

# SPORTS

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## At 75, Chernock's life on track

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GREENACRES -- He jokes that he can't hold a job for long, but Roy Chernock has been doing the same thing professionally for 53 years -- coaching track and field -- and even at 75, he's not sure whether he wants to call it quits.

"Looking ahead, the stars of my team are all seniors, so next year I'm looking to rebuild or retire," the John I. Leonard boys coach said Wednesday before heading to his team's final practice before today's regional championships at Dwyer's Blum Stadium. "But I'm stupid, so I'll probably be back."

Chernock has been coming back to the sport he loves to coach for more than half a century. His first coaching job was in 1950 at Jamaica High School in New York. Then came jobs at Oceanside High in Long Island and college jobs at C.W. Post, Baruch, Princeton and William & Mary, where he started the women's track program in the late 1970s. He called his two-year coaching stint at Baruch College in midtown Manhattan the "longest two years" of his life. "I'm an outdoor person and it is difficult to be an outdoor person at 23rd Street and Lexington Avenue in the middle of the largest city in the world," he said.

In 1990, Chernock "retired" and moved to South Florida. He remembered that while he was coaching at Oceanside High, there was a young runner in the area named Harry Howell Jr., who later became -- and still is -- the cross-country and track coach at Cardinal Newman.

So when Chernock arrived in Palm Beach County in March 1990, he called Howell to see if he knew of any part-time coaching positions open. Howell picked up Chernock and showed him around Newman, thinking perhaps he might want to coach there. On the way back to a friend's house where Chernock was staying, they drove past John I. Leonard. Howell mentioned that he thought Leonard was looking for a girls track coach. Chernock checked it out and was hired.

That was 13 years ago. He returned to the school three years ago after brief coaching stints at Suncoast and Wellington, and last week Leonard's boys team won its first district championship in recent memory.

## **Outspoken on Various Topics**

Among the track coaching fraternity in the area, Chernock is known to speak his mind, and not only on topics involving running and jumping. Five years ago, Chernock penned a letter to the editor of The Palm Beach Post in response to two stories -- one about a \$70 million gift to Liberty University from Arthur Williams, the other about the financial dire straits of athletic departments at area high schools following the encephalitis scare from mosquitoes in the fall of 1997 that shut down nighttime sports activities.

Wrote Chernock: "Wouldn't it be wonderful if Mr. Williams or some other local philanthropist could see his way clear to bail out local schools rather than send money to other states?"

"We've had our fights, and I usually just walk away," said coach Rick Rothman, who has coached for 27 years and built Spanish River's cross-country program into one of the best in the nation. "He's a good guy, and he does know what he's doing. Somebody once asked me if I thought I'd coach as long as Roy. I told them I'll be happy if I live as long as Roy."

Chernock has coached his share of star athletes, including Craig Masback when he was at Princeton in the mid-1970s. Masback today is the CEO of USA Track and Field, the governing body of the sport in this country. Chernock also coached Vin Lananna, the cross-country and track coach at Stanford, and Jeri Daniels-Elder, the women's track coach at Penn State, when they were in college. Lananna and Daniels-Elder last September were named to the coaching staff of the U.S. Olympic track team for the 2004 Athens Games.

## **Surprise district title**

When he was in his late 60s, Chernock held Masters sprint records in the 100 and 200 meters and the 100-meter hurdles. Hip replacement surgery four years ago, however, ended his competitive running career, which he said "is a shame because I was looking forward to kicking all those older guys' butts in my age group."

Two summer ago, Chernock, who claims to be a pretty fair golfer, shot his age (73) at Addison Reserve in Delray Beach. He said he had a makable birdie putt on the 18th hole for a round of 72, but as the ball rolled close to the hole, he almost urged it to not go in. It rimmed out of the cup and Chernock tapped in for his 73.

Then came last week when the Leonard boys team, led by senior distance runner Jeremy Miller, surprisingly captured the district title, making this season the best at Leonard in more than a decade. Should this be Chernock's last year, it will be one to remember. Don't count on it, though, says his wife, Ethel.

"It's the best thing for him," she said. "He has to be with the kids. I hope he never stops."