

Simpson retires as RoadRunners track coach

By Chronicle Staff

Virgil Simpson, head coach of the Winston-Salem RoadRunners Track Club recently announced his retirement. Simpson has served as a volunteer coach in summer track and field for more than 20 years.

Simpson, often called the "Godfather Coach" of the North Carolina TAC (The Athletic Congress), has been recognized for long years of volunteer service working with the youth of this state. He and his wife, Marion,



Virgil Simpson

have received coaching and volunteer awards from TAC's Region III. The East Coast Track & Field organization awarded Simpson for 10 years of team participation in their summer track program.

Devaldean Penn, one of Simpson's long-time assistants, replaces Simpson as the RoadRunners head coach. Penn is a Winston-Salem State graduate who is currently a teacher and coach in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County school system. "Track and field," says Penn, "teaches a youngster responsibility and what it takes to get the job done. That's what life is all about."

Simpson's summer track coaching career started in the late '60s when he was the track coach at Anderson High School. It was then that he introduced his state track winners to Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) competition for the first time.

"My wife, with our two daughters, would drive her care and I would drive my car to transport those young people around the state and southeastern region to compete in the summer AAU meets," Simpson said. "The young people were excited and did very well in the state and regional meets."

From those summer months grew the idea of forming a youth track club -- the RoadRunners.

Simpson says his goals from the beginning were to provide organized track and field in the summer months to area youth. By doing so, the athletes developed a positive self-image, leadership skills, physical fitness and endurance. "I've always tried to stress the importance of giving your best and feeling good about it," the coach said. "I also told them that winners take advantage of all opportunities that come with being a winner, always seeking to improve on the last performance."

But aside from the track and field aspect, Simpson is proud that most of his athletes pursue their education beyond high school. He says that 99 percent of the youngsters who have come through his program have attended college, many of them on track scholarships.

Simpson credits much of his athletes success to his staff of volunteers that he has had over the years. He expresses special thanks to the coaches along with the RoadRunners Parents organizations, headed by Bob Chiles, Carolyn Thompson, John and Lois Young. The recently retired coach also expressed his thanks for the financial support the club has received from corporations, small businesses, fraternal organizations, churches, friends and the athletes' families.

In August 1974, the RoadRunners held their first county-

wide track meet. The meet was sanctioned by the AAU and sponsored by the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity and the Winston-Salem Police Dept. Over 200 area youngsters competed for medals and ribbons. Since then, the club has continued to host a county meet each year.

In 1981, the RoadRunners, along with several other youth track programs, left the AAU organization and formed the TAC.

This new national organization was formed to develop a program geared specifically towards track and field. Even after joining TAC, the RoadRunners continued to produce champions at the local, state, regional and national level.

Simpson says that one of his greatest coaching joys has been watching his athletes develop as they mature into young adults. That's because many of those athletes started competing with the

RoadRunners at an early age.

Among those are Shanta Young (sprinter, relay runner at North Carolina A&T); hurdler Jabbar Bennett who plans to attend Hampton University in September; and Chantell Carter who competed in the 1991 Sweden Games.

The coach also reflects on the sixth place finish of long jumper James Samuels in the AAU nationals, which was the first time

any RoadRunner competed in the nationals.

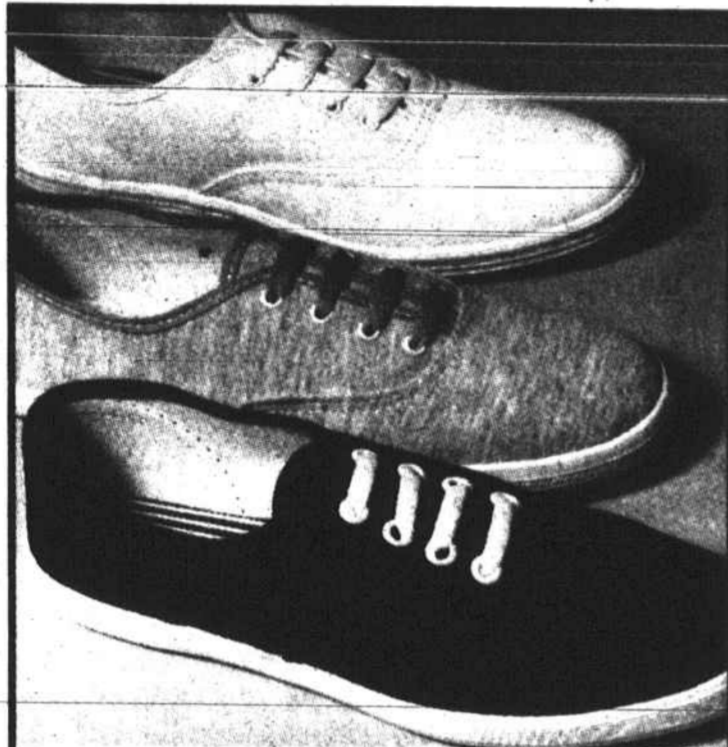
But there's also the three national championship gold medals won by Randy Jones, along with the 1976 girls 800 meter relay team that won the national title. The foursome of Vanessa Smith, Sharon Simpson, Lemelia Johnson and Donna Matthews still holds the AAU national record in that event. Debra Alexander, a Division II

