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X-Youth Adventures

Author uses personal experience, familiar settings and love of mysteries in series designed for young readers

By Christian Zavisca
Telegraph Editor

When Bob Schaller was working as sports editor for the Scottsbluff Star-Herald, he often went camping in the summer. That experience, and his love for the Hardy Boys mysteries, gave him the idea for the "X-Country Adventures," his series of mysteries designed for readers age 9 and older.

Schaller makes an appearance today at Waldenbooks at The Mall at North Platte from 5 to 7 p.m. to sign the first four books in the series, "Message in Montana," "South Dakota Treaty Search," "Crime in a Colorado Cave," and "Adventure in Wyoming." He'll also sign books from his three-volume series, "The Olympic Dream and Spirit," and will answer questions about what it takes to be published.

The "X-Country" series follows a brother and sister as they travel to different states solving mysteries. The books include geographic and historical references unique to each state. The idea, Schaller said, is a bit like the Hardy Boys adventures if they took place in an actual setting.

Schaller's "Olympic Dream and Spirit" series features first-person accounts of athletes like Andre Agassi, Mary Lou Retton and Dominique Moceanu. He currently is at work on a biography of U.S. Olympic swimmer Amy Van Dyken and lives near the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Schaller, who has written several books on Nebraska football, covers the Cornhuskers for the North Platte Telegraph and other Nebraska newspapers. His book signing in North Platte is the first stop on a multi-state book tour that will include an appearance on CSPAN's Book TV.

Schaller said he has a special affinity for North Platte.

"My whole career has always sort of revolved around North Platte," he said. "It just seemed like a perfect place to start."

Schaller said while in Scottsbluff he wrote many stories about athletes from North Platte playing sports at Chadron State. He wrote most of his book about Tommie Frazier, perhaps the best Nebraska quarterback in history, while staying at a North Platte hotel.

Schaller credits his prolific output -- he had 18 books published since February 1998, with 9 more expected by March 2001 -- to his experience as a sports writer covering high schools in Nebraska.

"You learn to write a lot in a short amount of time," Schaller said. "The kids expect that, and they deserve that."