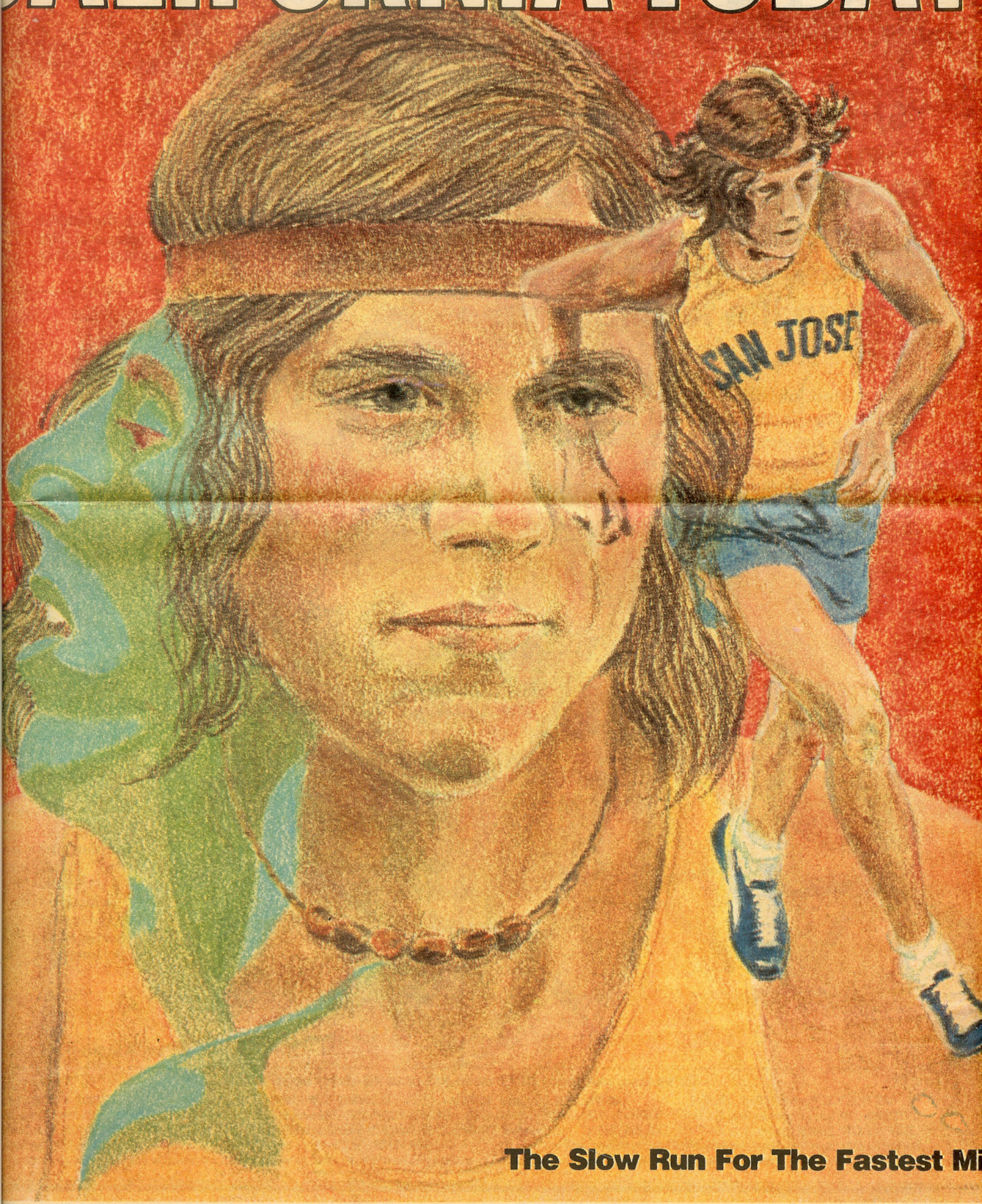


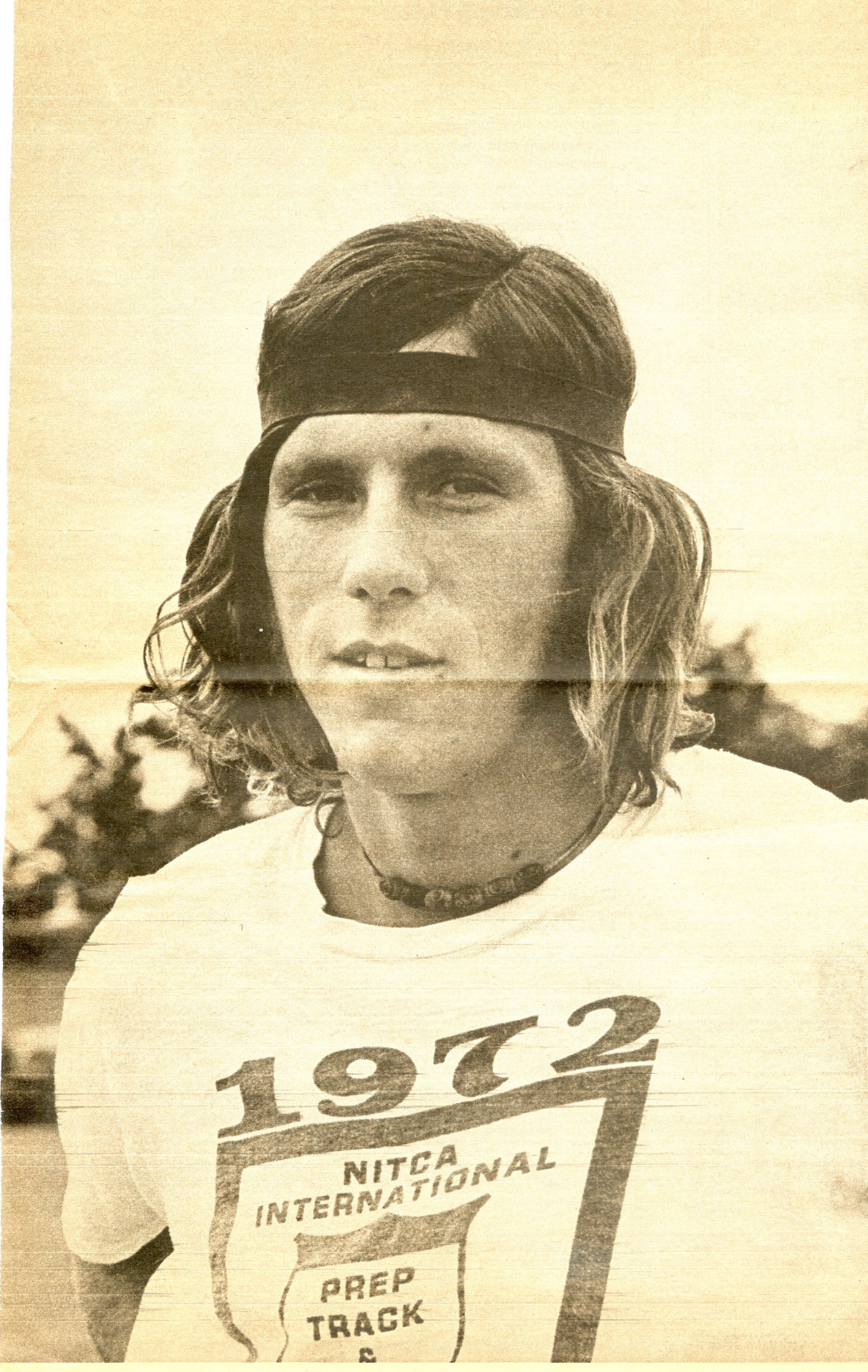
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The Slow Run For The Fastest Mi



The Slow Run For The Fastest Mile

Mark Schilling, San Jose State's premier distance runner, has but a single goal in this, his sophomore year—to complete the season undefeated. This means a win in the NCAA meet in late spring. If it happens, he will certainly take his place among the world's greatest milers. Still young, he could someday be the very best but it's a long, slow process.



DON RIGGS SPEAKING: "In high school he set the state record for the mile in 4:05.6 and he ran 1:54.2 in the half. Those were his best times. He's a sophomore at San Jose this year. Last year, he was only defeated once at the mile. He made the European tour with the junior team. He beat the Russians. The only 18-year-old boy to beat the Russians.

"He ran a sub-four minute mile three times. His best time? 3:58.6. This is great for a freshman, almost unbelievable. Then he ran 1:50.6 and set a new conference record in the half mile. He's always been my leader. Great to coach. Very mature. And, boy, you need someone like this. I think he's one of the most wonderful young men I've ever met."

