



A characteristic Dick Chaney picture. In this action photograph of the championship Oklahoma two-mile relay team of 1935, Dick Chaney (second from the left) has just said something funny and the other members of the team (left to right, Denzil Boyd, Loris Moody and Granville Barrett) are laughing

Athlete-Humorist

By Harold Keith

THE accidental death from drowning at Newport, Arkansas last July 15 of 27-year old Richard Chaney of Salt Fork, University of Oklahoma journalism school graduate and well-known Sooner athlete, not only shocked and saddened the hundreds of friends of this tall, merry, likeable boy but also cut short a literary and journalistic career of a humorous bent that had just begun to bud most promisingly.

It was as a runner—the lankiest, skinniest, biggest-footed runner ever seen here, that Dick made his mark at the University of Oklahoma. In action, he was game as a thoroughbred race horse, had a terrifically long stride and threw his spiked feet out behind him in dangerous revolving whirls that discouraged close pursuit. The other runners always gave him lots of room.

Dick ran to win, as a log of his races proves. He was a member of the Sooner two-mile relay team that set the all-time indoor record of 7:57 at the Kansas City board track in old Convention hall in 1935. He also won the Big Six outdoor title that same year, driving his long legs so powerfully over the rain-drenched Nebraska track that he licked the best half-milers in five states by 15 yards.

And yet Dick will be remembered here for his jollity and humor long after he is forgotten as a runner. He had the humorist's faculty for discovering, appreciating and expressing the ludicrous and incongruous. Every person possesses some peculiar oddity of character and it was Dick's priceless gift to be able to ferret these out and imitate them in droll action and speech. It was so darned much fun just having him around.

He loved to have his joke, even when running. In the fall of 1935 John Jacobs, Sooner track coach, decided to make a two-miler out of Chaney. In his first spin over the unfamiliar distance, Dick was soon left far behind the other runners. With the race half run Dick pulled up, puffing, and looked beseechingly at the spectators clustered around.

"Which way did they go?" he panted with pretended anxiety, and everybody had a laugh.

And yet, before the fall was over, Dick began to beat the other Oklahoma two-milers one by one until at the close of the season he could trim them all save Floyd Lochner, the national collegiate champion. Thanks to Dick's phenomenal development, Oklahoma won the Big Six championship in the final race.

Dick kept the track team convulsed with his antics. A gangling, stooped-shouldered fellow, he went around with a look of such mischievous slyness in his eyes that, just meeting him on the campus, you'd have to burst out laughing.

And yet he rarely made anybody angry. One day Clyde McGinnis, a Sooner runner of Irish descent, received a letter from the University NYA office, which employed him, threatening to discharge him if he didn't stop spending his weekends in Tulsa. McGinnis, who was a particularly honest and conscientious worker in spite of the fact he went to Tulsa every Sunday to see his girl, blew up.

With blood in his eye, he made the rounds of the University authorities, all of whom denied authorship of the letter, and finally it dawned on the irate athlete that somebody had been playing a joke on him.

"It better be somebody I like or I'll beat the devil out of 'im!" McGinnis growled, and sure enough, when the culprit was finally revealed, he was nobody else but Dick Chaney, with whom McGinnis roomed. McGinnis, who was secretly very fond of Dick, could only laugh and splutter helplessly and then laugh some more.

Another time Dick organized a plot against Elwood Cleveland, another runner. Cleveland was a plodder who had to try to set so hot an early pace that the other runners wouldn't have anything left with which to outsprint him.

The only other miler on the squad whom Cleveland could beat consistently was McGinnis, Dick's roommate. Before the race, a practice affair which all three were to run, Dick talked McGinnis into hiding out in the stadium after the first lap. Unknown to Cleveland, McGinnis did and meanwhile Chaney, running, kept urging the absent McGinnis on: "Come on, Clyde! Don't quit! Stay up!" as though McGinnis were in the race. Of course on the final lap, the well-rested McGinnis surreptitiously joined them, as per Dick's instructions, and ran off from the weary and preplexed Cleveland down the home stretch.

DICK was a competent, alert fellow, too. In 1936 I undertook to write a book, a Boys' Life of Will Rogers, the late Oklahoma humorist, and Dick was my helper and companion on early automobile trips. One of the first people I interviewed was Mrs. Mildred Mulhall-Acton, of Guthrie, who had been in vaudeville with Rogers in 1905 at Madison Square Garden.

Dick and I called on Mrs. Acton at Guthrie and for an hour I asked her questions and sat entranced as she talked vitally and intimately of a youthful Will Rogers none of us had ever heard about. Imagine my chagrin when I discovered, after Dick and I were back in the car on our way to Norman, that I had been so

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enthralled listening I had neglected taking down a single note!

But as usual, long-headed Dick hadn't been idle. He let me cuss myself out for ten or twelve miles and then, with a grin, handed me several pages of interesting looking foolscap upon which, in his patient, laborious scrawl, was practically a verbatim record of all of Mrs. Acton's conversation. He had been bright enough to copy it all down as she talked. Right then I got to thinking that maybe Dick should be writing the book instead of I.

From Norman, after he graduated from the School of Journalism, Dick worked at Medford and later at Vinita to become city editor of the *Daily Journal* under O. B. Campbell. He also handled the great mass of Grand River dam publicity for the Kansas City Star, while there, selling many a feature yarn that got past the Star's conservative policy simply because of the author's unique and refreshing humor.

It was at Vinita that Dick began to come into his own as a writer. His daily tabloid column, occupying only about four or five inches of space, was always good for four or five laughs. He knew everybody in town and everybody knew him and seemed genuinely glad to stop and talk to him.

