

SOUTHERN SECTION CIF CROSS-COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIPS (1925-1997)

As far back as the winter of 1925-26, a few high school boys participated in a "Southern California" Cross-Country Championships, the high school section of meet sponsored by the local Amateur Athletic Association and the Los Angeles Breakfast Club. Through the fall of 1934, before they formed their own section, schools from Los Angeles City were dominant. More often than not, for the next quarter-century schools from San Diego County were most successful in Southern Section Cross-Country until they too became a separate section.

Early in this period, only a few current Southern Section schools consistently fielded teams, notably Long Beach Poly and Compton among the large schools as well as Paso Robles and Montebello in the small school category. Thanks to efforts of a few coaches, especially Norm Barker of Poly and Ernst Hartmann of Compton, the sport gradually expanded, growing rapidly in the post-World War II era. By the time of the explosive growth of the "hill-and-dale" sport in the early sixties, the Southern Section had become the most competitive area in the nation for Boys Cross-Country, necessitating the periodic addition of several divisions for large, small and medium size schools in Championship Finals.

Through the fall of 1931, "Southern California" Cross-Country Championship meets were conducted at Griffith Park in Los Angeles. When the new UCLA Campus opened in Westwood, Southern Section Championships were held there in the falls of 1932-1939. From 1940 through 1953, Recreation Park in Long Beach was the championship meet location. The new Mt. San Antonio Community College campus hosted the meet between 1954-58 and again in 1961-62. Cal State Long Beach was the site in 1959 and again between 1963 and 1971. Cheviot Park in Culver City hosted a single meet in 1960. From 1972 to the present Mt. SAC has become the more or less permanent site, interrupted only in 1979 at Lake Castaic and in 1980 at Saddleback Community College in Orange County. While the earliest meets were conducted on hilly dirt trails or relatively flat grass courses, come rain or shine, inclement weather during the Mt. SAC era has necessitated a switch from the mountainous regular course, to a mostly flat asphalt course, on a few occasions.

Beginning in 1976, Southern Section girls got the opportunity to compete at the championship level, though some southern California lasses had achieved local and even national renown long before that time. By the end of that decade and beyond, Southern Section "leather lungers" of both genders had converted their cross-country background into State and National record breaking performances at 800 meters, Mile, 3000 meters, 3200 meters, Two miles and 10000 meters.



JEROME WALTERS
(Jack Kegroat photo)

Jerome Walters (Compton '48) won Section titles at 880y, Mile and (twice) Cross-Country. He added a State half-mile and nearly a mile Championship, and was the first high schooler ever under 4 minutes for 1500 meters. He capped a long career by competing in the 1956 Olympic Games 1500 and setting a U.S. National Record for Two Miles.

Coach Ernst Hartmann, alongside Chuck Kohl (Compton '47), one of his many distance aces, was a major force in expanding Southern Section X-Country for two decades. Hartmann coached the Compton blue and white jerseys to eight team and eleven individual section Championships.



ERNST HARTMANN & CHUCK KOHL
(Lee Hansen photo)