

Olympic Runner Bob Soth Goes for the Gold at Walnut Village



Bob Soth with one of his running trophies.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s America's Cold War with the Soviet Union was in full swing and resident Bob Soth was smack in the middle. Bob, an up and coming world-class long-distance runner, had one thing on his mind ... "Beat the Russians!"

Bob's best finish at an Amateur Athletic Union meet was third in the 10,000 Meters in 1959. He also placed fourth in the 5,000 Meters in 1956 and 1960. Bob won a bronze medal in the 10K at the 1959 Pan American Games. It's now July 1959 and Bob faced his biggest challenge, competing against two elite Russian runners in the 10,000 Metres.

The USA-USSR dual meet was held at Franklin Field in Philadelphia and Bob was one of the two American entrants. It was a brutally hot July day, and the pace was slow. At around 8,000 Meters, the two Soviet runners led, followed by Bob. One of the Soviets was overcome by heat and Bob made his move into second place. But Bob shortly also fell victim to the heat, running in an odd, backward lean indicating he was in serious trouble. After almost a full lap of that, he collapsed and became unconscious. Fortunately, he fully recovered and no long-term damage ensued.

“Sure I was disappointed but I was competing against two top-notch Russian athletes,” he said. “There was a lot to be proud of. At that time in history, all athletes wanted to beat the Russians.” Although defeated in that race, it has become known in racing circles as a meet that displayed Bob’s competitive spirit. So much so that Bob went on to compete in the 1960 Olympics in Rome and placed seventh in one of the preliminary heats failing to make the finals in the Men’s 5,000 Meters.

“I learned a lot as a competitive runner about my self-worth and gained a lot of confidence that helped me as a teacher and in life in general,” Bob said. Bob competed a few more years but then decided to pursue a career as a high school teacher and part-time track coach.

Bob continued to go for the gold when looking for a retirement community. At Walnut Village Bob felt an immediate feeling of friendship. And if there is any doubt Bob enjoys living at Walnut Village just look at his name tag. “I’m a happy Villager,” it says, and Bob would not have it any other way.