Right on track

INSTALLMENT OF NEW TRACK FACILITIES AT HANCOCK COMPLETE

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Hancock College thrower Felix Rincon anchored his relay team to victory Saturday and became the first runner to cross the finish line at Hancock's new track.

The relay race was for fun, organized at the dedication of Hancock's new eight-lane, 400-meter, all-weather track.

Buldogs cross country, and track and field coach Louie Quintana looks to see races that count for team points taking place on the track next year.

"We're looking at 2015 as the first year we start hosting meets," he said at the dedication of the track. The track is open to the public.

Rincon, a sophomore, will throw the discus, shot put, javelin and hammer for the Bulldogs this season. He considers the shot put his best event.

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“The footing in the ring here has been good right from the start,” he said.

The building of the new track facility was possible because of Measure I, a bond measure that voters passed in 2006.

Hancock’s badly chewed up former track — lane one was downright unusable, there were numerous cracks throughout the surface and the school’s runners eventually couldn’t even work out on it — was under where the school’s industrial technology building now stands, a building made possible by the passage of Measure I. The new track and field facility is just feet to the south of the school’s IT building.

The dedication drew numerous alumni from past Hancock track and field and cross country squads, along with athletic director Kim Ensing, Jim Gilkes, chairman of the Joe White Memorial Committee, and local dignitaries such as Santa Maria Mayor Alice Patino. Hancock College President Kevin Waithers and school board of trustees president Larry Lahr.

Kenny Kring, the oldest son of late former Hancock cross country, and track and field coach Ray Kring, was at the dedication. He still holds the Hancock school decathlon record of 7, 243 points which he set in 1971. He won the state championship in the event that year with 5,677 points. In her remarks to the crowd, Ensing spoke fondly of Kring and another late former Hancock track and field coach, Jack Cook.

Cook was the California Coach of the Year after he guided Hancock’s men to the 1966 state cross country and track and field championships. He coached Nell Duggan, who set the national junior college mile record of 4:02.7 when he ran for Hancock.

Ray Kring squads won 16 conference titles. His cross country team won three state championships. Kenny Kring ran for the 1975 cross country state championship team although, “I mainly used cross country to build for track,” he said.

Kenny Kring scanned the gleaming facility which included a long jump and triple jump pit and a pole vault pit. Quintana said the shot put and discus rings and javelin area are located on an adjacent grass area, and the hammer throw will take place across the street.

Kenny Kring said, “My father would have been so proud of the interest in track and field the community has shown, of the investment the community has made here.”

He said he was touched when Eero Keranen, an Australian who was the MVP of Hancock’s 1975 state championship cross county squad and the state individual runner-up that year, called Millie Kring, Kenny’s mother, to wish him well. He said Keranen, who lives in Australia now, also made a call to some former team members regarding the dedication.

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Earlier, he had quipped to the assembled crowd, “We beat that old track to death. We are responsible for sending that track into a quiet retirement.”

Many Hancock men’s school track and field records that were set in the 1960s and ’70s still stand. “Maybe, with this new track, a lot of those records can be broken,” Kenny Kring said to the audience.

Santa Maria cross country coach Adolfo Lopez was also at the event. Lopez ran for Hancock’s 1966 state championship cross country squad that Ray Kring coached. “Coach Kring was such a great man,” said Lopez.

Stan Whitley was also on hand. Whitley long-jumped over 25 feet for 17 consecutive seasons and he is a member of the USA Masters Track and Field Hall of Fame. A former veteran teacher and coach at La Verne Bonita High School, Whitley and Duggan were both part of the Hancock 1966 and ’67 squads that won state championships. Hancock’s women won their first conference title in 1975.

Duggan won five state individual titles, in the mile in 1966 and ’67, the two mile both of those years, and the 880 in 1966. Whitley won the triple jump (49 feet, 10 1/4 inches) and long jump (a wind-aided 25-2) at the state meet in 1967.

Duggan still holds school records in the 400 (50.0), 1,500 (mile) and 5,000 (three-mile). Whitley’s school records that he set at the 1967 state meet still stand.

“This is quite a difference,” Whitley, who lives in Alta Loma now, said as he scanned over the facility. “I remember we used to run on that old GrassTex surface.”

Scott Mayfield was the only freshman who ran for Hancock’s 1976 state title cross country team. After finishing college, he said, he was a police officer for the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department for 28 years.

“What’s amazing to me is the citizens investing in the community,” Mayfield said. “Hancock is a place where you really can get ready to go to other schools, such as Cal Poly.”

Ensing, Walthers, Lahr and Patino, along with Quintana, in their remarks to the audience, all thanked Santa Maria voters and the City of Santa Maria for making the facility possible.

“Thanks to the City of Santa Maria, we have this long jump pit, this triple jump pit and this pole vault pit,” said Ensing.

Quintana and Rincon remembered those not so good times of the recent past when, “I’d have to get the throwers over to Righetti High School at 2 p.m., get back here, load up the truck between 3:15 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. and get the runners to Santa Maria High School because we weren’t allowed on the Santa Maria campus before 3:30 p.m.,” Quintana said to the audience.

Now, as he walks to his practice home, “I’m smiling every day after school,” Rincon said.