

# Fame spoiling fun for Graves

By Jerry Shnay

**TOM GRAVES** would like to run for fun, but he can't.

It's not a matter of performance for the Carl Sandburg High School junior. It's the pressure. Tom Graves is something special.

He's been called "The Machine" and the nickname fits the style of running that is carrying Graves toward virtually every high school distance record.

Last Saturday, Graves ran the third best two-mile in Illinois prep history [8:52.8] and came back a couple of hours later with the fastest mile this year in Illinois, a 4:16.7.

Only Craig Virgin of Lebanon [8:40.9] and Dave Merrick of Lincoln-Way [8:46.9] have bettered Graves' time in the two-mile. And both were seniors when they hit their peaks.

IT'S NOT a question of whether Graves can approach those standards. It's just when. And that's what bothers him.

"I guess it's nice to be on top, but on the other hand, you know everyone is after you," said the powerful, curly-haired runner. "I like to run just for fun. I don't like to get talked about. Everyone is looking at you and taking your picture."

But anonymity is one thing that will elude Graves. It will also bypass Graves' teammate, senior Bob Hicks, who was second in the state mile with 4:09.1 last spring.

Hicks and Graves complement each other on the strong Sandburg team coached by Gene Kowert. "We lead different lifestyles," says Hicks. "Tom gets up early, works hard, and maybe is in bed by eight o'clock. Me? I just can't do that."

All Hicks has done this year was a 9:30.3 in the 3,000-meter steeplechase, which is run infrequently in high school. Hicks' time is the best in the nation this year.

**NEITHER RUNNER** thought about track and distance running in grade school. Hicks wanted to make his athletic mark in basketball. "I was a 5-6 guard in 8th grade who could shoot well, but I had trouble playing defense," he says.

Graves was considered a strong swim-

mer. As a freshman he came within a fraction of a second of qualifying for the state finals in the 100-yard butterfly and the 200-yard individual medley.

When Graves was a freshman he tried cross-country. His best overland time was 15:05—sensational for a ninth grader. In the spring, he clocked a mile in 4:22 and a two-mile of 10:02.

"When I came to high school, Bob was the king," Graves recalled. "I didn't know anything about running. Bob helped me with training and form."

Graves soon began to realize how good he could be. "I just lost to Terry Bauer of Bloom in the cross-country sectionals. He went downstate while I didn't. I thought, 'Hey, maybe with a little thing here or there, I could go downstate.'"

In his sophomore year Graves finished third in state cross-country in 14:18, had a 4:18 mile, and won the state two-mile in 9:00.5. He won individual honors in the state cross-country meet last season.

**ALL THIS RUSH** of fame colors Graves' outlook. "I like to have a good time with the runners. I like to talk to them; to make friends. Now everyone looks at me."

Hicks looks at running in a different way.

"I think I'm a competition runner," he said. "There are a lot of good distance runners in the state this year. [Todd] McCallister [Deerfield], [Jim] Spivey [Fenton], and [Tom] Johnson [Palatine] are just three who could win state titles," said Hicks.

Hicks and Graves were 1-2 or 2-1 all through the cross-country season. Hicks admits that "Tom might have been a little better late in the season," then tries to shrug off any comparison.

"It's not going to be easy to double in the mile and two-mile in the state meet," he says. "I'll try and run with the field instead of against any record."

**HICKS DECIDED** on Auburn [preventive medicine course] before the outdoor season started. "I wanted to get it out of the way so I could concentrate on track."

Coach Kowert, who didn't even go out for track and field when he was a student at Lyons Township, has one of the most successful long-distance programs



Tribune Photo by Don Casper

Tom Graves of Carl Sandburg, who has run the third fastest two-mile (8:52.8) in Illinois high school history and the fastest mile (4:16.7) of the season.

in the state.

In addition to Graves and Hicks, sophomores Mike Choffin [4:26] and Mike Keane [4:37] give the school fine depth in mile events. Another sophomore, miler Jim Sunta, and freshman Ray Krauss compete on the frosh-soph level. In all, Kowert has 10 runners who have gone under five minutes in the mile.