

Rex Cawley – Farmington 1959



One of the greatest names in Michigan history named himself after the neighbor's dog. Warren Jay Cawley got to his 6th grade homeroom, and found three other Warrens. The teacher said that wasn't going to work. So Cawley took the name Rex and he made that name famous.

Coached by Gene Freed at Farmington, as a junior Cawley won state in the 120-yard highs (14-inches less than 110H) in 14.5, and also taking the 180-yard lows in a record 19.0.

The next year he trained hard, often running several events at a morning meet and finishing up with 3-4 more in the afternoon. His antics caused the MHSAA to change the limit from 4 events per meet to 4 per day. "I got real tough, real fast," he said. At regionals, he tied the national record with a 13.9 twice—director Bob Parks made sure there was a wind gauge. At the state finals on a wet cinder track, he won the long jump at 22-8 1/8, then the highs in 14.4, the lows in 19.2, and he brought Farmington back from a 12-yard deficit on the 880y relay, clocking 20.8 for the win.

Cawley traveled to Fort Wayne to run against the big boys, winning all three hurdle events: 14.1 (42-inch), 51.5 in the 440y intermediates, and 23.3 in the 220y lows. At the AAU nationals in Boulder, he became the first American man in history to place in all three, taking 5th in the highs, 6th in the 400H and 3rd in the 200 lows (22.8—the winning time was a World Record 22.6).

That put him on the national team, and he spent the summer in Europe, racing the world's best and setting more records. Not only was he T&FN high school athlete of the year, he ranked in the top 10 in the world in both the 110H and 400H.

At USC, despite a hamstring injury that slowed him for over a year, he won the 440H at the '63 NCAA (49.6 AR) just a few hours after taking 2nd in the quarter in 46.1.

In 1964, he won the Trials in a World Record 49.1. At the Olympic Games in Tokyo, he stunned, coming from behind to take gold in 49.69.

In 1965, he won nationals and ranked No. 1 in the world. Before pro track, long careers were hard. "I would love to compete in Mexico City," he said of the '68 Olympics, "but I've had my day and must consider my future."

He passed away on January 21, 2022, in Orange, California.



Cawley (far left) en route to winning the Olympic gold.