

2009 - 2010
CBC Writing Competition
CBC Entry
Category: Non Fiction
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A Lane Worth Traveling Down

“Man, we had to have done that a long time ago,” said Community Colleges of Spokane (CCS) head track coach Larry Beatty while looking at a picture of himself on a wall in his office. “I had hair back then.”

He was referring to an old Northwest Athletic Association of Community Colleges (NWAACC) Championships tradition of dunking the Athlete-of-the-Meet award winner into the water of the steeplechase pit.

At the 1999 NWAACC Championships, with six first place finishes—along with two school records in the 100 meter dash (10.36 seconds) and the 200 meter dash (20.96 seconds)—Dusty Lane was the victor/victim.

Lane’s parents, Jay and Lorna Lane, made it down to the track meet from their home in Cashmere, Wash.

"It was such a great meet," said Lane’s mother, Lorna Lane. "Everybody had to chase him down to dunk him in that water."

On two separate occasions, Lane would leave his celebrating teammates to thank his parents for coming and wish them a safe trip home.

That would be the last time they would see their son.

On June 13, 1999, Paul Abernathy returned to the apartment to find his roommate asleep on the couch.

“He wanted to go rafting really bad so we went,” Abernathy said. “We got down on the water and for some reason...he must’ve been having a hard time with his wetsuit...but he got out of the raft.

“He was laughing and grinning trying to catch back up with the raft...even in his last moments he was having a great time.”

Lane, a licensed scuba diver, would never reach shore, as his body was sucked under water due to a strong current.

“Coach Beatty said there had been an accident,” said his father Jay, referring to when he was notified as to what had happened. “It would’ve been hard to look for him at night so we got there early in the morning and started looking.”

Lane’s body wouldn’t be found until 10 days later near Long Lake in Stevens County, according to Beatty.

Nearly 800 people attended his memorial service in Wenatchee.

At Cashmere High School, Lane was a stand-out wrestler, football player and track athlete. He was a seven-time state champion in track in the 200 meter dash, the 300 and 110 meter intermediate hurdles and the 400 meter relay. In 1994, he won the state championship in the 148-pound class in wrestling and was an all league runningback selection for the Bulldogs on two separate occasions.

Coming out of high school, Lane was content with going to the junior college in town and learning the carpentry trade.

“He was fine with not doing sports until the spring came around and then it hit him,” his mother said.

Coach Beatty liked what he saw and had been recruiting Lane for several months as a part of his first recruiting class as CCS head track coach.

“He was a phenomenal athlete, one of the best I had ever coached,” Beatty said. “Dusty was the next big-time decathlete, I think, in the world.”

When Lane first arrived in Spokane in 1997, he was very shy and reserved, according to track team captain, friend and former roommate John DeAngelo.

“I took him under my wing socially and he grew into his own, which was very fun to watch,” DeAngelo said. “I still say he was the best athlete I’ve ever seen.

“He really hadn’t been training when he got here and a few months later, he was a NWAACC Champion.”

Lane immediately found success at the collegiate level, winning four 1997 NWAACC Championships in the 110 meter hurdles, the 400 meter hurdles, the 400 meter relay and the decathlon on his way to being named Athlete-of-the-Meet.

In 1998, Lane won the 110 meter hurdles at the Oregon Invitational in Eugene, Ore. What ensued after the victory perfectly summarized his personality, according to DeAngelo.

Being one of the most prestigious track revenues in the country or even the world, it is tradition for a winning competitor to run a victory lap around Hayward Field.

“He had no clue that that was what you were supposed to do,” DeAngelo said. “We had to pretty much force him to run that victory lap.”

“He looked like a deer in the headlights,” said Jeff Magnuson, another friend and later roommate.

Lane’s mother said he was always like that after winning.

“He loved to win but any extra attention would embarrass him,” his mother said. “All of his coaches would say ‘You would think Dusty would be used to winning by now’ but he never was.”

Abernathy said that, even though he could dominate you in anything, “he wouldn’t tell you until you asked it.”

“I thought I was getting pretty strong and I challenged him to arm wrestle me,” Abernathy said. “He just kind of smirked a little and went along with it. I asked him about my chances. ‘I would kill you man,’ he said. That was the way he was. He wouldn’t have said anything unless I had mentioned it.”

Despite this shyness, Lane was extremely competitive.

“I often wonder what it would’ve been like to live with a professional or professional-caliber athlete and after living with Dusty, I think I know,” Abernathy said. “They must all be total weirdos—in a good way of course.”