All-American triple jumper at Hampton, also developed her skills as a member of the RoadRunners Track Club.

While Simpson has stepped down from the head coach position, he says he will continue to volunteer his time as a volunteer consultant for the RoadRunners and TAC. "My heart and services will always be concerned with the youth of this community," Simpson said.

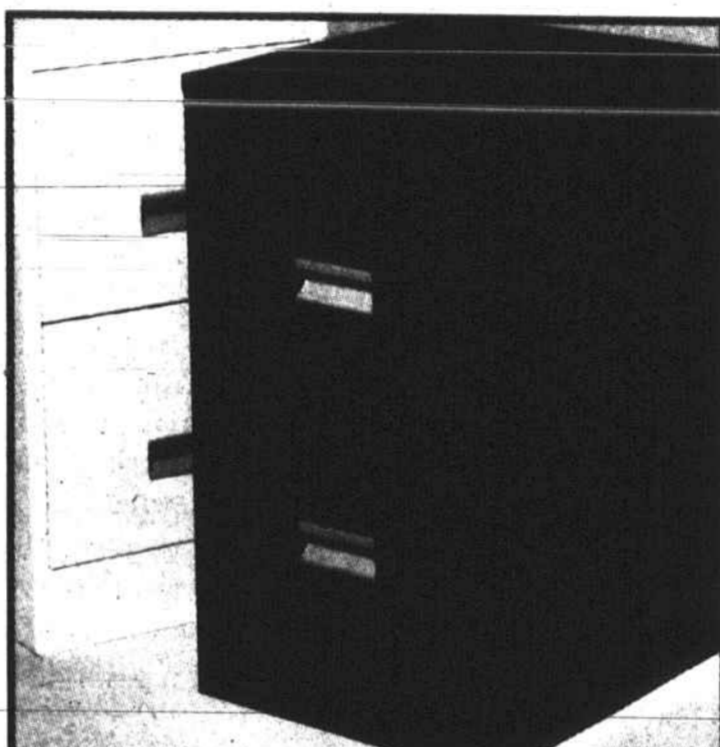
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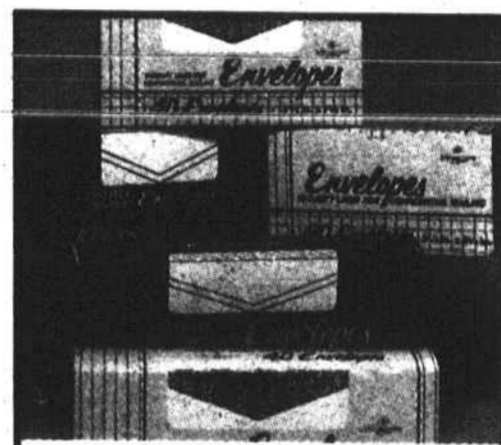
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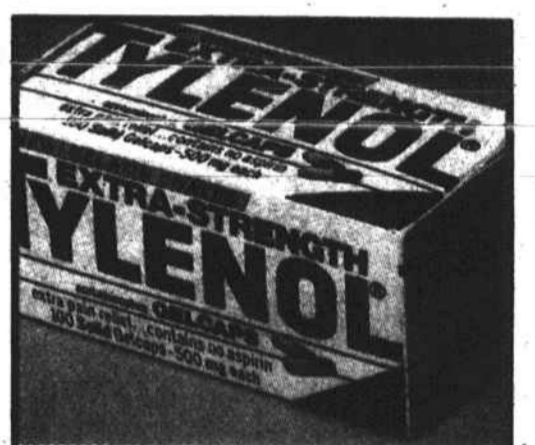
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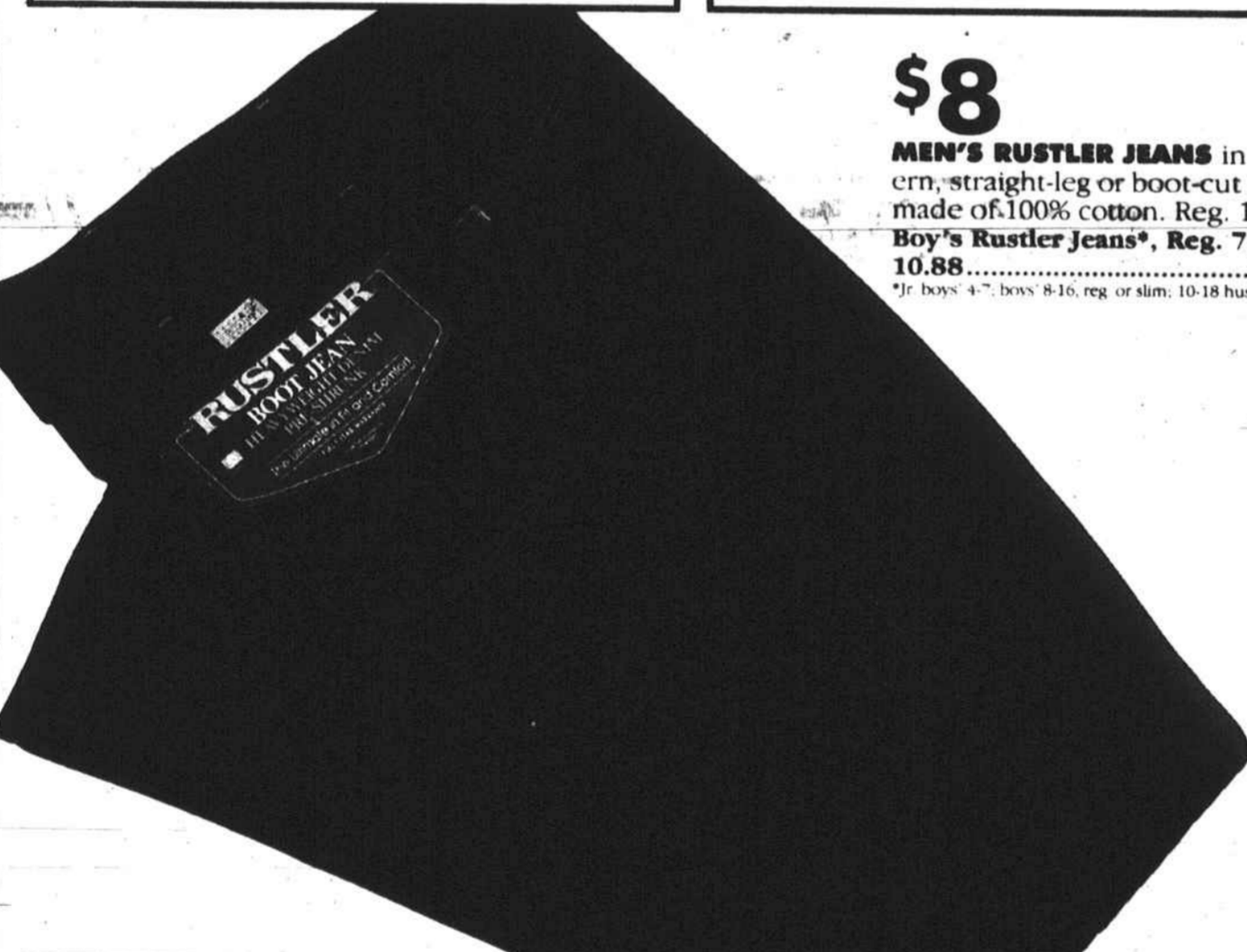
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