

Trailblazing runner inducted into state women's hall of fame

■ Francie Kraker Goodridge's career included 2 trips to the Olympics and stints as the track coach at Huron, Greenhills.

By JO COLLINS MATHIS
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Little girls have always known the thrill of running hard, swimming laps, hitting a ball over a fence. But until recent years, that joy was confined to the back yard or neighborhood parks. At school, it was OK to play - but only boys could compete as athletes.

Francie Kraker Goodridge of Ann Arbor helped change all that. As one of Michigan's pioneers of women's athletics, Goodridge was among eight influential women inducted Thursday night into the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame at the Michigan Women's Historical Center in Lansing.

"I just followed the desire to accomplish something and the outlet for that ended up being sports, which were just beginning for women in the '60s," said Goodridge, 54, an admissions counselor at the University of Michigan. "I was 13, 14, looking for something that would make me special. There weren't many outlets for girls in those days. And then this opportunity to become an athlete came along and that was the beginning of a long career."

That career included two trips to the Olympics and stints as the track coach at Huron and Greenhills high schools and the University of Michigan, among other places.

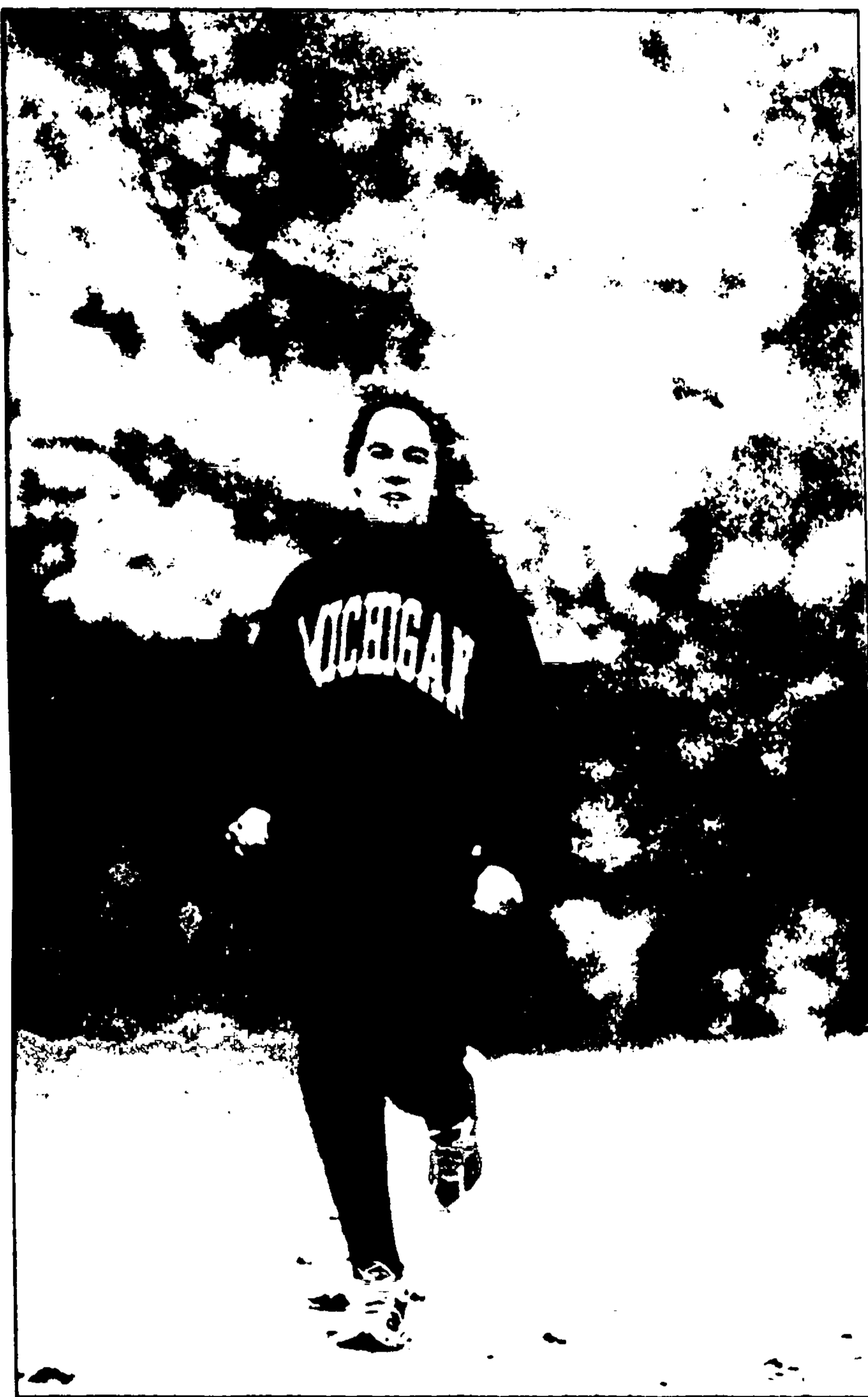
Marcia Federbush of Ann Arbor, a member of the Michigan Historical Center since she was inducted in 1988, said Goodridge is a "very special woman" whom she's long admired for her athletic abilities as well as determination to gain equality for women in athletes and coaching.

