friends there. I was married 53 years to a wonderful lady, great careers and great family ... what else can you ask for?”

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