

A Very Special Cap



This is a story about a very special Penn Relays cap. It is one of a kind, it cannot be reproduced, and it is one very cool piece of track & field memorabilia. What makes it so special? Please read on...

On April 26, 1969, at the Penn Relays Carnival, Power Memorial's Two-Mile Relay of Andy Walsh, Tony Colon, Peter Lovett, and John Lovett ran a time of 7:40.7. They won that race by over four full seconds. No high school foursome had ever run faster in this event at the Penn Relays. It was more than 12 seconds

faster than these same boys had ever run before. Coached by Br. John Bielen, trained to peak at the right time, racing on a tartan surface for the first time, motivated by a loss the previous day, a large track savvy crowd in the stands and adrenaline coursing through their veins... These ingredients proved to be the perfect blend for their remarkable performance.

They had run faster than the Bob Zieminski led Archbishop Molloy team which set the national record of 7:43.8 in 1964. They were faster than the 7:42.9 national mark by Jim Ryun's East High School team out of Wichita, KS in 1965. Faster still than Proviso West from Hillside, IL with Jerry Mentz, Allen Jakosa, Bruce Bowman and Craig Grant, who lowered the record again in 1965 to 7:41.9.

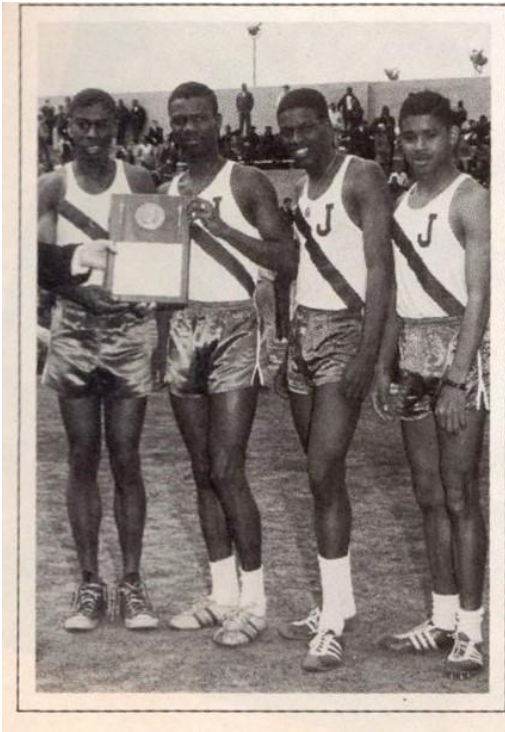


Power Memorial's remarkable time of 7:40.7 would stand as the Penn Relays Championship record for 21 years. By 1995 it had been the longest standing high school championship record in the history of the Carnival.

But their time was not a national record when run. It was also not a New York state record. In fact, it wasn't even the 2nd best time in New York State or even New York City history!

In what may best be described as a "*pre-Beamon-esque*" performance, three years earlier on Wednesday, June 7th, at the 1966 CHSAA Coaches Relays, two PSAL teams became the first in history to break the 7:40 barrier in a two-mile relay.

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In one of the greatest schoolboy two-mile relays in history, Andrew Jackson of Queens and Boys High of Brooklyn completed eight-circuits of a push-and-pull battle around St. John University's tartan track. The thrilling duel climaxed when the two anchormen crossed the finish line in a near dead heat. Both teams were clocked in the identical, astounding time of 7:35.6, with Jackson declared the winner. The time established a new national mark, shattering the old record by more than SIX seconds. It would stand as the national record for 36 years. As of May 2021, Track & Field News lists the 1966 Jackson and Boys two-mile relays still among the top 10 in history. No other 20th century teams make the cut.

The brilliant runners for Jackson that day were Julio Meade (1:54.3), Bill Jacobs (1:57.3), Sam Thomas (1:52.7) and Mark Ferrell (1:51.3). They were coached by the legendary Milt Blatt. The equally brilliant Boys High squad consisted of

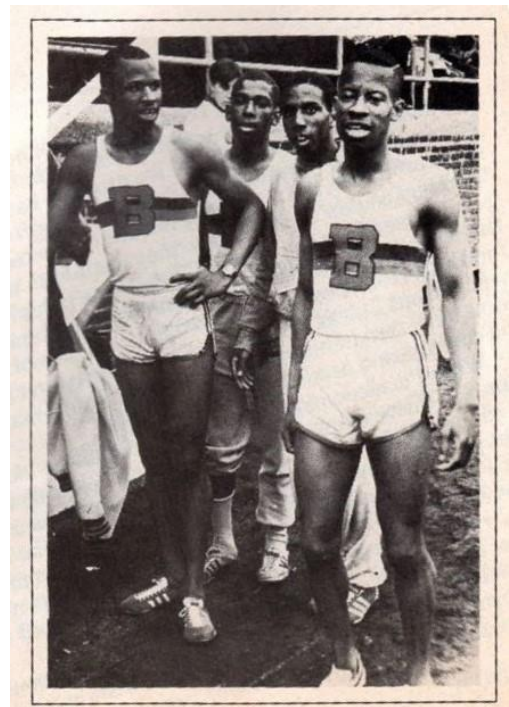
Mark Edmead (1:55.3), John Henry (1:56.6), Mike Randall (1:53.1) and Jim Jackson (1:50.6). They were coached by the legendary Doug Terry.

