

Ken Simmons: The Man Behind The Michigammes

By Bill Anderson
(News Sports Writer)

Ken "Red" Simmons is a man with a certain amount of contentment, a man who has fought the good fight for girl's athletics and is now just beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

For the first time in years, his girl's track & field club appears to be on sound financial footing with a secure future ahead. His Michigammes have a real shot at winning the state cross country championship next weekend on the Central

Michigan campus in Mount Pleasant. He is even casting a cautious glance ahead to the state track & field championships next spring, the national cross country meet next year, and, yes, even the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal.

All these things for a man, who has toiled quietly in the vineyards of girl's athletics long before women libbers and their advocates made a big issue out of it. The Michigammes date from the time Simmons retired from youth work in the

Detroit area and moved to Ann Arbor where he earned a Master's degree from Michigan and soon became a member of the staff. "I was always interested in sports," Simmons said, "but I was just too old for most coaching jobs. So, I decided to start my own team."

It is hardly surprising that Simmons chose track & field because he was a finalist in the 1932 Olympic Trials, but he never made the team that competed in Los Angeles.

But then Ken and his wife, Betty, found a special mission in girl's track & field as an area where they could really do something for young people.

"We took a look at the results from the 1960 Olympic Games and we decided we could do something about it," he said. "So we started this girl's track club here in Ann Arbor."

Founding a girl's track club is one thing, but paying for it is another. Through years, the club treasury was quite often Simmons' wallet.

He received a charter from the AAU for \$50, paid for most of the expenses on the trips and occasionally had a buck or two left over to help any girl who couldn't afford the entry fees at meets.

Just recently, the Michigammes received a big boost when the Ann Arbor Exchange Club decided to as-



KEN SIMMONS

sume some of the expenses and purchased the club charter from Simmons.

"It has been a great shot in the arm," he said. "The girls know now that someone is interested in them."

While clubs around the state have been folding right and left because of monetary reasons, the Michigammes have a more stable future.

Simmons won't have to leave anyone home because they can't afford the road trips. No girl need not pass up an event because she doesn't have the entry fee.

His immediate concern is the state cross country meet. He figures his team has a good chance at winning the Michigan AAU title.

Earlier this month, the Michigammes won the Golden

Triangle Invitational on the Eastern Michigan campus defeating the Kettering Striders one of the strongest teams in the Midwest.

Frances Goodridge paced the team with a second place finish while Pam Beyst was fourth, Karen McKeachie was fifth and Anne Forshee was sixth. But a 17th place from Sue Koebnick, who was running in her first meet, insured the victory.

"We have got some good prospects," the coach said. "We have a real shot at the state championship. We beat the Kettering Striders and they always have been one of the best clubs in the Midwest."

Ironically, the Michigammes are profiting from the demise of other clubs in the Detroit area. Many of the girls are turning to the Ann Arbor club as their only outlet.

"We will be picking up a couple of real good girls from other clubs. We have got a shot at the state track & field title next spring.

"The national cross country championships are going to be run in the southwest this year. If they hold them anywhere within reasonable driving distance, we will take a run at it next year.

The Michigammes are known around the state and nation as well. The club deve-

loped the only Michigan resident ever to become a member of the U.S. Olympic team, Francie Kraker.

Mrs. Simmons picked the future Olympian right out of her physical education class at Slauson Junior High, and with Simmons doing the coaching, she developed into a world class athlete.

Francie ran in all of the big meets, the Milrose Games, the New York AC and Maple Leaf Games. She once held a world indoor record. She was a member of the 1968 and 1972 Olympic Games.

Perhaps her most important contribution was giving prominence and visibility to girl's athletics in the city. She really helped put the city on the map as far as women's track & field went.

Her accomplishments also helped Simmons morale when the going was tough and the financial problems started to mount up for the club.

"It's a long ways to build a club," he said. "But I never really got discouraged. Every now and then, I would see a little spark and determination in the girls. That's all I really needed."

Local Riders Gain Honors

(Special to The News)

GRASS LAKE — The names of three Ann Arbor riders and their horses will be inscribed on four trophies presented



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