

Girls began competing for state track and field medals in Pennsylvania in 1973, a year after the number of girls track teams in the commonwealth soared from 67 to 125.

One of the state's first superstars in the throwing events was Elaine Sobansky of Trinity in Washington County. Her 50-81/2 shot put in 1979 can still be found in the record books.

This area produced two pretty good throwers back then, though neither reached Sobansky status.

The first was Stacy Cunningham of Cranberry, quickly followed by Patty Davis of Clarion-Limestone, the area's most decorated athlete with 10 state medals.

Cunningham was never a state champion, but she was a versatile enough athlete to compete in the long and triple jumps along with the throws. She took third in the shot and fifth in the discus at states as a junior and was looking for more as a senior.

But she tore a cartilage in her left knee throwing the javelin in the District 10 meet, and finished fifth. This was after she set D-10 AA marks in the shot (42-5) and discus (123-11). It marked the second straight season that she set a meet record in the shot.

Cunningham shrugged off the injury to compete in the shot at states. She took a sixth with a gutsy put of 36-8 before undergoing surgery a few days later.

After Cunningham, along came Davis, who starred at C-L from 1981-84.

Davis medaled at states in each of her four seasons, beginning with a fifth in the shot and a sixth in the discus as a freshman, and improved to seconds in both events as a sophomore. She even came oh-so-close to the gold in the shot, tying Sandy Starr of Mars for first place at 38-6. The championship was decided on second-best throw, and Davis didn't have that.

Accounting for all 28 of her team's points, Davis finally broke through to the top of the medal stand in 1983 with firsts in the javelin (142-9) and discus (127-4) as a junior. She also took second in the shot (37-11).

That 142-9 was a school record, and it came with a javelin borrowed from Karns City. Davis had broken her javelin and C-L didn't have a proper backup. C-L coach Clyde Conti said throwing coach Dave Schirmer about swallowed his gourd when Davis just "whipped that thing out there" for the gold medal.

After setting District 9 AA records in both events (40-9 shot, 134-3 discus) in 1984, Davis struck gold again at the state meet with a 41-91/4 shot and a 135-3 discus throw. A sixth-place finish in the javelin gave her career state medal No. 10.

Davis was an indoor and outdoor All-American for Slippery Rock University.

Schirmer thought Davis' 10 state medals might be a record. But, alas, Tiffany Abney of Merion Mercy Academy was a perfect 12-for-12 from 2000-03, including 10 individual golds for her showings in the 200, 400 and 300 hurdles plus four more in the 1600 relay. Her only downfalls were second- and third-place finishes in the 200 her last two years.

The 10 golds are a record for boys and girls. The boys record is seven held by Lancaster McCaskey sprinter Barney Ewell in the mid-1930s.

Ewell, real name Henry, was nicknamed Barney because he used to sing the hit song "Barney Google With the Goo-Goo-Googly Eyes" as a 5-year-old in 1923. He was denied Olympic greatness at first because there were no Games held in 1940 and 1944 due to World War II, his prime years. He did win three golds in the 1948 Games at the age of 30.

Ironically, Ewell had both legs amputated below the knee due to poor circulation and died at age 78 in 1996 from complications.

D-10 superlatives

District 10 athletes own 10 state meet records, two by Grove City's Jeff Brown (10.58 in the 100) and Tom Wise (37.47 in the 300 hurdles) in Class AA. Lakeview's Fawn Miller threw the javelin 167-2 as a junior in 2008 for the AA girls record. She won the NCAA title for Florida in 2014.

And two athletes from tiny Warren County schools left their mark at states. Sheffield's Matt Benson holds the AA high jump record at 7-1, and Youngsville's Mike Shine, an eventual Olympics hurdler, won five golds in the early 1970s.