

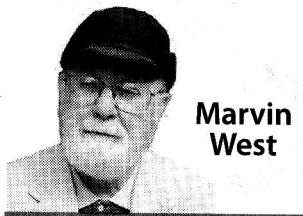
Chuck Rohe and 'What a day!'

Sound the trumpets! A genuine legend is coming to town. What a day!

Chuck Rohe will return to Knoxville next week for a reunion of his track and field Volunteers and old friends, starting with Charlie Durham and Jerry Wrinkle. Polite people will stand and applaud. Some may tell tall tales. There are many. Somebody may even confirm that driven Vols once pushed their stalled bus to the nearest gas station.

From the time I met Chuck, in 1963, he was my poster person for the power of positive thinking. He loves life, doesn't want to miss any and drags reluctant others along for the joy ride. Always up before the crack of dawn, he has stretched the truth as needed and greeted each morning with "What a day!"

Long-suffering distance runners, out before breakfast, forced to train even in the dead of winter, in chilling wind, rain, sleet or snow (or all the above), thought Chuck was at least half crazy. They ran to get away from their coach.



Marvin West

Those who could observe from a safe distance considered him different, intriguing and perhaps brilliant. His record is supporting evidence.

Rohe, 78, is identified nationally as the coach who performed an eight-year Tennessee miracle, planning and pushing from flat nothing to something big, 19 consecutive championships in Southeastern Conference outdoor track, indoor track and cross-country.

From time to time or at the same time, Chuck was several other things – coordinator of football recruiting for Doug Dickey, U.S. Olympic committee member, athletic administrator at Virginia Tech, promoter of various and sundry enterprises designed to make money, vice president of Pace Management in Hous-

ton, part-owner of a partly professional football team, executive director for 20 years of what became the Florida Citrus Bowl and, more recently, organizer and driving force behind Nike coaching clinics.

For endless energy, giant dreams and wild innovation, Rohe stands atop the long list of traveling salespeople who have worn T caps. Swim coach Ray Bussard and basketball associate Stu Aberdeen were close but they paused for occasional naps.

Rohe was unique. In his mind, nothing was ever impossible. There was always a way and he could find it, organize the mission, gather a supporting cast, delegate duties and motivate those who would do the lifting and carrying. Somewhere in the middle of a process, Rohe would vanish, gone on to the next great challenge.

Besides championships and All-American runners, jumpers and throwers, the Rohe legacy includes Tom Black Track and his famous football recruits, hall of famer Chip Kell and Richmond Flowers.

Chuck transformed Dean

Planters tobacco warehouse into a magic kingdom, an indoor training facility, but couldn't convince athletic director Bob Woodruff that the modest track budget should never be cut and squeezed.

Great 1969 compliment: Paul "Bear" Bryant noticed Rohe's multiple skills and decided to buy him for Alabama. He made what was called a "fabulous" offer. Woodruff chose to fold instead of fight but Dr. Andy Holt, university president, stepped in and said no go. Rohe got a raise, restoration of reduced scholarships and the assistant he had been often promised. Bear felt used. He was properly ticked.

A little later, Rohe was caught squarely in the middle of historic consternation over NCAA javelin champ Bill Skinner's handlebar mustache. Bill Battle had a no-facial-hair rule in football and the track team just had to conform.

Skinner, full-grown, 6-7 and 250, tattooed union welder, Navy veteran and heavyweight boxing champ of the Mediterranean fleet, was probably older than Battle. No slack.

Rohe and many others admired Skinner's ability, courage and independence, but there was little choice. He grudgingly shaved. Alas, his coach soon went away, to join Charley Coffey at Virginia Tech. There could have been a connection.

Rohe was born in Park Ridge, Ill. He attended Lawrence College, transferred to Mississippi Southern, walked on in football, competed in track and sold homemade pimento cheese sandwiches in campus dorms when the cafeteria was closed.

He became a winner as track coach at Hattiesburg High and football coach at the junior high. His big break was getting the track job at Furman University. Another big break was having Fulton High's Copley Vickers on the team.

Vickers, Sevierville attorney, provides refreshing insight into Rohe frugality: "Coach made do on a limited budget at Furman. On one of our trips, he stopped the bus at a grocery store parking lot, handed each of us \$2 and told us to pool our money and find something to eat. We got bread, peanut butter and a few things like

that, got back on the bus and had lunch.

"There was a cross-country trip where the team stayed at his mother's house."

Vickers never lost faith. He followed Rohe to Tennessee. There was some more money.

Rohe made a lasting impact on UT football recruiting. He convinced Dickey of the need for speed. Chuck didn't stay long at Virginia Tech. He promoted and directed major sports events for Pace Management. He and Flowers invested in the World Football League, Shreveport Steamers. Rohe managed. Flowers played. Bad idea. Cost a bundle.

Chuck, nicknamed Rhino (tough skin, straight ahead charge), transformed the lowly Tangerine Bowl into a stunning success. Orlando has never been the same.

Wrinkle, Durham, the Knoxville Track Club, a host of Volunteers, Nike and I still regard Rohe as a really big deal but he is different. For some strange reason, he switched his trademark slogan from "What a day!" to "Just do it."

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