Abernathy recalls a time when he got up one night to use the bathroom and saw bright lights in the backyard out the window. Keep in mind this was around 3 a.m.

“I went out to see what was going on and Dusty had set up a mattress and was throwing a discuss at it,” Abernathy said. “I asked him what in the hell he was doing and he simply said, ‘Just practicing’. He had that thrill of competition and he loved to perfect things.”

Even in things not quite as important as athletics, Lane still cared.

“He wanted to play me in Streetfighter on the Nintendo and I got a chuckle out of that because I grew up playing that game...I was going to dominate him,” Abernathy said. “I did, and Dusty went into his room, taking the Nintendo with him. The weirdo practiced that game all night and when he challenged me again later, he destroyed me.”

Magnuson also remembers Lane’s competitive side.

“He was in his room and he came out wearing his football cleats,” Magnuson said. ‘This dog thinks he is faster than me,’ he said, and he went out there and ran around with my dog.”

Lane’s father Jay, recalls how hard his son worked to improve.

“He was very self-motivated,” he said. “I would often hear him downstairs lifting weights with the music blaring...We had a house with a long hallway and during the winter, he would set up hurdles in that hallway and practice going over them.”

During his time on the CCS track team, Beatty said that he had to “kick him out of the stadium.”

“He’d hide implements around the stadium and sneak back in after dinner or on Sunday to work out more,” Beatty said. “I sat down on the vault pit once and felt something hard.

I dug under the covers and there's a discus. I asked our throws coach, 'This is a \$150 discus – what's it doing under here?' He said, 'I checked that out to Dusty.'"

DeAngelo says that when all of his friends are together, they are never at a loss for their own "Dusty stories".

The 1996 Olympic gold medalist and former world-record holder Dan O'Brien was a major idol of Lane's.

O'Brien spent a brief time on the CCS track team and set the standard for future decathletes at the school.

In the words of John Blanchette in a *Spokesman-Review* article out of Spokane, "In time, he got not only O'Brien's CCS uniform but his decathlon record, as well."

First, the uniform.

"They were getting their uniforms and Larry (Beatty) had told him that a particular one was the one Dan O'Brien wore," his mother said. "That was it. Dusty was going to wear that no matter how big or small it was on him."

In the same *Spokesman-Review* article referenced to earlier, Magnuson said, "I remember he'd come home and just kind of walk around in that singlet."

Lane's parents still have that jersey hanging on their wall.

It's rare that anybody gets to surpass their idol, but Lane did exactly that.

At the Mt. Sac, Calif. Relays in 1999, Lane posted the third highest Junior College decathlon point total in U.S. history at the time with a score of 7,370, breaking O'Brien's school record by nearly 100 points.

In the 1998 season, Lane and O'Brien actually raced head-to-head for fun at a meet at Eastern Washington University. According to Beatty, they raced about three times in the 110 meter hurdles. Lane won twice.

After the accident happened in 1999, O'Brien wrote a personal letter to the Lane family, something they are very appreciative of according to his mother.

Every March, the Lane family and friends gather at the Dusty Lane Open. Formerly known as the Bigfoot Open, it was renamed after Lane to keep his memory and name alive.

Lane earned a full-ride scholarship to the University of Alabama shortly before his death. Alabama assistant coach Ron Tiffan recruited Lane and just last year, made it all the way to Spokane for the 10th anniversary of the Dusty Lane Open.

“That says something about the kind of person Dusty was when 10 years after the accident, the coach who never really got to know him, still cares,” DeAngelo said.

Tiffan later asked for permission to use Dusty's name for his newborn son: Connor Lane Tiffan.

During his football playing days, Lane was quoted as saying at halftime one game, “I'm not Superman,” to his coach as a result of getting the ball nearly every play.

To those who watched him athletically, he may be remembered as Superman, and rightfully so. For his family and friends, he was shy, quiet and simple. Simply Dusty. Their “Shooting Star,” as his family called him.

“He was very loyal to his friends,” his father said. “He came home one Thanksgiving and got a call from one of his friends. ‘Sorry, Mom and Dad, they need me, I have to go back,’ he said. And off he was back to Spokane.”

DeAngelo also named his first-born son, Eli Lane DeAngelo, after his best friend. When asked what kind of person Lane was, DeAngelo said that he had a hard time conveying how great of an individual he was.

“I mean, he wasn’t just another guy,” DeAngelo said.