After Riggs, second-year distance and weight coach of the San Jose State track team, ends his laudation, I sit in the close quarters of a coach's room in the SJS Phys Ed building awaiting the appearance of Mark Schilling. Schilling is the subject of Riggs' outburst. He is probably worthy of it on the basis of his performances so far. But after Riggs tells you about him you expect the door to open and admit a behemoth: a combination of Tarzan, Superman, and Mighty Joe Young. Or, oldster, would you believe a Jack Armstrong?

MARK SCHILLING is none of these, obviously. He is a rather large young man of rather lethargic mien. He sits down on a steel folding chair and hoists his long legs onto another, looks like he's saying a couple of "Hail Marys" and is ready for the questions. It is disturbing. You suddenly realize the questions you have readied he has answered interminable times before. That is no way to get into a kid's head. Especially, when the kid is 6-foot-3 and goes 174 pounds. I want to be friends, right? So I sell out my brothers.

I understand you don't like to talk to sportswriters?

Last year I didn't want to at all. I was really annoyed by the constant questions. Like, "When are you going to break four minutes? Are you going to do this? Are you going to do that? Why did you come to San Jose State instead of going to Oregon?" Weird questions. I didn't like it at all.

I congratulated myself for not having started out in the weird vein. Mark has already broken the four-minute barrier and I knew he came to San Jose State because of Riggs.

Coach Riggs, then an assistant at



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the University of Oregon was recruiting California when he spotted Mark in Garden Grove. When Riggs came to SJS two years ago he continued his recruitment of Schilling and eventually the young man joined the Spartan track team.

Was there anybody else recruiting you when you graduated?

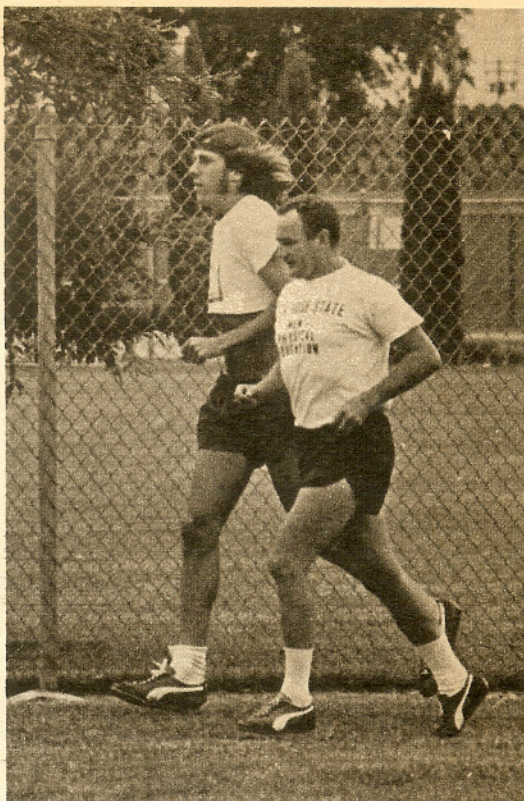
There were a bunch of people, but I really didn't look at them. I really didn't think I was going to run anymore. At the time I felt that I had done everything I wanted to as far as running was concerned so I planned to go to a junior college and just mess around. Then, I really didn't like talking to recruiters because it was so much b.s.

IT BECOMES OBVIOUS that Mark was, as the gung-hos are wont to say these days, slightly unmotivated as a senior high schooler. So you pursue it.

Did you participate in other sports in high school?

Nope. Just track and cross country. In junior high I played everything, but in high school I was going

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Schilling works out with coach Don Riggs. Riggs thinks the young runner's future as a star is unlimited.

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back. Then, in the afternoon we go for a run again. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays we just run whatever time we like. Then on Tuesdays and Thursdays and Saturdays we have to be here at the track at 3 p.m.

How many miles do you run in a day.

Approximately 10. We usually break it up. Five miles in the morning and five miles in the afternoon.

Do you go for time on any of those segments?

No. It's just going out and running easy over distance. I don't like to race the clock. I feel like I'm hurting myself. I guess I'm lazy.

IT SHOULD BE pointed out that at the time of this interview, Schilling was technically on "vacation." The first dual meet of the 1974 season was still nearly a month away. Once competition begins, Schilling's training becomes much more regimented.

