

Bob Schul Remembered

October 8, 2017

I actually had the distinct "pleasure" (probably the wrong word) of racing (no, that is absolutely the wrong word) Bob Schul, Jim Grelle, George Young and a team of LATC pacers in an all-comers mile in August, 1964, at Pierce Jr. College in Woodland Hills, CA. – Jeff Johnson



After testing himself against Jeff Johnson, Bob Schul won 5,000m Gold at the Tokyo Olympics. On a rainy day, he bested what was considered the strongest field ever assembled for that event. Iron sharpens iron.

We lost one of the greats recently. Bob Schul, who died at 86 on Father's Day at a nursing home in Middletown, Ohio, became the only American to win Olympic gold in the 5,000 and did it with a remarkable sprint in the final yards on a muddy cinder track.

Having recovered from mononucleosis and a calf injury and in superb condition from a training regimen emphasizing high-speed workouts, Schul

was a favorite in the 5,000. He had gone undefeated that summer while breaking an American record in the 5,000 and setting a world record in the two-mile run.

"I had told the press that I was going to win the gold medal," Schul told ESPN in 2014. "Some people said that was cocky, and I said, 'Well, what should I tell them, I was going to lose the race?' I was extremely confident."

"Asthma teaches you to breathe deep and slowly," he explained in looking back on his career. "There were races when I was getting only 80 percent air intake, so I had to make the most of every breath. The Tokyo race came at the end of the monsoon season, and the rain cleared all the pollutants."

Schul finished in 13 minutes 48.8 seconds, eight-tenths of a second in front of Harald Norpoth of Germany. Schul's teammate [Bill Dellinger](#) won the bronze medal.

"They've been telling us for years we in America were softies and couldn't win anything but the sprints," Schul told The Associated Press after the race. "I guess we showed the world we could do it."

That's an excerpt from *The New York Times*. Came in an email, one of several. Most of my friends are old enough to remember 1964. And Bob Schul.

He was special.



Robert Keyser Schul (September 28, 1937 – June 16, 2024)

That Time I Raced Bob Schul

A Remembrance By Jeff Johnson

I had just gotten off work at Severn Sporting Goods in North Hollywood, and motor-scootered (Lambretta) over to Pierce JC to see if I might break 4:20, and walked into the above. ***Bob Schul, Jim Grelle, George Young and a team of Los Angeles Track Club pacers in an all-comers mile.***

The circumstances were the '64 Olympic team was in Los Angeles, waiting to go to Tokyo. Further, the teenager Jim Ryun had just outrun Grelle, a 1960 Olympian, for a spot on the team, and Grelle, clinging to hope, thought, if he could break the World Record in the mile, the USOC would replace the "undeserving" Ryun on the team with him. Grelle arranged with his LATC teammates to pace him to a WR that night on the fast, clay track at Pierce.

Bob Schul, hearing this, thought he would run, too. If Grelle was going to run the WR, Bob figured that he would beat Grelle, and if anyone was going to replace Ryun on the team, it would be him. Schul had wanted to double

in the 1500 and 5000 in Tokyo. He figured he was the only one in the world who could beat Peter Snell at 1500m; while the U.S. Olympic Trials schedule had **not** made that double possible, the Olympic Games schedule did.

George Young, the Olympic steeplechaser, had never broken 4:00, so he tagged along, too, thinking he would never get a better chance. Plus, all the pacers were LATC guys, probably none of them slower than 4:08.

I know none of this backstory until I am on the starting line and glance over at my fellow competitors. WTF? Wasn't like any all-comers mile I had ever been in before.

Meet Management evidently knew some hours before the race that a WR attempt was on. That's why there was a timing device at 1500m, too, in case that record fell, as well. I doubt Pierce Junior College had such a mobile timing device, but USC or UCLA would have had one, and both are within 30-45 minutes of Pierce, depending on traffic. It was common to get a 1500m time in mile races in those days.

I didn't win. I went out in 61 and was a good ten meters behind the next to last person at 440. Grelle, completely thrown off his game by the presence of Schul, didn't break the WR. He didn't even win. Schul won, in 3:57 something. I don't remember whether Young broke 4:00.

I wasn't last. I caught my friend George White in the last fifty. I had been 4:01.8 at 1500, and something like 4:21 at the end.

George went off to be a college professor, I got into sneakers, Schul won Gold in the 5000, and no one replaced Ryun on the '64 Olympic team. – Jeff



Bill Dellinger and Bob Schul after the 5,000-meter race.

Bob Schul won the national three-mile title the year after the Olympics with an American record of 13:10.4.

The Tokyo Games were his only Olympics.

He was inducted into the USA Track & Field Hall of Fame in 1991.

He never again raced Jeff Johnson.

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April 2, 2020

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