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**UW-Milwaukee track reunion brings together generations of excellence**

Written by Howie Magner

What started as a casual conversation between a few friends last summer turned into a heartfelt reunion for UWM track and field alumni this summer.

More than 100 former Panthers, family members and friends gathered June 28 in Milwaukee’s Best Place at the Historic Pabst Brewery to share memories and catch up on each other’s lives. They also heard from the team’s current athletes , including six-time Horizon League Coach of the Year Andrew Basler and hurdler Natalie Block, who became [UWM’s first Division 1 All-American](https://uwm.edu/news/uwm-hurdler-earns-all-american-honors-at-ncaa-championships/) at the 2025 NCAA Championships.

Michael Hirsch, who ran track and cross country for the Panthers from 1976-80, was in Milwaukee a year prior visiting some fellow former runners. In a particularly nostalgic moment, one friend half-jokingly said that they needed to get everyone back together.

So Hirsch, now a dean at Huston-Tillotson University in Austin, Texas, took up the challenge, embarking on a year’s worth of logistical and organizational efforts.

He’d put together a smaller gathering back in the late 1990s, but this one quickly grew into a much more complex task, and Hirsch thanked the UWM Alumni Association and the many people who helped track everyone down. Emails were searched for and shared, as was the occasional physical address, and social media sleuths played their part.

All the work came to fruition in Best Place’s Great Hall. As a slideshow of photos and articles from days gone by played in the background, old friends exchanged hugs and smiles, laughter and remembrances.

“I love these people. My UWM days are some of the best days of my life, and I have a wonderful life,” Hirsch said in a quieter moment. “These are strong people, smart people, kind people, forgiving people, teammates and their families. I was just hoping to see them, and I was hoping that people would spend a lot of time talking and smiling.”

And you didn’t have to be part of those track classes from the 1970s and ’80s to appreciate the scene.

“I love seeing the photos, seeing the classic uniforms and some of those old surfaces, it’s crazy that they’re running on that,” said Block, who heads into her final UWM season after placing 12th in the 400-meter hurdles at the 2025 NCAA Championships, the best-ever national finish among Panther women. “It’s super-cool to see, because that’s how the program grew. You can see it carry forward through generations.”

Hirsch, meanwhile, is proud of how Block and the current generation continue to carry the baton.

“UWM fosters that sort of excellence,” Hirsch said. “We met at the Klotsche Center earlier today, and the coach was talking us through how they support their athletes and how proud he is of their athletes and how successful and hardworking Natalie has been. Our experience was at a different time, and she’s reached a higher level of excellence, and it’s brilliant.”