

# More's the pity, Foothill track athletes won't be in Harms' way

RICHARD WEINER

**THE MOOD AROUND** the Foothill College track won't be the same without coach Peanut Harms, who will not return after this cross country season.

Since Harms arrived as an assistant distance coach in 1980, at which time he was working as an assistant retail clerk looking for a track job, Foothill has become a mecca for running types.

We're not just talking about Foothill's nine conference titles, three Northern California championships and six state champions in the past six years.

Harms was nicknamed Peanut 35 years ago when he was a year old "because I was always small." But the unofficial leader of the Reebok Aggies Centipedes has drawn nothing but large crowds to the scenic Los Altos Community College.

His New Year's Eve "Midnight Run" attracts about 1,100 people each year. As many as 64 high schools come to Foothill for its invitationals. And while most area community college cross country and track teams have suffered from declining participation, Peanut says, "I've always had the numbers."

**YET NONE OF THAT** was enough for Foothill to find a full-time opening for the Los Altos resident.

Before Tuesday's practice, Harms said he has no gripe with Foothill. It is the system that relies on part-time employees that has forced him to seek a lucra-

tive opportunity with Reebok.

"There is something wrong with the system that doesn't allow coaches to put in the time," said Harms, who has sat in his office hoping for a full-time job at Foothill, only to field calls from around the world with tantalizing offers for his Centipedes.

"It's a travesty," Harms said. "I see it happening at every college in the area."

What is happening is that community colleges have become locked into a pay scale, with only faculty attrition paving the way for energetic newcomers such as Harms.

But Peanut certainly isn't a new face at Foothill.

"You ask anyone on campus, and they'll think I'm full-time here, benefits and all," he said. The only time he has received a full-time salary is when Hank Ketels — the original Foothill track coach who will help veteran Jack Parks pick up where Harms will leave off — took sabbaticals.

"When you look at it, it's the kids we come here for," Harms said, pointing to his latest group of cross

country champions preparing for the NorCal championships Friday in Rocklin.

"Not to sound egotistical, but if you don't allow for the guys like me to put in the hours we do, it's the kids that lose," he said.

And it's the athletes he'll miss.

"The best things about this has been the kids," said Harms. "The Danny Gonzalezes of the world."

Gonzalez is a former Mountain View High standout who flourished under Harms, as have so many. The most recent success story is Eva de Porcel, who came to Foothill to train for the World Deaf Games but wound up breaking the school's heptathlon record.

**WHEN AN ATHLETE** comes to Harms, he says, "They don't just learn how to throw a shot put. They learn what a shot put is. They don't just learn how to run a hurdle, they learn how many hurdles there are."

"There is probably no track program left in better shape, financially, than the Foothill team will be this year," said Parks, in his 20th year at Foothill.

Parks still is trying to lure Harms back as an assistant, but Harms doesn't know if he will have the time.

Reebok has donated an unprecedented \$1.2 million to the California high school athletic system, and Harms (who has been sporting a lot of logos lately) will serve as team services coordinator.

And the Centipedes have developed a following similar to David Letterman. In the past year, Harms has been featured in Sports Illustrated and The New York Times. He was an original member of the Aggies in 1974, and served as club coordinator for five years.

"It's sad," Harms said. "I was eating dinner with the team after the Coast Conference championships (in which the Foothill women captured their sixth straight title) and I started thinking about not being here. Luckily, I've been too busy to think about how much I'll miss it."

**IT'S NOT TOO EARLY** for area runners to think about missing Harms. Foothill's recent success has attracted 50 tracksters for this year's team. And Harms is confident the program won't miss a beat with Parks and Ketels back at the helm.

Still, it will be an eerie New Year's Eve when the clock strikes midnight and Harms isn't there to lead the fanatics around town.

"I don't think Jack will be out there," Harms said, quietly. Later, he said jokingly, "Maybe I'll come back and coach as a hobby."

Foothill should be so lucky — it's obvious Reebok's gain will be the Owls' loss.

While the system won't change, the mood around the Foothill track certainly will.