

The Argus

of FREMONT, NEWARK AND UNION CITY CALIFORNIA

Benefit to boost track clinic

■ Revered Logan coach often uses his own money to connect youth, pros

By Chris De Benedetti

STAFF WRITER

UNION CITY — Lee Webb has become an institution in local athletics. Supporters of the James Logan High School coach hope Webb's annual youth track and field clinic becomes one, too.

While the youth clinic attracts thousands of kids and many former track-and-field stars from around the country, it also has a tradition of being under-appreciated. Or so says Ron Mickle, a San Jose man so impressed by Webb's commitment to youth sports that he has taken the lead in raising funds to ensure that the clinic — named after the late Olympic hurdler Willie Davenport — survives by staying out of the red.

To that end, Mickle is spearheading the first "Evening of Champions" — a fund-raiser scheduled for Feb. 4 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Union City.

Mickle said he was compelled to pitch in when he found out that Webb often has dipped into his own pocket — last year he paid nearly \$5,000 — to pay off the clinic's expenses. Webb's level of commitment should be rewarded with community support, Mickle said.

"He's the most humble, unassuming and caring person I've come across in years," he said of Webb. "He wants no recognition. He just wants what's best for the kids."

About 370 seats will be sold — individually or in tables of 10 — for the fund-raiser, and about half of the seats already have been bought, Mickle said.

"It's been one of the easiest sells of my life, because that's how revered Coach Webb is in these parts," he added.

A fund-raising golf tournament also is held each year to benefit groups in need, including Special Olympics and the Mission Valley Track and Field Club — a youth track group led by Webb. This year's golf tournament is scheduled for Friday, Feb. 3, while the clinic will begin the next day, to be followed that night by the "Evening of Champions."

Nearly 2,000 kids from all over the Bay Area usually take part in the track clinic, according to Webb. There they get tips from former Olympic

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competitors and nationally recognized coaches.

"There are sessions for smaller kids, too," Webb said. "They get exposed to all kinds of ways to make themselves better, and they can learn about track-and-field history in general."

Star athletes such as long-jumper Michael Powell, high-jumper Dick Fosbury, Olympic coach Marcel Hetu, discus thrower Wolfgang Schmidt, hammer thrower Mac Wilkins and female Olympians such as Barbara Ferrell and Edith

McGuire, who now lives in the East Bay, are among the dozens of track legends who have attended the track clinic in past years.

Sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos, whose famous silent protest during the 1968 Olympics regarding the treatment of blacks was recently immortalized with a statue at San Jose State University, also participated in the clinic last year.

Webb himself has coached and mentored many standouts during his 20-plus

years at Logan; he estimates that hundreds of his athletes have received scholarships to Division I colleges. Still dozens of others have gone on to stardom in football and basketball. That list includes Roy Williams (Dallas Cowboys), Vince Amey (Oakland Raiders), Otis Amey (San Francisco 49ers) and Nate Robinson (New York Knicks).

But Webb said he gets just as inspired by seeing improvement in struggling athletes as he does with the standouts. He also volunteers for the Special Olympics, calling his work with disabled children "a passion."

"It's not so much about the ones who have all the skills," he said. "It's the ones who start with a little but end up with a lot more. That's what sports is about."

Although it is open to kids from all over the Bay Area, Webb said he would love to see the annual clinic take on a uniquely local flavor.

"We're trying to make it a Union City thing," he added. "Every city has something they do that they're known for. Union City could be known for this."

Staff writer Chris De Benedetti covers Union City for The Argus. He can be reached at (510) 353-7003 or cdebenedetti@angnews-papers.com.

What's next

▶ **WHAT:** 2006 Evening of Champions

▶ **WHEN:** 6:30 p.m. Feb. 4

▶ **WHERE:** Crowne Plaza Hotel, 32083 Alvarado-Niles Road, Union City

▶ **COST:** \$60 per person

▶ **INFO:** For tickets, call (408) 229-8854 or e-mail ronmickle@comcast.net