

AS A SPORT, RUNNING HAS NO BOUNDARIES

By DON SIKORSKI
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I don't believe that competing in road races is an intimidating experience. Even less so if you've been at it for over 20 years at a rate of about two dozen races a year or so. For competitive runners, race performance relies primarily on the weeks, months, and even years of preparation prior to the event. Running a strong race does require getting to the starting line on time, a proper warm-up, executing fairly consistent mile splits, and getting tough when the pain starts kicks in. But all of those factors won't mean much if your conditioning program has been sub par. So in essence, 90% of the work has already been done. Beginners shouldn't be intimidated either. I've yet to witness the top finishers in the race heckle the slower runners for not racing fast enough. And most races don't have time limits; the trick to finishing is to just keep putting one foot in front of the other. The camaraderie amongst the running community extends from the top finishers to the back of the pack.

Like most any other sport or contest, every participant brings to the table a varying degree of expectations and seriousness. Those who attend a road race hoping to perform to their greatest potential usually leave little to chance in terms of pre-race preparation, from rest to pre-race diet to getting to the starting line on time. Participation in road races is open to anyone from Olympic champions to beginner runners who have yet to prove that they can even complete the race distance. All start on the same starting line, run the same course over the same distance, and finish in the same location. Times can be measured against the top athletes on a level playing field, and if you think that you're a better runner than someone else, you have every chance to prove it when the gun goes off. The stopwatch doesn't lie. This is one of the reasons that running is a great sport. Almost anyone can run. George Young, the former U.S. record holder, once said that there's nothing special about the 100-mile weeks he does in training. Almost anyone can do it. The challenge is getting out of bed each and every morning and heading out the door to run.

I've enjoyed running and racing as a sport for the simple reason that they are no boundaries or limitations. Any of us can make a commitment to start training like a world champion if we desire to do so. The sky is the limit. I realized at an early age that if I wanted to be good at anything, it would take great amounts of practice and effort on my part (my golf game, or lack thereof, proves this point). But no matter how many hours I spent during my youth out in the cold shooting baskets, the NBA was not likely to come calling anytime soon (maxing out at 5'10" with no vertical leap didn't help either). But after a less-than-spectacular debut as a cross-country and track runner in high school, I learned that hard work and consistent training would yield positive results in a sport like running. Quite simply, natural talent takes a backseat to training and conditioning in distance running more than just about any other sport I can think of. I would argue that even the Kenyan athletes who have been dominating our sport for years aren't born superior to Americans. The truth is, they do the work, running to and from school at an early age, and their national class runners often train two or even three times per day. America society does not make this type of lifestyle envious in our country. But runners like Frank Shorter and Bill Rodgers put in that same effort years ago and produced outstanding results. The opportunity is out there for our next generation of runners willing to do the work.

Racing Roundup

- Colorado sophomore Dathan Ritzenhein will most likely red-shirt cross-country this fall after suffering a stress fracture of the femur. Ritzenhein, the 2nd most touted high schooler two years ago (behind Alan Webb), was 4th in last fall's NCAA XC Championship and was expected to provide the 1-2 punch with teammate Jorge Torres (2nd in 2001) that would lead the Buffaloes to an NCAA Championship.
- Dan Browne took a big step forward in being America's next great hope in distance running. Browne, a U.S. Army graduate now being coached by former marathon world record holder Alberto Salazar, won the Twin Cities Marathon this past weekend in his debut at the 26.2 miles distance. Browne's time of 2:11:35 bettered defending champion Joshua Kipkemboi (2nd in 2:11:45) and Jackson Kipngok (3rd in 2:11:51), and earned him the "A" Olympic Marathon qualifying standard in the process. Browne's recent performances at shorter distances, including wins at the New Haven 20K in 2001 and 2002 and a recent strong finish in the CVS Providence 5K (6th in 13:53 to conclude a 100+ mile training week), proved that he was ready for a strong marathon. Browne, who narrowed the lead pack down to 3 at 18 miles and used his sub 4-minute mile speed to outback his Kenyan competitors over the final half mile, pocketed \$34,000 for his effort. Jill Gaitenby of Providence, RI was the top American female, 2nd female overall, in 2:36:10. The Twin Cities race served as this year's U.S. Marathon Championship.
- Canterbury's Chad Johnson won the Eliot 5K in Eliot, Maine on September 28th. Johnson, 26, outran a highly-competitive field of nearly 1,000 runners to claim the win in 14:51, 3 seconds off his personal best for the distance.

This Month in History

October 23rd, 1983 – The Villanova men and the Boston College women claim Big East Cross-Country titles at Boston's Franklin Park. Ireland's Marcus O'Sullivan, who would go on to become the first Master's runner to break the 4 minute mile barrier indoors, leads his Villanova team to a narrow 3 point victory over Georgetown, by earning the individual win in 22:48, 8 seconds better than Georgetown's Kevin King, a former Connecticut state cross-country champion. The men's race up front clearly has an Irish feel to it, as Richard O'Flynn of Providence (22:59), Gerry O'Reilly of Villanova (23:00), and Andy Ronan of Providence (23:04) round out the top 5 finishers. UConn, who would finish 5th overall with 135 points, is led by Mike Gagne (12th), Tim Devalve (15th), John Bysiewicz (25th), Tom Cartelli (42nd), and Paul Birkmeyer (48th). In the women's race, Boston College easily outruns Villanova 37-50 for the team title, with Georgetown's Suzanne Girard claiming the individual title in 16:22. Maria Fahy (6th overall) and Montville's Kathy Hawkes (33rd) lead Connecticut.

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