"She's done so many firsts; she deserves to have some special notice," Federbush said. "She's been ignored too much, considering her great successes. She's a trailblazer."

As a young teen, Goodridge took part in President John F. Kennedy's new President's Council for Physical Fitness and Sports, which included a series of physical fitness tests given to millions of American schoolchildren, awarding those who passed with the Presidential Physical Fitness Award.

She competed in the 600-yard run-walk, running the entire way and beating every other student - male and female - at school.

Goodridge got noticed by her physical education teacher, Betty Simmons, who with her husband, Red, built a track club - the Michigammas - around her. The Simmonses became her coaches and mentors and helped her get to the Olympic Games in 1968 and 1972. Goodridge became the first female native Michigander to compete in the



NEWS PHOTO • ALAN WARREN

Francie Kraker Goodridge runs in her neighborhood in Dixboro. Goodridge competed in the 1968 and 1972 Olympic Games, but her student years were spent running at the club level - before Title IX passed in 1972, there were no women's track teams at local high schools or the University of Michigan.

Olympics.

But there were no girls' track teams at the schools, and Goodridge never got to represent either Pioneer High School (then Ann Arbor High School) or the University of Michigan. It was all done on the club level.

"We were still pushing those parameters before Title IX was passed in 1972 because we were still trying for equitable opportunities," she said. "There were still not those opportunities in the schools, which is where it really, really matters most sometimes when you're

young - to be able to represent your school."

She and other female athletes were noticed at the international level, creating great interest from young athletes and athletic hopefuls who began at a grass-roots level around the country to push for legislation to even the playing field for the sexes. Title IX, which forced schools to provide more equitable funding for girls sports, made a huge difference, Goodridge said.

"It still isn't there, necessarily, but it's

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GOODRIDGE: Title IX made 'huge difference'

"Certainly been a huge difference," she said. "A million and a half high school girls now are in sports, so it's just much, much different."

Goodridge competed in the 1972 Munich Olympics, which were marred by terrorism. Eight Palestinians invaded the Olympic Village and took Israeli athletes hostage to effect the release of Arab prisoners in Israel; 11 athletes were killed. A memorial service attended by 80,000 mourners was held in the stadium and the games were postponed for a day.

Goodridge ran the second-best time by an American in a 1,500-meter semifinals, but did not qualify for the final. By then, she knew it was time to go. She and her future husband, John, left before the closing ceremony to spend several days in Switzerland.

Goodridge still loves to run several times a week, and skis cross

'What I experienced the day I first ran was the joy of physical activity'

— Francie Kraker Goodridge, a pioneer of women's athletics in Michigan

country in the winter.

"What I experienced the day I first ran was the joy of physical activity," she said. "Being able to have a disciplined training program and the joy of competition are wonderful things to experience when you didn't have an out-

let for that. Women who came before me felt that way, and would come up to me and say they wish they'd been competitors. We're as competitive as the men, and we needed that opportunity. And that's what opened up for all of us."

Gladys Beckwith, director of the Michigan Women's Historical Center, said Thursday's honorees represent a broad range of accomplishment, including politics and business, civil rights, workers' rights and historic preservation. The other inductees were E. Belen, Aretha Franklin, Marian Bayoff Ilitch, Mary Ellen Riordan, Cora Reynolds Anderson, Josephine Stern Weiner and Sister Theresa Maxis Duchemin.

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