



## **Who is Billy Mills?**

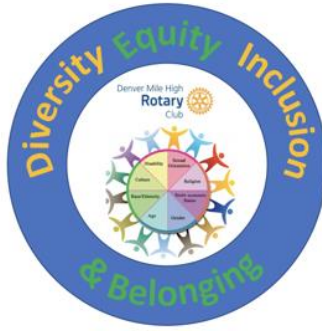
Article submitted by Debra Flick, Chair of DMHR DEI&B Committee

Billy Mills (born 1938) won what sports writers called the most sensational race ever run in Olympic history. A relative unknown, he came from behind to beat world champion runners in the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games. Miller later became one of the most noted of motivational speakers.

Mills was born on June 30, 1938 on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. The young Native American ran like the wind over the prairies and hills near his Lakota Sioux Reservation home. His mother, who was one quarter Sioux, died when Mills was seven year old. His father, who was three quarters Sioux, died five years later. Native Americans considered him to be of mixed blood. The white world called him a Native American. Mills claimed that running helped him to find his identity and to blunt the pain of rejection.

As a youngster, Mills admired the great war chief, Crazy Horse. This spiritual leader of the Lakota challenged him to follow his dreams, reach for goals, and succeed in life. Crazy Horse was a warrior, who led his life through responsibility, humility, the power of giving, and spirituality. Mills tried to live by the knowledge, the wisdom, and the integrity of Crazy Horse. After breaking many high school track records on the reservation, Mills received a scholarship to attend Kansas University. He then became an officer in United States Marine Corps.

As a young Marine lieutenant, Mills had been allowed to train for the 1964 Olympics, held in Tokyo, Japan. He qualified for the team in

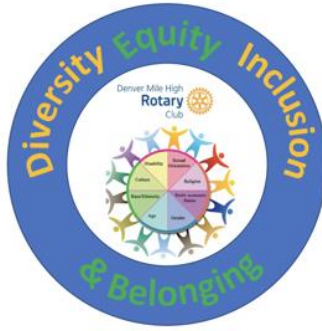


both the 10,000-meter race and the marathon, but was not expected to win either race. No American had ever won the 10,000-meter race in the Olympics. But Mills had always lived according to the teachings of his father, who had challenged him to live his life as a warrior and assume responsibility for himself.

Australia's Ron Clarke was world famous as a runner in the 10,000-meter event and was the odds-on favorite to win a gold medal. Mohamed Gammoudi, a Tunisian runner, was expected to finish in second place for the silver medal. Any of the other runners were capable of taking a third place bronze medal, according to the experts. It was thought that none of the other runners could win.

Mills, a believer in visualization or "imagery," did not permit a negative thought to enter his head as he worked toward the biggest race of his life. He had for some time before been visualizing a young Native American boy winning the 10,000-meter event at the 1964 Olympics. He created that picture in his mind over and over again. If a thought about not winning came into his mind, he would spend hours erasing the negativity. There could be only one result!

As Mills lined up, there was only one thing on his mind, and that was to win. The gun cracked and the field broke away from the starting grid. As expected, Clarke and Gammoudi fell into first and second place. Mid-pack jostling and shoving allowed the leaders to pull away and Mills dropped back. It appeared he was out of contention and few paid any attention to the sleek Native American who was well back in the field. If they had looked, they would have seen him running as smoothly as the wind, without effort, in perfect control. Near the end of the race, Clarke and Gammoudi remained



in the lead. The Japanese crowd cheered politely at what they had known all along was going to happen.

But suddenly the smooth running Mills stepped up his pace. He was closing on the leaders. The crowd fell silent. Mills increased his smooth, even pace, and drew closer to the leaders. With the three runners speeding down the last home-stretch, Mills made a spectacular, totally unexpected move. He surged in front of Clarke, who was still running in second place, then Gammoudi, who was leading. At the tape, it was Mills, Gammoudi and Clarke. Mills had beaten Gammoudi by three yards and Clarke by a full second. He had completed the race in a new Olympic record time of 28:24.4, a full 46 seconds better than his best previous time.

The crowd went wild with cheering, for they had seen the impossible happen. They had seen an underdog, an unknown, a runner who wasn't given a chance to win, beat the favorite. They had witnessed one of the greatest upsets in Olympic history. After his great running victory at Tokyo, Mills was honored with the warrior name of 'Makata Taka Hela' by the Lakota Nation. It means "love your country" and "respects the earth."

Although he was never sent to Vietnam because of his rigorous training schedule in the Marines, Mills was deeply affected by the many combat deaths of men from his unit. He felt that he could not participate in a sport when people were being killed in Vietnam. Mills finished his Marine Corps tour of duty as a captain, then reentered civilian life as an official of the Department of the Interior. He followed this with a very successful career as an insurance salesman. Mills retired from his insurance business in 1994 and became a motivational speaker.



Mills, who was elected to the U.S. Olympic Hall of Fame in 1984, moved with his wife, Pat, and their three daughters, Christy, Lisa, and Billie JoAnne, to Fair Oaks, a Sacramento, California, suburb. He devoted all of his time to speaking to Native American youths and raising money for charities, such as Christian Relief Services.