

# Not Habit Forming

## *Mary Spear Doesn't Let Running Run Her Life*

By DENNIS HILL  
Sentinel Sports Reporter

Distance runners are a driven group of athletes. Driven to push themselves past their limits of pain and exhaustion. The road calls and they answer without question. To some, the call becomes an obsession.

But to one of Winston-Salem's best distance runners the track is a challenge, not an obsession. Mary Spear, Forsyth Country Day's standout racer, answers the call of the road in her own way.

"Some girls are addicted to it (running). I'm not like that," Spear said while warming up before a workout at Wake Forest University this past week. "Compared to most runners my age, I'm not really that serious about it."

Serious or not, Spear has been turning in some pretty impressive performances.

In May she upset highly favored Betsy Wilkins of Durham Academy to win both the 1,600- and 3,200-meter runs at the North Carolina Independent Schools state meet.

And in July she finished second in both the 1,500- and 3,000-meter runs at the TAC Junior Olympic Region III meet at Columbia, S.C., earning a berth in the TAC National Championships July 31-August 1 at Lincoln, Neb.

Running in the Young Women's Division (16-18 years old), Spear clocked 4:59 for the 1,500 at Columbia and 10:39 for the 3,000 — both personal bests.

"I was really surprised by the time in the 3,000," she said. "It was twenty seconds faster than I'd ever gone before."

Spear advanced as far as the TAC regional three years ago, where she finished second in her age group as a 14-year-old. But only competitors in the top two age groups go on to the national meet, so Spear stayed at home.

After reaching the regionals, Spear took some time off from competition. She continued to put in mileage but "really wasn't in training."

"I just wasn't interested in it any more," she said.

This past fall she picked up her pace, running cross country for the Furies.

"I decided that I should run one year and see what I could do," she said. "I ran more miles this past fall than I'd ever run before. I worked my way up to five miles per day. That's a lot for me."

The training paid off this spring, when she encountered the favored Wilkins in the state meet. The Durham runner was supposed to have the advantage in pure speed.

"She had been a sprinter. The year before she beat me in the 800 meters," Spear said.

But Spear set a blistering pace in the 3,200 meters, burning up Wilkins' reserves. In a final stretch drive, Spear edged ahead to stay.

"She ran with me the whole way until I left her on the last two laps. Then she came back on me but I out-sprinted her at the end," Spear said, remembering the ordeal.

The time was a new state meet record of 11:24.03, a full 59 seconds faster than the old mark. The next day she again defeated Wilkins, this time with a new state meet standard of 5:18.6 over 1,600 meters — 16 seconds better than the old record.

By mid-summer Spear had advanced through TAC competition to the Columbia meet. Only the top two finishers in each event would earn the right to run in Lincoln.

In the 3,000 there was little contest. A runner from Alabama set the pace and Spear simply held on for second. The 1,500 turned out to be much the same, with the same runner pulling out to an early lead, but Spear

does have second thoughts about her own tactics.

"She pulled away after two laps and I thought she was going too fast," Spear said. "I should have stayed up, shouldn't have let her go. I finished four seconds behind her and I think I could've beaten her if I'd stayed with her. I have a good kick. I've won a lot of races that way, coming from behind."

Still, the trip to Lincoln was assured. But Spear hasn't set her sights too high.

"I don't expect to place," she said. "My goal is to just get into the finals. I think that's realistic."

"I'm mainly going for the experience and for my grandparents," she said. "They live in Nebraska and are going to come up and see me run."

With the national meet just days away, she has been intensifying her training. Interval 880's build the foundation for those come-from-behind finishes.

"I run them at race pace," she said. "Then wait for my pulse rate to get back to 20 beats per ten seconds and run again. I keep doing that until my pulse doesn't go back down within a minute or so."

Spear is studying at the Governor's School at Salem College this summer and is having to sandwich her practice sessions into an already busy schedule. But there are priorities.

