

Just another shringing year in the life of Charlie Ruter

By JODY DEMLING
The Courier-Journal

Charlie Ruter will turn 81 on Tuesday, but the longtime contributor to high school athletics and globetrotting track and field official isn't slowing down.

The Fern Creek resident has been to all 50 states and several foreign countries. Twice in the past month he went to Eugene, Ore., and this weekend he's in Hawaii for the fifth time.

"I have to keep going," Ruter said. "It keeps me young."

The hundreds of thousands of miles he has logged over the years haven't gone

unnoticed. Ruter already is in three halls of fame and will be inducted into three more this year, starting with tonight's ceremonies for the National High School Sports Hall of Fame in Maui. Later he will be enshrined in the Kentucky Athletic Hall of Fame and the Metro Area Athletic Directors Hall of Fame.

"Talk about the jackpot," Ruter said. "I've hit three of them in one year."

Though all three are special, he said, the National High School Hall of Fame "is very humbling" because there are



BY MARY ANN LYONS, THE COURIER-JOURNAL
Longtime official Charlie Ruter soon will be in six halls of fame.

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Another shringing year in Charlie Ruter's life

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only six other Kentuckians and 269 other people in it. He'll be one of 10 inductees in the hall's 19th class tonight as the 82nd annual summer meetings of the National Federation of State High School Associations come to an end.

"Just to be considered up there with the people who are in this thing is amazing," Ruter said. "Every athletic hero America has ever known is in this one. I'm just really touched by the whole thing."

He will be the first official from his state inducted. The Kentuckians already enshrined are Geri Grigsby, Cliff Hagan, Paul Hornung, Garnis Martin, S. T. Roach and William Kean.

"Charlie is sort of an icon," KHSAA commissioner Louis Stout said. "He's so well-known and so well-respected. He's just a very big part of the Kentucky High School Athletic Association family."

Assistant KHSAA commissioners Brigid DeVries and Julian Tackett and several members of the board of control are among those in Hawaii for the ceremonies. Ruter is being accompanied by his wife of 57 years, Ruth, who said: "Over the years he's done his thing and I do mine. But he's been a lot of places, and this is a great honor for him."

Ruter credits much of his success to his wife, who is involved in local charity work.

"She's says she's the reason I've lived so long," he said. "People ask how long I've been married, and I

CHARLES RUTER

Born: July 3, 1920.

High school: New Albany, Ind. (participated in basketball, baseball, track).

College: Western Kentucky University.

Major accomplishments: Track and field official for two Olympic Games; vice president of U.S. Track and Field Association; official for every major U.S. competition at one time or another; official scorer for boys' Sweet 16 since 1965; official scorer for girls' Sweet 16 since 1992; Kentucky Colonels' official scorer; scorer for every NCAA Tournament game ever played in Freedom Hall.

Other honors: Inducted into the Dawahares/KHSAA Hall of Fame, the Kentucky Cross Country and Track and Field Coaches Association Hall of Fame and the NAIA Hall of Fame. This year he will be inducted into the National High School Sports Hall of Fame, the Kentucky Athletic Hall of Fame, and the Metro Area Athletic Directors Hall of Fame.

say 57 years, but we haven't been together near that long. I've traveled all over the world."

Ruter, a New Albany High School graduate, played basketball for Ed Diddle at Western Kentucky University. He started his career as a teach-

er at Okolona High School before going to Fern Creek in 1948. He spent six years as the boys' basketball coach there before becoming athletic director at Eastern High.

He eventually became assistant principal at Eastern and spent some time on the central staff of the Jefferson County Public Schools before retiring in 1979.

"I've been around," he said.

Ruter has been the official scorer for the boys' State Basketball Tournament for the past 38 years and for the girls' tournament since 1992. He was the public-address announcer, referee and field judge for the State Track and Field meet for 45 years. He also was official scorer for the Kentucky-Indiana All-Star basketball games from 1958-76, for the Kentucky Colonels of the old American Basketball Association and for every NCAA Tournament game played in Freedom Hall.

And he has worked every game in the 54-year history of the boys' Louisville Invitational Tournament.

"That's a lot of games," he said. "I think that's one of my proudest facts, the longevity of some of the things."

But his high school and college contributions pale compared with his accomplishments in track and field, where he is one of the best-known and most-respected officials in the world.

"He's the quintessential volunteer for USA Track and Field," chief executive officer Craig Mesback said. "He's always there for us in his capacity as an official and team leader

for international trips.

"We love and respect Charlie a lot. He's a great ambassador for the United States and a great asset for USA Track and Field to have on our side."

Ruter has served as an official for two Olympics and every major competition in the United States at one time or another. He also was vice president of the U.S. Track and Field Association from 1976-96 and was administrator of certifications for track officials throughout the country.

"We had 67 officials," Ruter recalled. "When we finished we had 8,200. We educated people, and we tried to get them excited."

"It's all worked out really well for me. I've been to every state and taken teams to Russia, Germany, Jamaica, Caracas, a month to China and other places."

Among his fondest memories are a trip to China in 1975, when he met future President George Bush, and a two-week journey to the Far East in 1980 as manager of the U.S. team. One meet in Peking was the first matchup between the United States and the Soviet Union since the U.S. team boycotted the 1980 Olympics.

"I had to decide who carried the American flag in the opening ceremonies," Ruter recalled. "This young athlete came up to me and made a request. It was Edwin Moses. I immediately said, 'No problem, Tiger.'"

Looking back on his career, Ruter said: "I want to be remembered as a very professional official. I just want to do a very professional job at whatever it is I'm doing."