However, his best work at Vinita was his series of personal feature stories built around himself (whom he signed as "Cold Eye" Chaney) and Arlie Sicoy, his 290-pound enemy and opponent in the marshal-at-large race. Of course Sicoy was purely imaginary and, to get the effect he wanted, Dick converted himself into a simple country bumpkin who played dumb and, while detailing his rustic campaign experiences never let on that he shared in the joke. The series ran just preceding the July election and soon everybody in Craig county and northeastern Oklahoma was chuckling over the adventures of Arlie and "Cold Eye" as they fought each other from one end of the county to the other for the marshal's job.

Here are some brief samples of his craft. The first appeared shortly after Sicoy's announcement for the office appeared in the *Vinita Daily Journal*:

When Rough Richard Chaney heard that he had an opponent filing against him today, he took off his coat and said, "Who is it? I'll make him look like a sieve. I'll kill him."

When told it was Arlie Sicoy of Lightning Creek, seven feet tall and weighing 290 pounds, Chaney rolled down his sleeves and put on his coat. "Fighting doesn't get a guy anywhere," he said, "Maybe Sicoy has got a mother. I don't want to hurt anybody."

Shortly afterwards, while giving the Craig County voters his record, Chaney wrote:

Now to get back to me, my favorite subject, let me tell you boys that I am the real cause of

the dust storms in America. The first dust storm originated in Western Montana because they had to break up so much ground to bury the bad men of Sheep Dip who crossed my path.

Later this item, written by Dick, appeared in the *Journal* and was so generally believed that a neighboring newspaper, the *Adair Citizen*, picked it up and printed it for the truth under the head "Counterfeiter Caught":

Pete Baldy Benner was arrested Tuesday near Vinita. In Baldy's shack two presses were going full blast printing \$5 bills and handbills headed "Vote for Chaney."

The first meeting of "Cold Eye" and Sicoy, which resulted in a fight in a small night club, Dick described as follows:

"... here he comes, all 290 pounds of him, and I see he is ready to fight.

When he got over to where I was, he said, "come on out from under that table, Cold Eye, you can't fool me; it's too early in the evening for you to be under there."

That made me mad and I says "if you want me so bad come on in under here and get what's coming to you, Sicoy."

So he started in under after me.

Well, I went on out of the night club (they needed a new door there anyway) and waited outside for Sicoy because I like lots of room when I fight, especially when I aint got my guns handy."

Sicoy walloped "Cold Eye" pretty badly in the battle that followed, but even the memory of the beating didn't destroy "Cold Eye's" confidence in himself. Next day he wrote:

If Sicoy ever picks another fight with me, I'll turn him upside down like an hour glass.

I'll parlay my right and left fist on his chin and hit a 32-tooth jackpot.

Several days later, Dick reported the climax of "Cold Eye's" attempt to break up a "Sicoy for marshal" rally as follows. "Cold Eye" is talking.

"If you'll pull this 14-year old boy off me, I'll get up and whip anybody here," Chaney threatened from his undignified position on his shoulder blades....

Bill Bleeger, long a member of the Strong Men's club resigned following the meeting because the association fined him \$2 for hitting Chaney with a good egg. "How did I know it wasn't rotten?" Bleeger asked.

As the campaign warmed, Sicoy lined up the county female vote solidly for himself, whereupon "Cold Eye," in revenge, added the following plank to his platform:

No woman will be allowed to enter a barber shop in Craig county after 10 a. m., unless it is to make up a fourth for a quartet.

In his final appeal to the voters, just before the election, "Cold Eye" asserted he was as happy as a "lone sparrow in a horse barn" and "tough as the back end



Dick Chaney's sober expression often concealed a witticism that he was preparing to spring on his companions

of a shooting gallery" and further declared:

I still have faith in the men voters of the county because a man rarely makes but one great mistake in his life and most men voters are married....

I am so honest I can't even steal away for a quiet weekend. An old lady in Bluejacket last week grabbed me by the hand and said: "Bless you, Rough Richard I'm going to vote for you because you are so honest and true. And then I kinda like to be different from everybody else, anyways."

That warmed my heart....

In closing, Dick declared:

Don't forget these facts about Sicoy:

Sicoy has an uncle who saw Bill Murray introduce London.

Sicoy is as crooked as the road to Noel.

Dick finally left Vinita to become managing editor of the *Perry Daily Journal*, and from Perry he went to Newport, Arkansas, where he accepted a place as advertising manager of the *Newport Independent*. He wanted to learn the newspaper game from both the editorial and business ends.

Just recently he learned that the University of Alabama was in the market for a publicity director and field manager of the press association. Dick wanted that job worse than he had ever wanted anything in his life and with the help of Sam Schwieger, a friend, attacked it so dauntlessly that he soon had the inside track and had been invited to Tuscaloosa for an interview early in August.

Jubilant, he typed the good news Saturday morning to several friends and at 8:30 o'clock the same evening went swimming in White river with some Newport acquaintances, only to encounter one of the treacherous whirlpools that stream is noted for and drown despite his own splendid skill as a swimmer and the heroic efforts of a companion to save him.

On Sunday morning the tragic news of his death, wired to newspapers everywhere by United Press, stunned his friends in Oklahoma. On Monday they received his letters, written in his characteristic blithe, happy style.

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Originates ballet program

Mrs. J. D. Giles (Elizabeth Dooley, '34fa), organized the Civic Ballet which gave its first public performance at Washington, D. C., in July. The ballet grew out of her work as director of girls' activities for the recreation department of the District of Columbia schools, a position she has held for the last three years.

The taming of the Dust Bowl was the western theme which Mrs. Giles used in building the first public ballet performance.

She has had wide experience as a dancer and for one season was assistant director of the Los Angeles Civic Opera Ballet. She trained professional ensembles for Fanchon and Marco Theatrical Company.

Mr. Giles, '34ex, is an attorney with the Department of Agriculture.