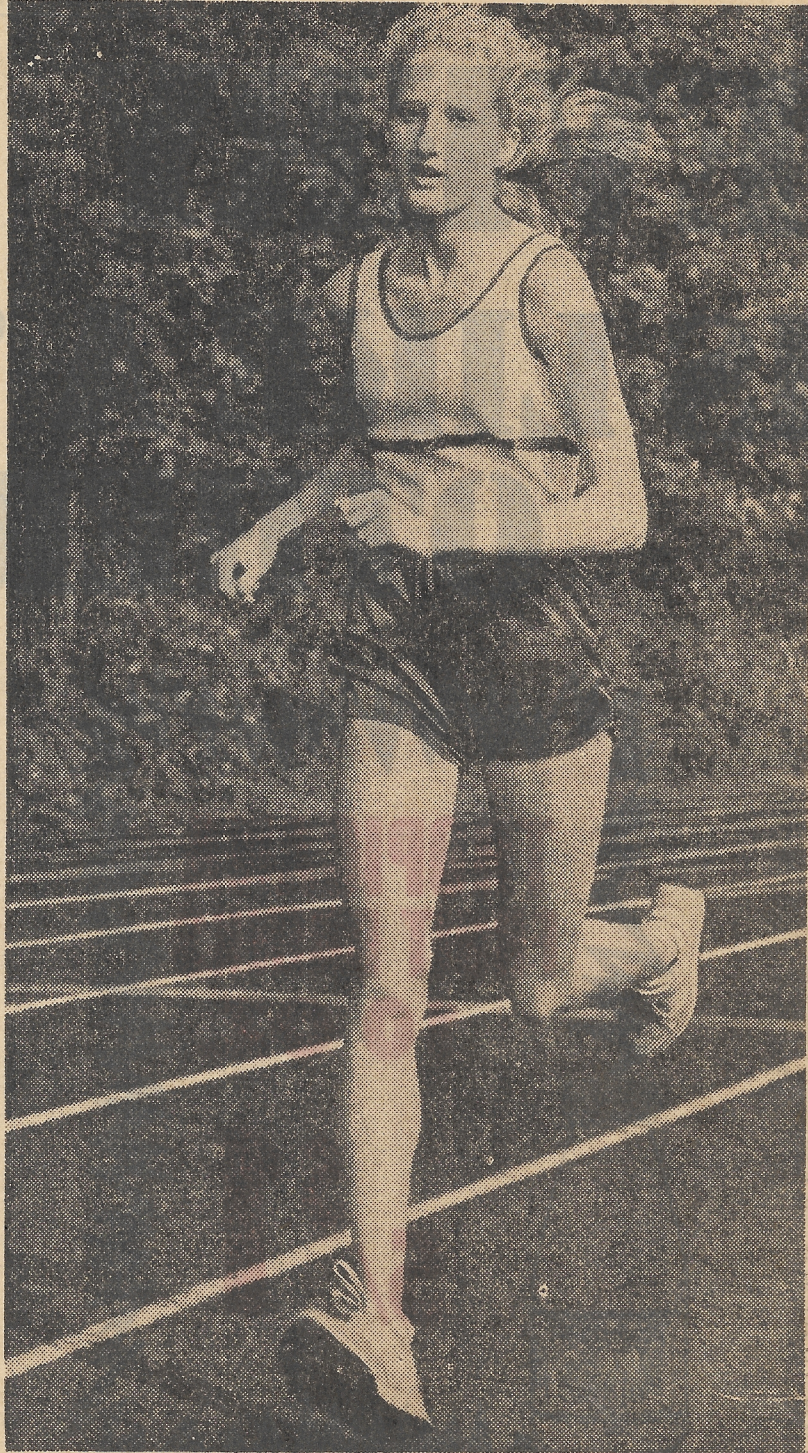
"I'm running about 30 miles a week now, which is a lot for me," she said. "Most of my workouts are hard. I figure if I'm going to come out here and give myself pain I might as well make it worth it."

"But a lot of girls run 60 miles a week," she said. "I don't know if I really want that or not."

A collegiate career seems imminent, but she remains adamant about the place running holds in her life.

"I want a school that doesn't place so much pressure on the runner," she said before hitting the track for more of those 880's. "I'm going to school for an education."





Sentinel Sports Photo by David Rolfe

**ON THE ROAD** — Mary Spear of Winston-Salem works out in preparation for the TAC National Junior Olympic track meet.