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Francie Kraker Strides Closer To Goal

By Wayne DeNeff

As far as anyone in Ann Arbor can tell, Francie Kraker is walking on land just like everyone else.

But looks are deceiving.

Francie has been walking on air ever since last week.

That's when the Ann Arbor coed won her first big races in the Millrose Games and the Boston Athletic Association competition and the 19-year-old (soon to be 20) blonde is speeding along right on schedule to become this city's first Olympian.

Annexing the 880-yard victory in Boston after her sparkling triumph in New York were tremendous accomplishments in themselves but the Michigan sophomore caused

the Boston timers to do a simultaneous doubletake when they saw the time—2.09.7, a new American record.

Even setting the American record was not as important as what Francie discovered about herself while getting a boost in confidence.

She found her leg speed was much better than it was a year ago.

She found that her endurance had improved after a fall of cross-country competition.

And she found she still had "something left" after blazing to the mark which clipped four-tenths of a second off the 2:10.1 Doris Brown set on the West Coast last month.

"I was ready to sprint at the end," said Francie, "but

there was nobody to sprint with." She passed the much-publicized Marie Mulder with two laps to go in New York and with three-quarters of a lap left in Boston.

What is the peak for the slender Literary College student who was first encouraged in the sport while still in the awkward age at Slauson Junior High?

"Indoors, somewhere around 2:06," says her pipe-smoking coach, Ken Simmons, and he's still dead serious when he adds "and maybe something like two minutes flat in outdoor competition in 1968."

"The way I feel I've only started to get close to my best," says Francie who also

mentions a flat two minutes as the natural target for women runners. "I guess two minutes in the 880 for us is something like the four-minute mile," she says.

Outdoor competition in 1968 means in time for the Olympics in Mexico City.

That's still the primary objective for her and her coach.

And it's by no means a new target for the articulate Ann Arbor High graduate.

A headline in The Ann Arbor News on July 24, 1962, first told of Francie's ambitions: "Francie Kraker Dreams of Olympics," said the headline above the story about the 15-year-old daughter of Dr. and Mrs. R. F. Kraker.

No one can blame Francie if she feels like she's walking on air for just a few days. Her program ahead still is a difficult one involving many more hours of practice, exercise, diet and dedication.

And there should be no misconception that the world of women's track isn't as fiercely competitive as that of the men.

"Take any eight girls all flying into that first turn on an indoor track and, well . . . it's dangerous," says Simmons. Rules call for disqualification for interference but there is subtle and not-so-subtle pushing, shoving and fighting within the loosely-interpreted rules.

Simmons wants Francie to

restrict her indoor competition during this month so that she reaches her peak at the time of the nationals at Oakland, Calif., March 3-4.

"After all," says Simmons, "these indoor meets are generally quite meaningless. A person can win a trophy but can get set back, too. The ultimate goal is the Olympics and our program is built around that."

Last year at this time, Simmons, whose wife is a physical education teacher who first recognized Francie's natural abilities, was trying to line up competition for Francie at the big meets but didn't always get good response from the promoters.

Now it's different.

Now the phone of the Michigan physical education instructor is buzzing and Francie herself was awakened at 2:30 a.m. by a call from Los Angeles and a plea for her to enter the Los Angeles Times Meet on Feb. 11 where Francie apparently would meet Charlette Cook, 24-year-old Seattle teacher whose :53.4 in the 440 and 2:05 in last year's AAU Women's National Outdoor Championships at Frederick, Md., set American records.

But right now it looks like the Philadelphia Inquirer meet Saturday, the New York Athletic Club competition on Feb. 17, and the Toronto Maple Leaf Games on Feb. 24 are the tuneups.



FRANCIE KRAKER
(Track Record-Holder)