As footnotes to this great race: Archbishop Molloy of Queens finished 3rd in 7:48.9. In what may be a record of sorts, the Boys High "B" team was FOURTH in 7:53.2. Watching from the stands that day, and unaware three years later he would play a role in another historic relay, was Peter Lovett of Power's '69 team. Peter skipped a few classes that day just so he could see these runners compete, later sharing details of the day's events with his brother John and other teammates.

But what makes this Penn Relays cap special?

For a seven-year period, from June 1969 to May 1976, three New York City schools owned the three fastest high school two-mile relays in U.S. history: Andrew Jackson from Queens, Boys High of Brooklyn, and Manhattan's Power Memorial.

In 1995, the Power Memorial 1969 two-mile relay team was honored with a place on the Penn Relays Wall of Fame to celebrate their accomplishment, the first high school team to be recognized on The Wall. While he was there, Andy Walsh, the leadoff man on Power's '69 team, picked up a handsome commemorative cap celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Relay Carnival.



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At the 1996 Penn Relays, the two-mile relay teams of Andrew Jackson and Boys High were recognized for their magnum opus performance achieved 30 years earlier and were honorary starters of that year's Championship Two-Mile Relay. In a bit of serendipity, enjoying the events that day were two Penn Relays and Power Memorial alumni, brothers Andy and Ed Walsh. Andy, of course, was wearing the cap he purchased the year before. Along with the other members of his '69 relay team, Andy had long respected and admired those athletes from Jackson and Boys. Now Andy Walsh had never asked anyone for an autograph before but today was different. Seated near him was the PSAL contingent. With an air of respect and admiration Andy approached the group and told them, "You don't know me, but I know of you", explaining how their teams shared a place in high school track & field history. Humbly, Andy requested they sign the bill of his Penn Relays cap to mark the occasion. Graciously the Jackson and Boys runners obliged with their signatures. When Andy met up with his own former relay mates, they too signed the bill of the cap.

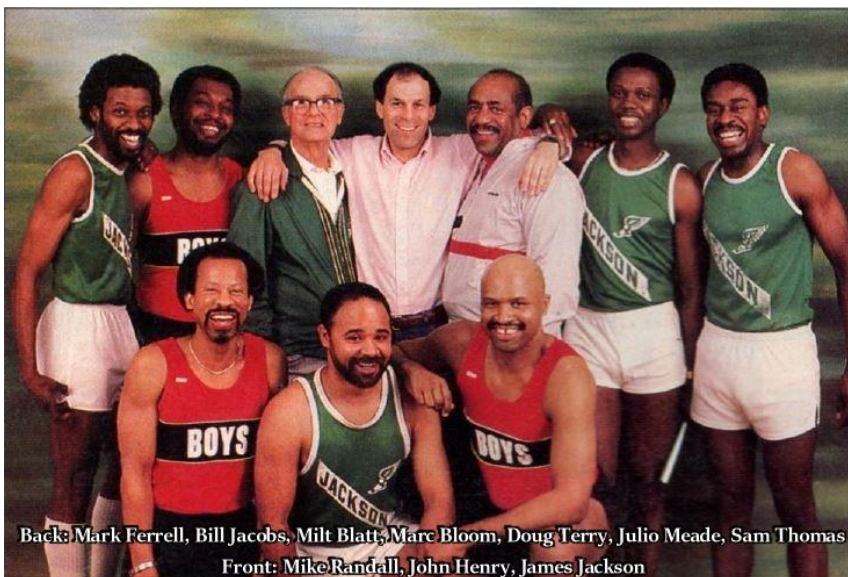
And that is what makes this Penn Relays cap one-of-a-kind special and a cool piece of Track & Field memorabilia. It is signed by 10 of the 12 New York City runners, who for a 7-year period, had the three fastest high school two-mile relays in US history. The missing men are Bill Jacobs of Jackson and Mark Edmead of Boys who were not present at Penn that day in 1996.



Signatures on the bill of Andy Walsh' special cap.

Epilogue: Jackson and Boys High time of 7:35.6y (7:33.0m) withstood all challengers for 36 years. In 2002, Auburn of Washington State surpassed their record metrically, by a whispery 0.11 seconds, with a 4 x 800 time of 7:32.89. As for Power, while their time of 7:40.7 was ONLY third best in US (and NYC) history when run, it was a National Catholic High School record that stood for 42 years. No US

high school team ran a faster two-mile relay until 1976 when FIVE Illinois teams ran between 7:38.0 and 7:40.6 in an epic race at the year-end outdoor state meet.



Back: Mark Ferrell, Bill Jacobs, Milt Blatt, Marc Bloom, Doug Terry, Julio Meade, Sam Thomas
Front: Mike Randall, John Henry, James Jackson

In 1986, journalist Marc Bloom reunited the Jackson and Boys High teams and their coaches for his magazine article, "Me and Julio Down by The School Track".

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Further Reading: The 1966 Jackson vs. Boys race was immortalized in Marc Bloom's 1986 article, commemorating the 20th anniversary of the race, "Me and Julio Down by The School Track". The story behind Power Memorial's Penn Relays victory in 1969 is brought to life by author Jim Irish in his 2019 article titled, "Power Memorial's Record at Penn Lasts and Lasts".



Andy Walsh, Tony Colon, Peter Lovett, John Lovett

Power Memorial's 1969 Two Mile Relay team is honored at the 1995 Penn Relays with a place on the Franklin Field Wall of Fame.

Please visit <https://www.powermemorialtrack.com/articles-news-clips> where you will find links to these and other great stories.

Jim Irish's blog can be found at <https://www.jameskevinirish.com/>

The author of this story, "A Very Special Cap", goes by the pen name PMA Track.