

Running with purpose

Former Olympic medalist now chases bad guys

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By John Crumpacker

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

When he joined the San Jose Police Department in 1984, Millard Hampton was well qualified to chase down bad guys. He was an Olympic sprinter, after all.

At the 1976 Montreal Olympics while a student at San Jose City College, the 20-year-old Hampton won the silver medal in the 200 meters, clocking 20.29 seconds in finishing a close second to the 20.22 of Jamaica's Don Quarrie.

"Going into Montreal, I had hoped to medal but I didn't know if I would or not," Hampton said. "I had just turned 20. I thought maybe my Olympics would be when I was 24."

Earlier in 1976, Hampton ran his personal best time, 20.10. Suffice to say no scofflaw on the streets of San Jose could run the furlong anywhere near that fast.

"I enjoyed it, when I was in shape," Hampton said. "I could chase a criminal and pass him up and tell him to hurry up. I enjoyed the surprise on their faces seeing me keeping up with them, a police officer with all that gear on his belt."

This is one cop who doesn't spend his time at the doughnut shop. Now 45 and a veteran of 17 years on the SJPd, Hampton still looks in good shape, 21 years removed from his last competitive race.

He works now in the Airport Division at San Jose International Airport, an assignment that took on sudden urgency in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington.

"It's intensified exponentially," Hampton said. "We're more aware, more alert because it's no longer a mundane job. Now you really have to examine things. You're examining faces more. We have more of a presence in the terminal and on the perimeter."

Whereas speed defined his athletic career, these days Hampton is a thoughtful man who doesn't hurry in answering questions. Like many elite athletes of the time, he disagreed with President Jimmy Carter's decision to boycott the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow.

"It had a real crushing effect on a lot of people," he said. "It derailed a lot of people's lives. I was extremely upset, as a lot of



Chronicle file photo 1976

A standout runner for San Jose City College, Hampton captured the Olympic silver medal in the 200 meters in Montreal.

athletes were. It's like what Baron (Pierre) de Coubertin said, in the Olympic Games, politics doesn't belong. I hope it's something our government realizes and never does again."

Hampton said he had long thought about joining the police department but did not do so until certain issues became personal.

"Drugs on the street were affecting my extended family," he said. "They were becoming addicted to these drugs. I wanted to join the department and apply that same energy that took me to the Olympics to catching drug dealers. That's the course I took."

Hampton recently moved his family — wife Arlena and 6-year-old son Millard IV (he has two daughters from a previous mar-

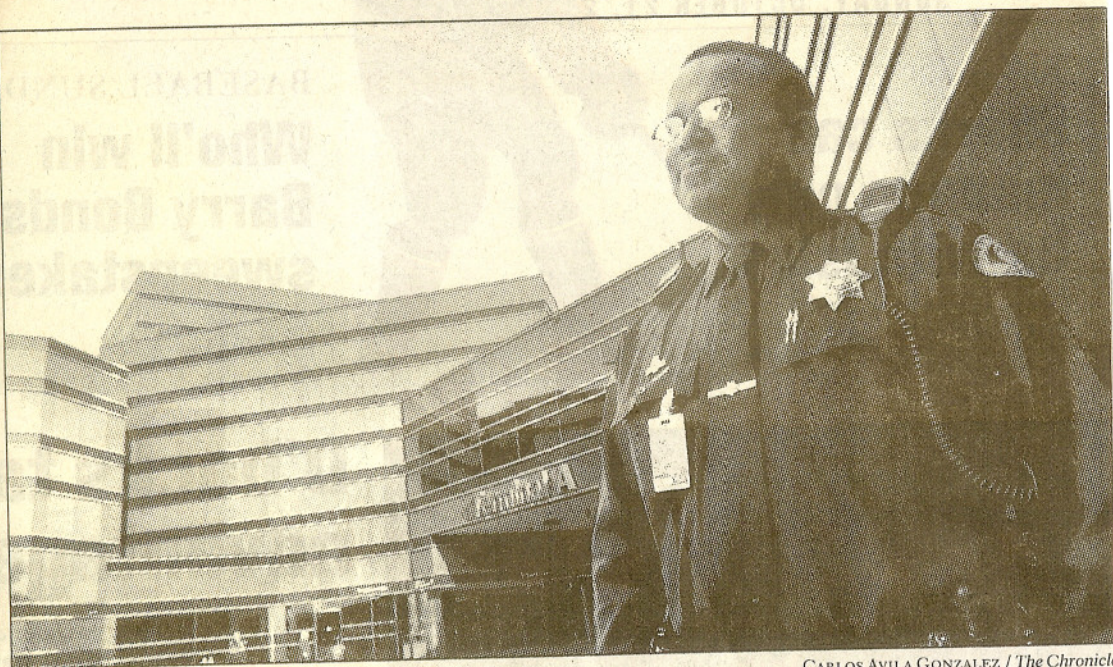
riage, Shennay, 20, and Talya, 16) — from San Jose to Tracy, where he plans to live after retiring from the San Jose Police Dept. In retirement, he'd like to coach track at one of the public high schools in town.

Youngest daughter Talya runs track at her dad's alma mater, Silver Creek High School in San Jose. "She's a good athlete and a good runner," Hampton said. "I call her an inspiration. She's an inspiration to her teammates. She has a big smile, works hard and loves to compete."

The same could be said of her dad — then and now.

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WHERE ARE THEY NOW? | Millard Hampton



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Millard Hampton now works as an officer with the San Jose Police Department's Airport Division.