Coach Riggs explains: "Once the season begins we tend to cut down the volume of running a bit and emphasize speed more. The same pat-

tern is maintained, but we'll be quicker within the pattern.

"Maybe Schill will run three to four miles in the morning and five to six in the afternoon, but the pace will be upped on the 220s, the 330's, the 660s and the 110s. We'll begin running him at the Gold pace (a sub four-minute mile pace) for the breakdowns.

"Some day he might take a off if he is leg weary. He knows when that happens and he'll just say, 'Coach, I think I need a day off.' Once the season starts, we concentrate on speed. In the pre-season we establish a firm foundation for this by a lot of off-track running. My distance runners train for ten months of the year."

When The Schill claims he doesn't race the clock, he evidently means he doesn't go out on the track and try to best a four-minute mile by himself. Yet, any distance runner has to be aware of the pace of a race. I ask Schilling:

How do you develop a mind

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clock that tells you when you and your competitors are running a bit too slow or the pace-setter may be running too fast?

It's all in the training. There you get your sense of pace. When you're on the track and you're working out you have to hit a pace all the time. That's where you eventually learn your sense of pace. You can tell, too, from the rhythm. You usually run in rhythm. If your rhythm isn't right, you're struggling a little harder.

In a race, if you're not running against the clock, it must be the calibre of the competition that contributes to your good or bad time?

Yeah.

Is there some strategy involved? Do you like to run in the pack, in front, or take up some other position?

Yeah. There is strategy depending on the opposition. You plan when you're going to make your final move, your kick, or when to jump somebody. I've led races before but

usually I like to follow and let somebody else dictate the race. Then I'll follow what they do. It's hard for me to set a pace. I'd rather just run back. I like to see what other people are doing. I adjust to it.

Like if a half-miler comes into a mile race, the pace can be slow early because he might not have the endurance I have. Then I have to know to take him, maybe, with 660 yards left instead of the usual 220 or 110 because he's probably got more leg speed than I have. I have to burn it out of him before it comes right down to the end.

What race did you run your 3:58.6 in last year?

That was in the NCAA.

Who was pressing you in that one?

Dave Wottle ... a bunch of milers.

Did you win that one?

No, I was sixth.

That was a pretty fast field.

Very.

THE SCHILL gives out all this



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information in a kind of flat monotone. Like he's bored. I'm trying but it's difficult to strike an emotional response from a person whose real world is so greatly different from your own. The questions he may be tired of being asked are still of interest to me and, I assume, to many who don't have first-hand knowledge of what makes a young athlete tick. But, persistence pays. I finally strike a nerve. There are apparently others. The Schill is disappointed in or disillusioned by besides sportswriters.

I understand you went to Europe last year on the Amateur Athletic Union junior team, and beat the Russians?

That was enjoyable, going there, but rotten, you know, being on the tour.

Why?

It was just the AAU. The officials there. They tried to put a lot of restrictions on us. I felt like I was about five-years old. We couldn't do anything. It seemed like just being ourselves was wrong. They expected you to live up to the Mom-Apple-Pie-Boy-next-door image. Be the All-America boy or whatever, not yourself. They expected us to put on a front, a show. I couldn't see doing that.

Did you get to see much of Europe?

Not really. The AAU messed up quite a bit. In Germany, we were supposed to stay a couple of extra days but we left early and went to Poland. In Poland we had to stay in some hole where you had to beat the



bugs out of your room. It was a really rotten place.

I take it that your opinion of the AAU is not of the best?

No. I don't get along with them at all. The coaches on the tour said that I only came to screw around. That I didn't come to run. They said that because of the way I ran in Germany. For the first week there I was adjusting to the time change and everything and went into the race and I took second, which was behind my own teammate. I beat all the Germans. But I ran a very slow time, about 4:12, something like that. So the coaches decided I had come along to goof. When they said, "Why don't you take a rest?" I said, "O.K., I will."

So the alternate ran in Poland

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to go out for basketball but I couldn't see getting my head shaved for a sport. I could see getting my hair cut but I didn't want to go bald. Shave my head right off. I thought that was stupid.

Ah, Dear Old Southland. Remember when a young man with long hair was considered a social outcast? Somewhere between Attila the Hun and the Boston Strangler? As late as 1971, Mark's senior year at Garden Grove, the Rev. Walter K. Pifer wrote a letter to the *Los Angeles Times* stating in part:

"When a man wilfully persists in having flowing locks, he defies God, and by his insistence, offends many people. While he may not always have this in mind, it nevertheless does so."

