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U-M to honor ex-Olympian Goodridge runs into Hall

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It's the little things in life that shape our destiny.

Francie Kraker Goodridge was an eighth grader playing field hockey on the Slauson School grounds when her physical education teacher noted that Francie could outrun everyone in pursuit of the ball.

The teacher passed the word on to her husband, Ken "Red" Simmons, a former Eastern Michigan University hurdler and track coach for the Detroit police team.



GOODRIDGE

And thus began an association that would lead Francie to two Olympic Games, world and U.S., running records, and a career in coaching.

"She was just a fair runner at first," says Simmons, "and had a lot to learn about techniques, but we had time and started out doing weight training and such."

Also, Simmons describes Francie as a person eager to learn and a hard worker. "She was aggressive and competitive," adds Simmons.

Goodridge says her Olympic experiences were "blockbusters," but an event to be held here Saturday "is as special as anything I've experienced."

Goodridge will be inducted into the University of Michigan Women's Track Hall of Fame in ceremonies at the Sheraton Inn.

"It's special because we are building a tradition for women, just like the men," says Goodridge. "I remember how I used to see all those photographs and honors for Michigan's track stars of the past and thought it was great to have all that Michigan tradition."

Goodridge says there is "night and day difference" between the opportunities that exist for women in track today compared with the time when she competed a little more than 20 years ago.

"It would have been something special if I could have been running for my high school or my university," she says, "but they didn't have women's teams and I missed that."

"It means so much to compete for your team in school. Even if it's only two years in junior high, there's an opportunity to gain in self-esteem and personal develop-

ment."

Today, Goodridge is coach of the Wake Forest women's track and cross country teams and she'll bring her athletes here this weekend to participate in the annual Red Simmons Invitational at the Michigan Track and Tennis Building.

She's held the Wake Forest position for the last 10 years, following four years as U-M coach, and has been named Atlantic Coast Conference coach of the year. While at Michigan, she developed 15 All-Americans, coached a Big Ten championship track team and also won an NCAA regional.

She recalls the old family home on Ann Street, her school days, and all those workouts at Ferry Field.

It was during those days that Simmons, who became Michigan's first women's track coach, founded the Southeastern Michigammas, a collection of talented athletes looking for a chance to compete.

Goodridge trained with Simmons in old Waterman Gymnasium during the winters and in other seasons the Michigammas had access to Michigan's Ferry Field.

Then it was onto the Olympic Games in Mexico City in 1968 for the 21-year-old Goodridge.

"There were four heats in the 800 meters," recalls Simmons. "The first was won in 2:10, the second in 2:09. Francie ran 2:07.6 in her heat, but only got fourth and didn't make it to the finals."

By the time of the Olympics in Munich in 1972, Goodridge was running 1,500 meters and advanced to the semifinals. Even though she ran an impressive 4:12.8, one of the top times in the world and the second-fastest ever by a U.S. female at the time, she did not make the finals.

"I felt I had accomplished what I trained for and it was a nice note to end on," said Goodridge.

Since her Olympic experiences, Goodridge has continued on as teacher and coach — Greenhills School, Huron High, East Lansing High, Michigan State University, coordinator of women's athletics at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Michigan women's track and cross country coach and, for the last 10 years, Wake Forest.

Goodridge will become only the second inductee into the U-M Women's Track Hall of Fame. The 85-year-old Simmons, regarded as the father of women's track in Michigan, was the first.

Wayne DeNeff is a former Sports Editor of The News.