

They never said it would be easy; they only said it would be worth it

This is the fifth article about the first class of inductees into the newly formed Coalgate Athletic Hall of Fame. Today we look at the 2004 state champions girls track team.

In the spring of 2004, nine young ladies did what generations of Coalgate High School teams had attempt-

ed. They brought home the title STATE CHAMPIONS and a little hardware for the trophy case. The team consisted of juniors Jenna Airington, Hillary Holliday, and Kacee McCulley; sophomores Echo Adcock, Jamaica Pebworth, Lauren Sandmann, Megan Sims, and Constance Thompson; and freshman Teran Mixon.

The girls were coached by Sherry McCulley, Joe McCulley and Don Willis.

The journey wasn't paved in gold for these ladies.

After ending the 2003 season as 8th place state finishers, they opened the 2004 season with a 5th place finish at Catoosa behind Booker T. Washington (5A champion), Bishop Kelley, Bixby (5A third) and Northeast (4A champion).

In the next meet, the Lady Cats started to find their groove finishing in gold at Henryetta. The next week the team traveled to Pauls Valley competing once again against larger schools. This time they fared much better bringing home silver.

The middle of April found the Lady Cats traveling to Comanche midweek and finishing the week in Tishomingo, once again wearing gold.

The last week of the regular season, the team journeyed to Tonkawa on Friday and traveled to Velma-Al-

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ma on Saturday, finishing both days as team champions. Running back-to-back meets gave the ladies an idea of what to expect at the state meet. But before they could make travel arrangements to Mustang for the state meet, they had to travel back to the Chickasaw Capitol for the Region 6 meet. It was a cold and rainy day — but the Lady Cats showed their purple pride finishing as regional champions.

The events in which the ladies were going to compete at state were set.

Sims — High Jump; Thompson — 4x800m, 4x400m, 400m dash, pole vault; Airington — shot and disc; McCulley — 4x800m, 3200m run, 800m run, 1600m run; Sandmann — 4x400m, pole vault; Mixon — 800m run, 1600m run, 4x400m, 4x800m; Pebworth — 100m hurdles, 300m hurdles; Adcock 3200m run, 1600m run; and Holliday 4x800m, 800m run, 4x400m.

On Friday, Jenna Airington broke the 2A record winning the discus. The 3200m quartet of Thompson, McCulley Mixon, and Holliday won gold, and McCulley won the 3200m, leaving the Lady Cats with a total of 41.

On Saturday morning, the Lady Cats picked up right where they left off, in the field events. Thompson set a pole vault record and Sandmann finished second. On the track, Mixon won gold in 800m and 1600m.

In the last event of the day, the 4x400m, Holliday, Thompson, Sandmann and Mixon won the gold, ending the second day with a team total of 107 points, ahead of Wynnewood with 71 and Tonkawa with 42.

On May 8, 2004, with several fans on hand, the Coalgate Lady Cats track team received the trophy crowning them as 2004 Class 2A Girls Track State Champions.

Coach Sherry McCulley and some of the members of that 2004 team share their feelings about that experience:

Coach McCulley — “Having the opportunity to coach a group of girls who were willing to buy into a dream is a privilege that a lot of coaches don’t get the chance to do.

“The road to their success was not what you would call easy. It was hard for them to adapt to the level of work that was required to be as successful as we wanted and planned to be.

“Success is always the selling point when you’re a coach, but when you’re running that 10th 400m in a workout it takes some personal fortitude to keep believing. They did believe and tried to do everything we asked of them. It was a total team effort. They could not have accomplished what

they did without leaning on each other to do their part, however small it was. It was a great time that they will have to remember the rest of their lives.”

Jenna Airington — “Being a part of the team that brought Coalgate their first state championship is something I am very proud of. The nine of us worked so hard and deserved it, and the experience was unbelievable. Setting the state throwing record was something I had wanted since I first started throwing. The most gratifying moment was when they brought out the steel tape and confirmed it.”

Teran Mixon — “It was definitely a bonding experience. I remember Coach making a huge results chart placing where we were ranked...after each event we wrote the results on the chart with a Sharpie to see how we were shaping up. It really kept everyone watching all events and cheering each other on. As it got later in the day we were in really good shape to win, but the coaches never let on to that, so we were trying to do our very best all the way to the end.

“I remember finishing the 4x400m, which was my 4th event of the meet and the 4th gold. I was dead tired, but as soon as I crossed the line Jenna ran over to me and picked me up for a huge hug and was spinning me around. I was like I’m so excited but I’m going to throw up if you don’t stop!

“After that the whole team got to run a victory lap and they announced us as winners. I will say I’ll never forget that first year’s group. We all worked so hard. Joe and Sherry really were the ones who laid out each and every step for us. They were amazing coaches.”

Constance Hansel (née Thompson) — “Winning the first state championship for CHS was a moment I will never forget. Being a part of such a wonderful team of girls and having amazing coaches made the experience that much better. We all worked so hard and put in the countless miles and hours to get to where we were.

“Winning was never a “me thing” but a team thing, and OUR team did it! The moment they called our school’s name and presented us with the state championship trophy was one the best moments, best memories that I have. I am blessed to have been part of the CHS 2004 Girls Track Team.”

Kacee Price (née McCulley) — “I felt a tremendous amount of accomplishment when we won state in ‘04. For me personally, winning state was a goal I’d had since I was a little girl and I saw my older sister’s track team win state. As I grew older, I realized how difficult and rare it is to do. So

for me, it was something I took a lot of pride in, knowing how hard my teammates and I had worked, and how much we deserved to be standing on the top spot of the podium after day two.

“It was also very special for me on a personal level, because it is something I was able to share with my parents (our coaches). Understanding their efforts put into our team, it was a wonderful feeling to reward their dedication with our best performances, which was good enough for the title.”

Megan Sims — “The whole track season was a memorable experience! I think some of my favorite times were gathering at Louis Sandmann’s house the evening before a meet for team dinners. It was such a special time for us to get together as a team and not stress about the following day. I am very grateful to have been part of such an amazing experience!”

Hillary Holliday Myers — “Winning the first state title has left me with a sense of pride. Not only were we as a team and a school extremely proud of our accomplishment, but the entire community was so excited and proud of us for doing something that had never been done before in Coalgate.

“It was and still is very humbling to have been a part of the team that inspired that type of excitement and I’ll always be proud to have been a part of it.”