

## **Joe Vigil's XC Achievements Summary**

20 World XC Team & Individual Medals\*

19 National XC Championships\*

14-Time National Coach of the Year\*

10 Individual XC Champions\*

8 Senior Men's USATF Individual XC Champions\*

8 Senior Women's USATF individual XC Champions\*

7-Time World XC Coach\*

2 Women's Individual XC Silver Medalists

2 Women's Team XC Silver Medals

1 Men's Team XC Bronze Medal

\*U.S. National Record

---

### **Denver Post article**

[http://www.denverpost.com/running/ci\\_28222178/joe-vigil-receive-legend-coach-award-from-usa-track-field](http://www.denverpost.com/running/ci_28222178/joe-vigil-receive-legend-coach-award-from-usa-track-field)

## **Joe Vigil to receive Legend Coach award from USA Track & Field**

**Legendary cross country and track coach will be second to receive honor**

**[By John Meyer](#)**

**[The Denver Post](#)**

Posted: 05/30/2015



Joe Vigil, a former Adams State football player and cross country and track coach, continues to fuel elite distance runners at 85. (*Kathryn Scott Osler, The Denver Post*)

BOULDER — Deena Kastor's first encounter with legendary running coach Joe Vigil was life-changing. She had just finished an injury-plagued career at the University of Arkansas. Burned out, she hadn't run in weeks. She was thinking about opening a bakery, but one of her coaches had seen flashes of brilliance and encouraged her to call Vigil before quitting the sport.

She did, and under Vigil's guidance she would become arguably the greatest female U.S. distance runner. "I called Coach Vigil fully intending to open up a bakery and create scones and cinnamon rolls and muffins for the university town of Fayetteville," Kastor recalled last week. "He left me so motivated and so excited about pursuing running that I hung up the phone and I put on my running shoes for the first time in a few weeks and went on a run that was so exhilarating and so exciting and so full of purpose and hope that I came back and started packing my bags to move to Alamosa."

Alamosa is where the story begins for Vigil, who will be honored by USA Track & Field as a "Legend Coach" at the outdoor championships next month. He is the second to receive that honor.

Born a month after the 1929 stock market crash and left fatherless when he was 3 months old, Vigil coached Adams State cross country to 19 national team titles (NAIA or NCAA Division II) and 10 individual titles. His professional runners won 20 world cross country medals.

And eight years after that first conversation with Vigil, Kastor claimed a bronze medal in the marathon at the 2004 Olympics.

"I went to him so vulnerable after college and learned so much, not just about being a better athlete but being a better person and a better contributor to my community," Kastor said. "In that pursuit I gained this happiness that became the core of who I was, the realization that joy and happiness of pursuing goals could lead to this well of energy to pursue even greater goals."

"He gave me all the lessons I needed to thrive — not just in running but in life."



Joe Vigil, third from far left, helped to shape the lives of countless athletes at Adams State in Alamosa, where he had a reunion with some of his runners in 2000. (*Denver Post file*)

### **A professor of altitude training**

Raised by his mother, Vigil became an Eagle Scout. A grandfather was a Baptist missionary. Vigil earned three master's degrees and a doctoral degree, and became an international authority on altitude training.

"I learned a lot of great values from church, my mom," said Vigil, still coaching at 85. "I loved my teachers."

After graduating from Alamosa High School and serving two years in the Navy, Vigil enrolled at Adams State and played football. He coached and taught at Alamosa High School for 12 years until Adams State needed a new track coach and he landed the job. It helped that his high school team beat the college team that year in an exhibition dual meet.

That was in 1965. Soon he was asked to serve on a committee working to attract the marathon trials for the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, which made sense because Alamosa's altitude (7,500 feet) is the same as Mexico City's.

The bid was successful, and soon 169 marathoners were in Alamosa to train at altitude for six weeks. Experts in running physiology — Jack Daniels, Bruno Balke, Dave Costill — came to do research.

"They're the guys that motivated me to go on and get my Ph.D.," Vigil said.

The great miler Jim Ryun spent three summers there (1967-69) while in college at Kansas. Coming off an Alamosa altitude stint in 1967, Ryun broke two world records (in the mile and the 1,500 meters) in 15 days. He would claim a silver medal at the Mexico City Olympics behind the altitude-trained Kip Keino of Kenya.

Thus the world learned altitude training made for great distance runners, and in Alamosa, Vigil was at the ideal elevation to help train them. Three years after that Olympics he coached Adams State to its first national team title.

His Adams State teams won 87 individual titles in cross country and track. At the 1992 NCAA cross country championships they posted a perfect score (15), sweeping the first five places. The following year, his last as coach there, they won with another ridiculously low score (25).

He coached several successful post-collegiate runners too. Pat Porter, a graduate of Evergreen High School and Adams State who was killed in a 2012 plane crash, won eight U.S. cross country titles.

"He's never had the luxury of recruiting great talent," Porter said of Vigil in a 1986 Sports Illustrated feature, "but if you could measure how far runners come under a coach regardless of where they start, there would be no one better."

Kastor also won eight U.S. cross country titles with Vigil.

"He is a physiologist, but he's also one of the greatest motivators this world has ever seen," Kastor said.

"He was raised in a community and a family that honored hard work and demanded hard work, rose to the challenge from his teenage years on, and really used those lessons make a positive difference."

## **Choosing to be excellent**

Vigil found a kindred spirit in Ryan Shay, who became the first Notre Dame runner to win an NCAA track title in 2001. Vigil coached him after graduation until Shay collapsed and died from a heart abnormality during the 2008 Olympic marathon trials.

"I still get tears in my eyes when I think about it," Vigil said. "The hardest thing for me was to give his eulogy."

What Vigil said at Shay's funeral, many would say about Vigil: "You choose to be poor, average or excellent at what you do. We all knew Ryan chose to be excellent."

In his seventh decade of coaching and now living in Arizona, Vigil guides seven runners, including local athletes Kim McConnell and Alia Gray. An 800-meter runner he coaches, Brenda Martinez, is ranked seventh in the world.

"He's all about hard work, but that hard work has to have purpose and intention," Kastor said. "It has to have an emotional connection. To say he's a physiologist is one thing, but he also knows the core of challenging that physiology has to come from an emotional place, and that's what he tries to get out of his athletes."

*John Meyer: [jmeyer@denverpost.com](mailto:jmeyer@denverpost.com) or [twitter.com/johnmeyer](https://twitter.com/johnmeyer)*