

Tillman Jumps At Chance To Compete

By MIKE CEARLEY
Special to The Observer

WAXHAW — Two years ago John Tillman decided to try out for the Parkwood High track team. It was a good thing he had a sense of humor because he sure made a laughing stock of himself when he tried the triple jump.

Tillman still laughs when he recalls how the veteran jumpers ribbed him. But nobody will be laughing at Tillman this weekend as he competes in the National Junior Olympics in Lincoln, Neb.

Tillman is among six members of the Charlotte Striders track club who qualified for the national meet in the Eastern Regionals earlier this month in Columbia. It is his second year at the Nationals. Last year he placed sixth in the 15-16 age group.

"I didn't know much about it (the triple jump) at first," said Tillman. "My freshman year I was just experimenting around and went down to the pits and watched the other guys.

"The veteran jumpers picked at me a lot, that was one thing that gave me the determi-

nation to work at it. I surprised a lot of those guys when I came back and beat them the next year. They learned a little respect for me."

Tillman, who lives about 10 miles south of Waxhaw, is the first person that town has sent to the National Junior Olympics. Living in a small rural community, though, hasn't kept Tillman from reaching national prominence thanks to the Striders.

"Things worked out just right for everybody. My high school coaches (Cecil Moser and Sam Bryant) took me to the state and regional meets last year as an unattached competitor. Then, came time for the Nationals and we had trouble getting enough money to go. Then, my coaches got in touch with the Striders coach (Jim Early) and they just happened to need an extra person to charter a flight."

Tillman said he is excited about returning to Nationals where he picked up a lot of valuable tips last year. He feels the competition will be

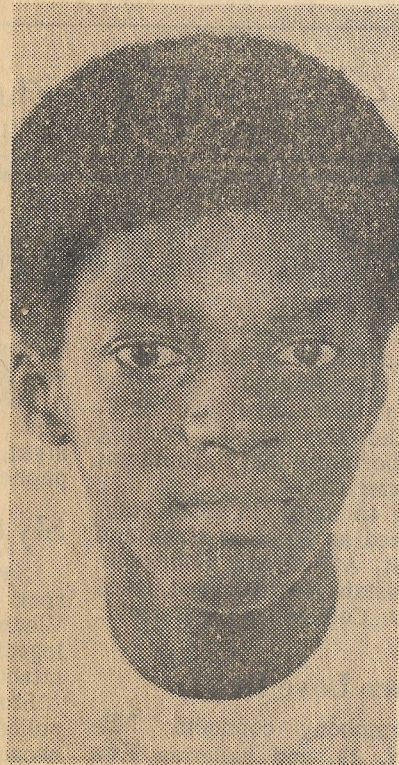
stronger in the older age bracket.

"I've moved up with the big boys," said Tillman. "Last year I was at the top of my age bracket, this year I am at the bottom. That's why I am so excited about going, the competition will be much stronger. I heard Virginia has a jumper who jumps over 50 feet and I heard a lot of jumpers from the Midwest have gone over 50 feet.

"The atmosphere in Lincoln is just great. The crowd is fantastic and the weather is hot. I like it hot but not humid. Humidity zaps you."

Tillman said it was humid in Columbia, but that didn't stop him from his best leap. He jumped 50-1¾ and finished second to Raleigh's Chris Brooks who jumped 50-6½. He actually had a jump of 52-0 that was disallowed because he took too much time warming up.

"It was disappointing having my best jump taken away, but then I wasn't too disappointed because it proved that I could do it," he said.



John Tillman