Kenneth 'Red' Simmons, ex-Olympian and a former University of Michigan track coach, is a fixture at the U-M Track and Tennis Building, where he works out regularly.

ATHLETE FOR LIFE

'Red' Simmons is still winning at 86

By DON FABER
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

At 86, Kenneth “Red” Simmons can look back on a life of accomplishment.

But Red Simmons doesn’t do much looking back because he’s too busy competing — against himself and others his age.

The fact he can do things athletically that men half his age only dream about, just adds to the Simmons mystique.

This is a man who competed in the Senior Olympics last year and won a chestful of gold medals.

Simmons can still heave the shot 30 feet, throw the javelin 90 feet and hurl the discus 100 feet.

If a body can be fit as a fiddle, then Simmons is a Stradivarius.

“I’ve never stopped continuous activities,” he says, “because it does a lot for one’s internal health.”

The hospital, he says, grinning broadly, “uses me for a rabbit” to test reaction time and peripheral vision.

At Michigan State Normal College, as Eastern Michigan University was known in Simmons’ college days, the self-described hotshot athlete got a job cleaning mats in the gymnasium to make ends meet.

He hitchhiked from his home in Redford to Ypsilanti. He couldn’t afford books. His grades weren’t too good, but he was an excellent athlete and lettered in track.

Before graduating, Simmons represented the United States at the 1932 Olympics, held in Los Angeles, as a member of track and field unit.
SIMMONS: While coaching at U-M, athlete drew special attention to women's track

Kenneth 'Red' Simmons

- Age: 86
- Residence: Ann Arbor
- Occupation: Retired coach
- Personal: Married, two children
- Community involvement: Former member, Ann Arbor Exchange Club

In the 400 meter hurdles

Later, as an athlete in the Amateur Athletic Union, he would race against — and

and first aid. He used books he'd bought to tutor football players in anatomy.

In 1960, Red started the first Ann Arbor Women's Track Club, the "Michigammas." From that program he developed seven national champions, 19 state champions and numerous cross country and track and field championship teams.

One of his prize pupils was Francis Krakow, who was the first Michigan and Ann Arbor native to be a member of the women's Olympic track and field team, in 1968 and 1972.

Crisler into hiring him, at age 56 and without an advanced degree, as an instructor in physical education.

and weight training

and "non-revenue" sports and to enhance athletic opportunities for women. Simmons hit on the idea of a national track meet.

Today, the Red Simmons Invitational is in its 15th year at U-M, and it's even expanded to include track and field athletes.

For his many contributions to U-M athletics, Simmons holds the distinction of being the first person to hold both the honorary "M" man and "M" woman awards, the second a recognition of his work with the women's track team.

Not to be outdone, his wife Lois is in the U-M men's hockey Hall of Fame. Together, they sponsor various awards for academic and athletic achievement.

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Of his life with Lois, he says, "What we do, we do together or we don't do it."

The U-M's oldest living former head coach can be seen several days a week at the U-M Track and Tennis Building, lurking in the distance and doing the high jump, putting the younger wannabes to shame.

His advice on keeping fit is simple: "Stay active, be sensible in diet and moderate in drinking."