

ELITE DESERVE THEIR REWARDS

By DON SIKORSKI
Special to the Bulletin

One of the greatest things about distance running is the fact that the sport is open to anyone who wants to participate. While I'll never personally be allowed onto Fenway Park to play third base for the Red Sox or be asked to call signals as quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys, I do have the opportunity to enter a national championship road race and line up side by side with the best runners in the country. And if I can keep up with them for a few miles, they'll notice me. That's not likely to happen, of course, due to one primary factor: elite runners train harder than we do. It's true. Oh, sure, talent and youth are certainly key components for distance running success, but the bottom line is that elite runners have rightfully earned their place at the front of the pack as a result of years and years of hard work, dedication, and a ton of miles. Let's compare training logs and see why the elite deserves their rewards.

Khalid Khannouchi is the best distance runner that the United States has to offer. Mr. Khannouchi has earned that title by running a marathon in a world best time of 2:05:38, which breaks down to just under 4 minutes and 48 seconds per mile for 26.2 miles, an amazing athletic accomplishment (Khannouchi also owns 3 of the 4 fastest marathons ever run, proving that his world record effort was no fluke). By comparison, the average finishing time for most marathon runners hovers around the 4½-hour range. There are also plenty of people who complete marathons in over six hours, which requires a pace of only 13:44 per mile by comparison. And while genetics do play a role, the significant variation in race times between Khannouchi and the 6-hour marathoner or the masses of marathon participants out there is primarily a result of the time spent training and preparing for competition. The enormous amount of miles that Khannouchi and his world class counterparts log during a typical week of training produce the lean, muscular physique, the 6 percent body fat, the efficient stride, the powerful heart and lungs, and the aerobic capacity required to run such a long distance at such a fast pace. As a result of carrying out this extremely difficult workload over a number of years, Khannouchi has molded himself a lean, 125-pound body on his 5'5" frame. By comparison, recent studies have determined that over 60 percent of men in the United States are considered to be overweight. Most of Khannouchi's 100+ mile weeks in Albuquerque, New Mexico are conducted at a pace that even top local runners would struggle at. And while most of us training daily after an 8-10 hour work day are considered by our peers to be ambitious, elite runners like Khannouchi may conduct three training sessions per day, comprised of fast interval workouts on a track at 95% effort or 2 hour long runs during early morning hours. He runs when he's tired, runs when it rains, runs when he doesn't feel like running. Elite runners run the miles and put in the time training because it is their job.

Taking that comparison down to the next level, the top local runner who may run a weekend 5K in say 16 minutes or better probably trains harder than the average midpack runner, who may log less than half the mileage at a much more pedestrian pace. And while factors like age, genetics, injury prevention, and natural ability all play a role, the bottom line is that success in distance running requires hard work, and generally speaking, a greater workload, conducted over a course of time and in the proper manner, will yield better results than those of a lesser-trained competitor. I've always kept that thought in the back of my mind each time I got hammered into the ground in a road race. The front runners have earned the opportunity to finish first.

Racing Roundup

Uncasville's Chris McCormack, now competing at Southern Connecticut State University, won the USATF State 1-Mile Championship in Harwinton on July 5th. McCormack led his Mohegan Strider teammates to the team title by virtue of the team's 1-5-6-7-8 finish, with his winning time of 4:30 on the slightly uphill course bettering Chad Johnson's previous course record from a year ago.....The Mohegan Striders Summer Racing Series continues in Norwich's Mohegan Park every Thursday evening through August 28th. The ½ mile kids run starts at 6:30pm, with a 1 mile developmental run at 6:45pm and the 3 mile recreation race starting at 7:00pm. All three events are free and begin and end in the center of the park. All levels of ability are welcome. Contact the Norwich Recreation Department @ 823-3791 for more information.

This Month in History

July 10th, 1993 – Just 5 short days after his countryman Richard Chelimo broke the world record in the 10,000 meter run in Stockholm, Sweden, Kenya's Yobes Ondieki becomes the new world record holder and the first man to break the 27 minutes barrier for the distance. The 32 year-old Ondieki clocked 26:58.38 at the Mobil Bislett Games in Oslo, Norway, slashing more than 9 seconds off Chelimo's previous mark of 27:07.91. He took the lead for good with 8 laps remaining after opening with a 13:28 5K split, averaging just over 65 seconds per lap for the 6.2 mile distance. Todd Williams of the United States was 5th in the race in a very respectable 27:40.37. Prior to July, Arturo Barrios of Mexico held the previous world best for 10,000 meters at 27:08.23 in 1989. It was the 50th world record since 1924 set at Bislett Stadium.

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.