



I saw the letter to the editor from former News-Herald reporter Larry Harton who was reminiscing about Rick Weaver's gutsy come-from-behind victory in the PIAA half-mile in 1969.

Weaver, then a junior at Oil City High School, was left for dead after being fouled at the start of the race, but that didn't stop him from becoming the Oilers' second state champion ever – and the first since Charlie Winger claimed three middle distance titles in the mid-1950s.

Plus, it has since come to light, he beat a future world famous model in the process. More on that later.

According to Jack Mays, who covered the meet for The News-Herald, Weaver was knocked off stride early, and subsequently was last heading into the first turn of the two-lap race. The Shikellamy runner who committed the foul was disqualified.

Weaver, in the meantime, stormed into sixth place and held it for the first half of the race before making his move – passing three runners on the back straight away – and then easing into the inside lane on the final turn.

From there, Mays wrote, Weaver drifted into the third lane and sprinted past the first- and second-place runners, winning the race by three feet. His time was 1:56.2.

Comparable performance: Redbank Valley freshman Mylee Harmon in the 2A state 400 meters just last spring. I didn't see this either, but I know Harmon was in fifth place with 150 meters to go. She turned on the jets and passed all five before the race was over. Her winning time was 57.15.

Anyhow, kudos to Harton for resurrecting Weaver's mad dash and bringing it to the forefront of Oiler lore where it belongs.

Weaver graduated from Oil City in 1970, three months before I started at The Derrick, so I didn't see any of his sports heroics, which also included a 48.65 in the 440, and stardom in cross country and basketball for the Oilers and baseball over the summer.

I knew Weaver won a state title, but I wasn't aware of the drama involved until reading Harton's letter. What's more, a guy who was helping me on sports for a while early in my Derrick life – and an admirer of Weaver's – told me something that I might have misunderstood. I'm still not sure – and that is Weaver won despite running the "slow" heat.

But the two runners he beat over the final 100 yards for the state title – Billy Perry of Wissahickon and Bruce Hulse of Haverford – were in that race with him. So was Dick Root, who took fifth for Corry.

The next year – his senior season in 1970 – Weaver was in the "slow" heat – never mind that he was defending state champion. His time in the District 10 meet was what counted, and the competition wasn't great, so he was placed in the "slow" heat at states, winning by 35 yards. His time was 1:55.3. Rich Matrunick of Derry won the "fast" heat and the state championship in 1:54.6.

Definite bumner for Weaver, but he and high jumper Terry Thompson, another state place-winner, would go on to "run" some track at Pitt.

Star-studded state meet

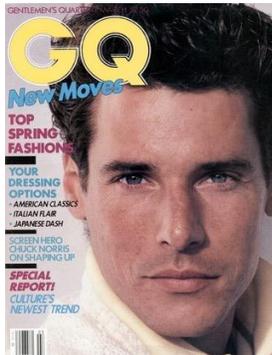
As for those two half-milers he beat down the stretch in the 1969 race: Nothing to sneer at.

Perry, who was second, was also state runner-up in 1968. Hulse, who settled for third, didn't run the 880 as a senior in 1970, concentrating on the hurdles and 440 instead.

Hulse was not state caliber in either event, but he, Steve Joachim and Ray Edelman were the mainstays of a 24-2 Haverford team that lost to Beaver Falls, 82-57, in the state championship basketball game.

Edelman averaged 23 points and went on to play three years at Kentucky. Not a star, but he played. Some. Joachim, who averaged 19, was a heralded quarterback. It was a big deal that Penn State landed him. He didn't last there and transferred to Temple where he was the Maxwell Award winner in 1974.

Joachim was taken in the seventh round of the 1975 NFL draft by the Colts – Ted Marchibroda's first season at Baltimore – but his only pro team was the Jets in 1976.



Hulse, who averaged 10 points as a high school senior, went on to play hoops at Cornell, and THEN, became a superstar model for the likes of Calvin Klein. Modeled for three decades. Just last year he was featured on HunksOver40.com. Google it.

And just for good measure: Another notable track star of the 69/70 era was Chichester sprinter Billy “White Shoes” Johnson, the future flamboyant receiver/return specialist for the NFL's Oilers (1974-80) and Falcons (1982-87) after playing college ball at Division III Widener.

Johnson missed by two years of being a Falcons teammate of another one of Franklin's own – All-Pro cornerback Rolland “Bay” Lawrence (1973-80).