

TEENAGE ATHLETE OF THE MONTH

"IT'S ALL HAPPENED SO QUICKLY"



MARIE MULDER, at first glance, appears no different than any of the soda-swilling, jumper-clad teenage girls in Class 10-J at Crossland High School, near Washington, D.C. She talks of books and boys and giggles shyly like the others, but there is a difference. She can run faster. What's more, she can run faster than the boys at Crossland, too.

Marie Mulder has been called "the brightest women's distance prospect in the nation"—large praise for a 15-year-old. She was the women's national cross-country champion at 14, and holds the national women's records at 880 yards and 800 meters, both indoors and outdoors, and at 1500 meters outdoors.

For Marie, the Olympics are the stuff her dreams are made of, and she seems certain of running the 800 at Mexico City in 1968. She hopes the 1500, which she considers her best distance, will be added to the women's Olympic agenda by 1972.

Marie began running as a child. Her father owned a summer place at Mount Lassen, California, in the Sierras, and she first developed her stamina and long stride by racing up mountain paths to 9000 feet. She raced up the paths while carrying mail for the fire lookouts.

Soon she was outrunning her older sisters, Lucinda and Christine, then her brother, Roland. She has been keeping a good distance ahead of the boys ever since. "She finds more incentive running against the boys," her mother says. "The boys don't want a girl to beat them and Marie, being a champion, doesn't want anybody to beat her."

Will Stephens, founder and coach of the gals' track team, "Will's Spikettes," discovered Marie while she was running fourth in an all-comers meet in Roseville, California, near Sacramento, her home. Stephens called her "a natural born runner," and asked her to join his club. The Mulder family says he developed her talent.

Marie's father recently took a position as Chief of Medical Care of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and the Mulders now have a home in Camp Springs, Maryland, a Washington suburb. Leaving Stephens' supervision was a disappointment for Marie.

Under Stephens' instruction, Marie first attracted national attention. She set an 800-meter record in the U.S.-Soviet Union track meet in Kiev, Russia. She participated in the Little Olympics, a test of the effects of Mexico City's 1½-mile altitude. (Despite her mountain-climbing background, she said she felt "very tired, particularly in the arms.")

Of her success, Marie says, "It's all happened so quickly. My mother doesn't want me to get conceited or spoiled, so she's giving me plenty of housework to do." Marie still finds time to be an "A" student, do 70 pushups two or three times a week, and run ten miles a day.

Besides running against the boys, she also plays football with them. Her positions are "end and middle linebacker," and in her neighborhood she's known as "Sam," for linebacker Sam Huff. "There always were some tomboy traits," she says.

There aren't many though. Marie Mulder is hazel-eyed and dark-haired, of Dutch-Indonesian heritage. She is 5-6, whippet-thin and graceful, and her long brown legs glide over grass with a rhythm that belies her speed. All who have seen her believe she will run fast enough to catch up with her dreams.

WILLIAM GILDEA

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