

RUNNING RESOLUTIONS FOR 2003

By DON SIKORSKI
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Health clubs recognize significant enrollment increases in the month of January. By mid-February, however, most of those same people who signed their lives away for a six-month minimum will be rationalizing why it's acceptable to cut their losses and hibernate to the couch until the arrival of spring. After all, exercise is hard work, and Americans have easily adapted to the concept of drive-thru windows at McDonald's or Dunkin' Donuts. Every health study that is revealed as of late agrees on one conclusion: we are a nation of fat and unfit people, and that the trend is getting worse. More than half of elementary school children can't measure up to basic fitness requirements. Most people don't meet the recommended minimum criteria of exercising three days weekly for at least 30 minutes. Whether you're an avid runner who never misses a day of running or a couch potato in need of a motivational boost, a new year brings with it a new opportunity to improve your own level of physical fitness. Studies have also show that children raised by fit parents are more likely to become fit adults, so do yourself and your family a favor and lead by example. Here are a few fitness resolutions for 2003 to consider:

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY: Put that glass of eggnog down and listen up. Realizing that being a bit overweight or out of shape is your own problem. Getting fit or improving upon your own level of fitness, whether you're a casual jogger or a serious runner, is your own responsibility. Make 2003 the year that you decide to make an improvement in your own level of fitness.

NO EXCUSES: There are plenty of reasons not to exercise. In our busy day to day hectic lives, it is possible to ignore just about anything under the premise of being too busy. President Bush runs every day and can run 20 minutes and change for 3 miles. If the President can make time to exercise, then we can too.

RUN LONG: If you're one of those runners that run the same course or the same distance day after day, try extending the distance of your long run. Try running for time instead of for distance, and add time each week. Reduce the total running time every 3 or 4 weeks and then build back up again. Don't worry about pace; start slow and get the minutes under your belt. Increase your mileage gradually; going from a long run of 5 miles to 12 miles right away invites injury and burnout. While intensity burns calories at a faster rate, duration will burn a greater percentage of fat. Another plus following the holiday season.

CROSS TRAIN: Add some variety into your training program. There are an unlimited number of activities that will maintain or improve your fitness level and keep you interested in fitness. Activities that count as cross-training: swimming, weight training, rowing, bicycling, walking, aerobics, yoga, plyometrics, kickboxing, etc. Activities that may be enjoyable but do not qualify as cross-training: darts, billiards, bowling, Playstation 2.

IMPROVE YOUR DIET: While I'm not recommending a complete health food diet, most of us admittedly need improvement in this area. However, I'm a believer that the more exercise people do, the more entitlements that come with it, one of them being the rewards of eating and drinking. Former world class marathon runner Don Kardong was once quoted as saying that "without ice cream, there would be chaos and darkness". In my opinion, Kardong's high mileage habit entitled him to eat ice cream guilt free. Moderation is the key. I often use the lure of food and beverage as a motivating factor: running a few miles or getting to the gym should entitle you to a little indulgence.

SMALL STEPS LEAD TO LONG-TERM GAINS: We understand that infants must learn to crawl before they walk and walk before they run, yet we as adults expect to see physical results in the mirror after just a few weeks of exercise or dieting. Realize that getting started in an exercise program and making a commitment to improvement is the first step.

IF YOU FALL OFF THE WAGON, GET RIGHT BACK ON: It's easier to exercise when you make it a consistent part of your weekly routine. But miss a stretch of time due to vacation, illness, or other obligations or commitments, and the temptation to return to laziness becomes even stronger. Realize that you will realize temporary setback throughout the year. The trick is getting back into the swing of things before the negative progress becomes detrimental.

APPRECIATE WHAT YOU HAVE: Whenever I see someone physically handicapped participating in sports, someone in a wheelchair finishing the Boston Marathon, or even someone overweight in the gym or jogging down the road, I appreciate the fact that I am physically capable of exercising.

Do yourself a favor and plan to make an improvement in January. No matter how overweight or out of shape you feel you may be, set some short-term and long-term goals and give them your best shot. Even serious runners who train every day can find plenty of areas that they need improvement in. Best wishes for a happy and healthy 2003.

Racing Roundup

- Ahmed Haji of Conard (West Hartford) High School and Megan Owen of Killingly represented the state of Connecticut well at the 24th Annual Footlocker National High School Cross-Country Championships in San Diego. Haji, just a junior with a Connecticut and New England title to his credit, finished 8th in the 32 runner field and was the top runner from the Northeast Region. Chris Solinsky, who will compete for Wisconsin next season, was the overall winner. Chris Solinsky, who will compete for his home state Wisconsin Badgers next season, cruised to an impressive win, tying Dathan Ritzenhein's record for the largest margin of victory (20 seconds) of a year ago. In the girl's race, Owen also posted an impressive 8th place finish and helped her Northeast Region Team put 5 in the top 9 to win in impressive fashion. Zoe Nelson, a 15 year-old sophomore from Montana, won the race in 17:30. Both Owen and 7th place finisher Katelyn Kaltenbach of Aurora, Illinois will join returning NCAA Champion Shanahan Flanagan at the University of North Carolina next year.

This Month in History

December 14th, 1986 – Marc Davis of San Diego High School wins the Kinney (not Footlocker) National High School Cross-Country Championships in his hometown of San Diego. Davis, who would go on to become a 2 time NCAA champion at Arizona, a Olympian in the 3,000 meter steeplechase, and the U.S. record holder at 2 Miles, broke away from the field just after halfway and cruises through the Morley Field 5,000 meter layout in 14:38, good enough for a 9 second win and just 1.3 seconds shy of Reuben Reina's 1985 course record. After an 8th place finish a year prior, the confident Davis made good on his prediction of a win, beating two standout runners in the process: senior Todd Williams of Monroe, Michigan and junior Bob Kennedy of Westerville, Ohio, who would go on to win at Kinney the following year. In the girls' race, Erin Keough of McLean, Virginia, who had outrun future Olympian Suzy Favor a year ago, becomes the first girl to earn back-to-back Kinney championships, running 14:38 for the 4,000-meter course. 16 years later, Reina's 14:36 and Davis' 14:37 are still # 1 and #2 on the all-time list.

Don Sikorski writes a twice-monthly running column for the Norwich Bulletin. His "Coach's Corner" column can be accessed at www.moheganstriders.org. He can also be reached by e-mail at kdcsikorski@netzero.net.