Now, I don't know where the good Reverend researched his thesis, but the only off-hand Biblical reference to barbers that comes to mind is Delilah's trim of Samson's locks. And we all know what happened to him, don't we? But that's the way it was Down South and it might have been

Mark Schilling's initial revolt against things he calls "stupid."

FORTUNATELY for SJS, Coach Riggs was able to re-motivate his charge before he got to messing around in serious proportions. The result has been gratifying not only because Mark shows great potential as an athlete, but because he has also improved his scholarship.

"Mark came here with a C grade average. Now, overall, he carries a B," says Coach Riggs. "He knows I believe in him. He has taken everything very seriously."

It is not surprising to see Mark Schilling still sporting, shall we say, a rousing head of hair. When running he holds it in place with an Indian-type headband. It is a bush mane, the color of an old lion. His skin is burnished to nearly the same tone by the NorCal sun. He is not what young maidens would call ugly.

Does your training regimen at San Jose State interfere with your dating situation?

As far as Riggs is concerned, "Stay away from girls!" But, I can't

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get serious about a girl now anyway. Most girls can't put up with the situation because they have to come second. They don't really like that because if they want to do something I have to say no, I have to do this first for track. It's track, all the time.

It kind of cuts down on all the hobbies?

It does.

How many days do you run?

Every day.

Sundays, too?

Sunday is usually our long-run day.

OUT ON THE TRACK Schilling works out under the watchful eye of Riggs. He leads a pack of other track hopefuls like a pack of hounds trailing a cougar. When The Schill (as Riggs refers to him) gets into stride, his arms are bent so the forearm is nearly parallel to the track during most of its swing. His hands are held palms downward and rather cupped. He looks like a giant collie paddling up stream.

There is a great deal of strength visible in his upper legs, at the belly, and at the hips. His legs are firm and long but the muscles don't bulge out like you'll see in some sprinters. While Riggs bounces back and forth from the 220-yard mark to the finish line, crossing the infield with short choppy strides, watching his stop watches and shouting out seemingly inane numbers, The Schill leads his charges in 220 sprints and 440 laps at stride broken up by jogging yards. He'll do four or five miles this way on most afternoons. He's easy to spot. Not only because of his running style and the position he maintains at the head of the pack, but because he stands a good three inches taller than any of his team mates.

Aren't you a bit tall for a mil-er?

Yeah. A lot of people say I'm too big. But Riggs says I'm just the right height. He says he wants most of his distance runners in the 5-11, 6-foot range. Jim Ryun was over 6-feet but there's not too many. Most milers are under six.

What is your average day like? Your training schedule—is it fairly all-encompassing?

We go through our ritual. We drop in in the morning and we go for a run, four or five miles and we kick

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~~and he ran great. He ran the equivalent of a sub-four mile. He ran excellently.~~

In Russia the first day we didn't have time for anything but a light run. The next day I ran in the morning and the evening. The impression I got from the coaches was that I was going to have to prove my condition. So I ran a long workout proving I had my endurance and speed left and, you know, my stamina. The next day, the day before the race, they said to rest. So I did. Then, on the day of the race they said I could run.

To run a workout, rest a day, and then race was just ridiculous really. That could have hurt me more than it helped me.

Did you break four there?

No. I think I ran the equivalent of 4:01.

But you won it?

Yeah.

SCHILLING IS neither modest nor brash. If his words read one or the other it's because you can't put intonation into print. The Schill's main point seems to be that you race to win, and the American fetish for

"the record" has not, as yet, clouded this young man's thinking.

Does he have the potential? Coach Riggs thinks so. "I'm not a prophet, and I'm not a god, so I have no way of knowing or predicting," claims the coach, "but we've set a goal for this year though we don't discuss it much. The goal is very realistic and we're going to work very hard to achieve it. Mark would like to go undefeated. That means the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) championship.

"I think this young man's potential is unlimited. As long as he continues to work dedicatedly as he is now, and his attitude doesn't change, he is going to be one of America's great runners."

It is coincidental that The Schill's senior year and the next Olympic Games occur at one and the same time. If things progress on schedule, Riggs has to be thinking "gold medal" and, possibly, world record speed for the glamor mile. Just as likely, Mark Schilling will be thinking about winning races, but one at a time.