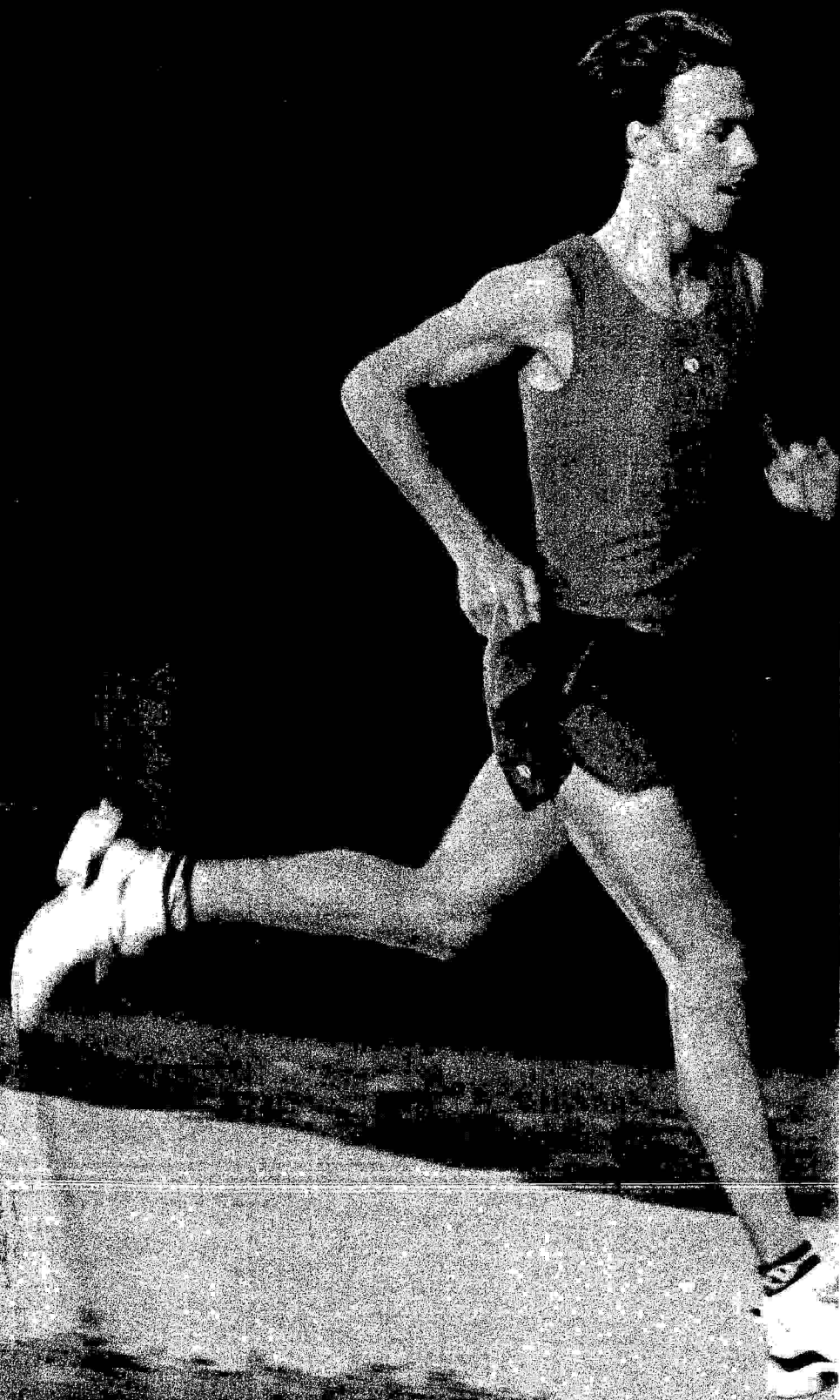


# MIND



## FREE TIP #5 Run Faster By Relaxing

"Almost any runner who can look less tortured while running will probably run faster," says Dave Martin, Ph.D., an exercise physiologist and advisor to USA Track & Field.

For that "less tortured" look, concentrate on this sequence:

1. Most important, relax your jaw. "If you can relax your jaw," says Martin, "everything starts to open up."
2. Consciously drop your shoulders. They should be loose and down, not tightly bunched up around your ears.
3. Shake out your hands and arms.
4. Think "smooth, efficient, fast." Say it again: "Smooth, efficient, fast."

**RUNNER'S WORLD** brings you enough inspiration and motivation to keep you running for a lifetime! Send for your two risk-free trial issues today!

# coach's corner

BY MARK COUGHLIN

## Relax, Max

**W**e live in a very tense society. As we struggle to meet deadlines and make ends meet, we keep doctors and chiropractors busy trying to undo the physical results of all that tension. We could all benefit from a little unwinding. At first glance, the concepts of relaxation and long distance running may seem mutually exclusive. After all, these words conjure up images on the opposite ends of the exertion spectrum. However, in reality, relaxation is one of the keys to successful and enjoyable running.

We runners need to learn to shed our unnecessary muscle tension, even as we move along at ever faster paces. If you watch a video of a world-class distance runner in action, say, Kenenisa Bekele in the Olympic 10,000-meter final, you will see what this sort of relaxation is all about. While flying along at under 4:30 per-mile pace, his carriage reveals little of his internal effort level. His face and jaw show no tension, his shoulders are low and loose, and his arms swing easily without a hint of tightness.

This makes for a nice video, but how does it help him go faster, longer? Relaxation makes us more biomechanically efficient, meaning that we use less energy at a given pace than we would if we were running in a tense, tight state. Why? Let's say you're running with your shoulders up high and tight, your fists clenched and your face in a grimace. You are then using up extra fuel and oxygen by flexing and holding taut a bunch of muscles that do nothing to move you further down the road. This amounts to working against, rather than with, your body.

Unfortunately, the more we become fatigued on a run, the more we tend to tighten up, making things worse. So, how do we remedy this wound-up posture? Start with the upper extremities. The face and jaw should be completely lax and the hands should be gently cupped as if holding potato chips that you don't want to break. The shoulders should be as low and relaxed as possible with the arms swinging smoothly as if on well-oiled hinges. Take deep, full breaths from the belly and as you exhale, visualize tension leaving the body.

This more mellow approach can take time to develop, but it is something that we can and should continuously strive for. Perform frequent checks during your runs to make sure that you are not tightening up anywhere, especially as fatigue begins to creep in late in the run. Eventually, you should be able to run in a very relaxed state even during intense races and workouts. This will not only make you more efficient and quite possibly faster, but will also make running feel more comfortable and therefore more enjoyable. It also helps to prevent those annoying shoulder cramps and side stitches that many of us experience. So, loosen up and let go—in running and in life. ●

