Melgares, Pat. *Chasing Excellence: The Remarkable Life and Inspiring Vigilosophy of Coach Joe I. Vigil*. Solstice, 2020. Paperback. $19.95.

Reviewed by William Steele, English Department, Lipscomb University

When discussing the elite coaches in college sports, there are names that need no introduction. Bud Wilkinson, Joe Paterno, and Woody Hayes in football; John Wooden, Dean Smith, and Pat Summitt in basketball; and Rod Dedeaux, Mike Martin, and Tim Corbin in baseball. But only the most die-hard track and field and cross-country fans would recognize coaches' names other than Oregon's Bill Bowerman.

Legendary coach Joe Vigil, a former football player and Golden Gloves boxer, has certainly earned his place as one of the greatest collegiate coaches in history, not just in his sports of cross country and track and field, but in any sport. Vigil, who turned the Adams State College program into a national power in his 29 years at the school, won 19 national team championships, coached 425 All-Americans and 87 individual national champions, and was named national Coach of the Year 14 times. Perhaps most impressive, due in no small part to his own commitment to academic excellence as a professor, Vigil's student-athletes achieved a 95 percent graduation rate over the course of his coaching career.

In *Chasing Excellence: The Remarkable Life and Inspiring Vigilosophy of Coach Joe I. Vigil*, one of the coach's former runners, Pat Melgares, introduces readers to the man whose commitment to learning his sport and inspiring his athletes to achieve greatness contributed to unprecedented growth in American track and field. Building on his time on Vigil's team, Melgares uses numerous interviews with Vigil, his wife and children, former athletes, coaches, administrators, and members of the community to present a multifaceted look at both the personal and professional sides of Vigil.

Born into poverty to a mother who was already in the process of divorcing his father by the time he was born, Vigil was inspired by her work ethic and commitment to making sure her sons were provided for as they grew up in the railroad town of Alamosa, Colorado. Vigil's own commitment to excellence later helped him make the town synonymous with distance running around the world.

Melgares tells Vigil's story in a straightforward manner with each chapter interspersed with sidebar anecdotes titled "Let Me Tell You a Story." These vignettes come from former students, athletes, family members, and fellow coaches. And while they occasionally interrupt the chapters' narratives, the stories provide terrific insight into the long-lasting impact Coach Vigil has had in physiological research, athletic performance, and community involvement, all topics which are threaded through the entire book.

For those who follow cross country and track closely, the book provides a compelling backstory to Adams State's rise to dominance as a member of the NAIA and then their ability to compete at the NCAA level immediately upon making the jump. Vigil's philosophy, something readers are reminded of as the "Vigilosophy" throughout the book, ignored what naysayers thought and showcased his ability to inspire his athletes to not only compete with, but to defeat much bigger programs with far more resources than they had in Alamosa.

Melgares details Vigil's progression from a collegiate football player at Adams State to high school biology teacher and coach to an internationally recognized researcher and coach. The book provides insight into Vigil's seemingly accidental entrance into track and field when, after seeing the disappointment in the faces of the only three boys who showed up for track practice at Alamosa High School, he began coaching them with no budget and no administrative support. By the end of his first year, Vigil had coached his first state medalist, miler Luther Quintana. A year later, Vigil was offered the head coaching position for the football team, but the school claimed to have a rule prohibiting coaches from being the head coach for multiple sports. Suspecting no such rule existed, as others had coached multiple teams at the school before him, Vigil thought the school might be denying him the opportunity because he was Hispanic. In a decision that would change the face of American track and cross country, Vigil chose to coach track and field. Melgares spends little time on the details of Vigil's high school coaching, choosing instead to elaborate on the years at Adams State, the place where the coach's legend was cemented in his almost three decades there.

While an author so intimately connected with the subject might be inclined to lean towards hero-worshipping, Melgares avoids this trap by drawing on the variety of interviews with those who best kneaw Vigil as a coach, administrator, teacher, researcher, and friend.

Some of the most interesting parts of the biography are at the end when the 90-year-old Vigil provides his top five memories from his career, allowing the legend to give his own voice to conclude the narrative. The remainder of the book is a set of four appendices: a summary of Vigil's professional accomplishments and awards, dating back to his time as a high school coach; a list of Olympic athletes Vigil coached between 1968 and 2016; an interesting and insightful collection of Vigil's quotes on various topics, titled "Vigilante," compiled by assistant coach Jay Birmingham during the 1993 season; and a list of countries where Vigil has presented or coached.

While Melgares presents only a brief glimpse into Vigil's life outside athletics, readers will come away with an understanding of what motivated him professionally, his impact on building the Adams State program into an NAIA and NCAA powerhouse, his role in training Olympic athletes, and the legacy he continues to build in cross country and track. Those already familiar with Vigil's story will come away with a much better appreciation for his philosophy and coaching, and those who are just now learning about Vigil will wish they'd known about him long before now.