



JAMES L. PURSELL
MARCH 1981

Mel Patton, winner of two Olympic gold medals in the 1948 London Games, always said James Pursell was responsible for starting him on the road to success as a world record breaking sprinter.

During his many years as head track coach at University High in Los Angeles, Pursell developed such outstanding stars that in 1949 the Los Angeles Times pointed out that three of his proteges, then in college, scored enough points to have won the National Collegiate team championship.

Patton, the first sprinter to run the hundred in 9.1, won both the 100 and 220 that day for the University of Southern California. Craig Dixon, also a medal winner at the London Olympics and a world record breaker in 110 and 220-yard hurdle events, collected a pair of firsts for UCLA. A third athlete once coached by Pursell, Taylor Lewis, UCLA discus thrower, finished fourth. The three of them earned 44 points.

The interesting thing about Pursell's 38-year coaching career in the Los Angeles school system is that he never competed in track while an athlete at the University of Southern California.

"When I was appointed to my first job as a track coach," he recalls, "I went to Dean Cromwell, world famous track mentor at USC, and he gave me a crash course." What Cromwell taught him paid off.

Football had been Pursell's sport at USC. Born and raised near Tulare, California, he played high school football and earned his letter at the Trojan school as a guard.

Modest to a fault, Jim never considered himself a star but was proud of the fact that he played in the first grid contest ever held in Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum (USC vs. Pomona), the first game ever in what is now the Rose Bowl (USC vs. California) and was on the first of many Trojan teams to play in the Pasadena New Year's day classic. It beat Penn State 14 to 3 in 1923.