JACK WELCH

Jack Welch’s life was like one of his races: short, triumphant and memorable to those who shared his path.

The former Redwood Christian High track and cross country champion died in 2007 at the age of 21 as the result of brain damage suffered in a car accident that occurred nine days after his high school graduation in 2004. His legacy is still being felt in the Eagles’ athletic program.

“He was just an unusually great young man,” recalled Steve Gillette, who coached Welch in both his high school sports. “So often my best athlete was the biggest problem in the classroom. Not Jack. He was not a challenge for you. He was a great example for others. For years, we kept records on the wall at the school. Everyone used to compare their times with Jack. Everyone wanted to be like Jack. The way he carried himself. So humble.”

In a record-setting prep career, Welch is remembered as part-standout, part-captain and part-recruiter.

“We didn’t have a lot of runners when Jack joined the (cross country) team as a sophomore,” Gillette recalled. “He was very good. But that wasn’t enough for him. He went out and convinced others to join the team. By his junior year, we had 28 kids turn out. He was the big reason why.

“Same thing in track. We are a very small school, but we had a lot of good athletes. He had a dream of winning the track championship. He had a vision … he could see one guy was fast, one guy could jump, and he got them to join the team. Then we started winning championships.”

In cross country, Welch won three Private School Athletic League and two Central Coast Section championships and placed fourth or better at the State Meet twice, leading Redwood Christian to two league titles and one CCS title. Along the way, he set the course record at Coyote Hills in Fremont during the 2003 league championships.

In track, Welch set school records in the 400, 800, 1,600 and 3,200 meters while winning two league championships apiece in the 800 and 1,600. Redwood Christian won three league team titles in Welch’s four seasons.

Today, Redwood Christian honors its most inspirational athlete each year with the Jack Welch Memorial Award.