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BOB DAY  
BECKMAN COACH

# Preparing for a new era

Beckman cross country coach and Olympian sets sights on league title.

By TOM CONNOLLY  
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With the cross country season quickly approaching a new Day is about to start for Beckman High. Bob Day, a U.S. Olympian, is beginning his second year as the head coach for cross country and track for Beckman. This season will be the school’s first full year of varsity competition.

Day is trying to bring his enthusiasm and his passion for the sport to the Irvine school, which is part of the Tustin Unified School District.

“I’ve always had an interest in working with kids,” said Day, who ran the 5,000 meters in the 1968 Olympics at Mexico City.

“We’re getting the kids on an individual program and watching them mature and do things they didn’t know they could do. Teaching them discipline and watching them gel into young adults is very rewarding.”

Day said starting a new program has its challenges.

“We had to start from the ground up,” said Day, who was hired by athletic director Sean Diaz to head both the boys and the girls track and cross country teams.

“We had to go out and order equipment and calibrate the track and get kids into the program,” said Day, who had approximately 100 athletes in the track program last season. He anticipates that number will double this season.

“We even had to go over to Irvine High school and borrow their hurdles. It’s been a challenge.”

Day, 60, has the energy of a man half his age and he’s using his track experiences to develop the Patriots’ programs.

Day seems to thrive at the challenge. Beckman High opened its doors in September 2004 to 930 freshmen and sophomores students.

The Patriots’ track teams competed mainly at the frosh/soph and junior varsity levels in the first year. Four athletes were able to compete at the varsity level.

Despite being a first-year program, Beckman produced some impressive feats.

Freshmen Christina Hryniewicki, 14, ad-

vanced to CIF postseason competition in the 100 meters providing an inspiration to Day and the program.

Day is quick to dish out high praise to his assistant coaches.

Day said his coaching philosophy was influenced by his track coach at UCLA, Elvin “Ducky” Drake.

Drake, whose name dons the UCLA track stadium, used an individual coaching approach to raise the standards at UCLA.

The approach paid high dividends for Day during his tenure in the Bruins pro-

gram from 1963-66 and the lessons learned are still paying off 40 years later.

Day, who ran a 4:16 time in the mile as a senior at San Marino High, was heavily recruited by Oregon, Arizona, and several other Pac-10 schools. He chose UCLA because of Drake’s reputation.

“Coach Drake took an individual approach with everyone on the team,” said Day, who as a junior in 1965 set the Bruins’ mile record (3:56.4) that still stands today.

“He (Drake) sat me down as an immature freshmen kid and asked me what I wanted

to do. I told him that I wanted to break four minutes in the mile. He said, ‘OK, I’ll get you to break the four-minute mile but you have to do exactly what I tell you to do.’”

Day listened and did as he was instructed and he went on to break the four-minute mile when he ran a 3:58.9 in a race at Compton College. In that race, an unprecedented nine runners broke the four-minute mark, including an up-and-coming prep senior from Kansas named Jim Ryun. Day finished in sixth place.

In his prime, Day competed against all of the great runners of his era: Ryun, Kip Kieno, a two-time Olympic champion from Kenya, and New Zealand’s John Walker. He has trained with Ron Clark (Australia) and Steve Prefontaine and is a friend of Billy Mills, the 1964 gold medalist in the 10,000 meters.

Day continued competing throughout Europe after college until 1971 when an Achilles tendon injury caused him to retire from the international scene.

He became involved in a business venture with Olympian and friend Jeff Galloway that included Day’s involvement in road-racing in San Diego.

In 1984, Day and his family moved to Irvine and he began a career in the health-care field.

As his daughter, Amanda, reached high school, Day got the itch to return to the track. He became a volunteer assistant track coach at Woodbridge High under George Varvas.

After a few years, Day was encouraged to apply for the track coach job at Beckman. Day is taking the same approach with his Beckman athletes as did his mentor.

“I plan to sit down with each of our kids before the season and lay out a specific program for each one of them,” said Day, who with his wife Jenny, has two daughters, Amanda and Dava.

“You need to be flexible. Every kid is different and we need to determine each kid’s strengths and weaknesses and go from there.”

Day realizes there will be challenges in the Pacific Coast League, but he is setting some lofty goals.

“We’re up against good competition but we want to win league this year,” he said.



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**BECKMAN’S BOB DAY** has the challenge of competing for a league title as the head coach for cross country and track. This season will be the school’s first full year of varsity competition.