

JUST A HAMSTRING AWAY

By DON SIKORSKI
Special to the Bulletin

In the prime of his racing career, Ireland's John Treacey once rationalized that despite the level of fitness he had achieved, that he was "only a hamstring injury away from oblivion". Elite runners certainly walk a fine line between peak performance and being slowed by injury, but runners at all levels will eventually have to face the injury demons sooner or later. Any competitive runner whose experienced being sidelined with an injury knows just what Treacey was talking about. And anyone who has ever shared a household with a runner certainly appreciates our company much more when we're able to participate in our daily ritual.

Avoiding injuries are one of the keys to success in most sports (just ask any Fantasy Football owner who's had the misfortune of drafting a Terrell Davis or Jamal Anderson in past years). But injuries are a part of sports, and runners, like football players, get injured often. Some injuries are nagging, some are short-lived and disappear in a few days, others re-occur just when you're rounding into prime racing shape. For professional athletes, the stakes are much higher, as money and career longevity play a huge role. But for people hammering out serious workloads in a repetitive motion sport like running, the likelihood of getting injured increases as the workload and intensity of the training does. Much like trading stocks, the greater the reward, the greater the risk.

Competitive runners are stubborn people by nature. Past memories of completing a collegiate cross-country season with a cracked bone in my foot or running 80-90 miles per week to prepare for a marathon while suffering from a painful bout of plantar fasciitis are just a few stunts I recall that weren't too pleasant at the time. Bursitis, tendinitis, herniated discs, shinsplints, stress fractures; you name it, most runners have dealt with it at one time or another. At times I'm on a first-name basis with the ice pack in the freezer. Injuries can also result in both a physical and emotional setback for runners, often erasing months of fitness derived from hard work. When these types of injuries occur, runners keep the Physical Therapists, Chiropractors, Osteopaths, Podiatrists, Orthopedists, and Massage Therapists in business. And these trained specialists now become our new coaches. Find ones that posses an understanding of competitive athletics, and the runner has now gained valuable ally, provided we heed their well-intentioned advice.

Runners who push their bodies to the brink walk a fine line between top-flight fitness and being sidelined with an injury. The challenge is to have a secondary plan in place; something to substitute for the time and energy that running borrows from our daily schedules. This alternative plan will also relieve family and friends from having to deal with any our emotional setbacks (i.e. injured runners can become grumpy people). I try to view injuries as a blessing in disguise, offering a chance to cross-train, enjoy other activities, and most importantly, reflect back and appreciate being able to run healthy. And I always try and remember that no matter how invincible we may feel at times, we're only a hamstring injury away from oblivion.

Racing Roundup

- Masters Runner Brian Lundie of Gales Ferry ran well at the Las Vegas International Marathon on February 3rd, finishing the 26.2-mile race in 3:21:05, good enough for 346th place overall.
- Speaking of injuries, University of Michigan freshman Alan Webb, who made history last year by erasing Jim Ryan's high school mile record, has officially redshirted this year's Indoor Track season due to a bout with achilles tendinitis. After a strong cross-country season for the Wolverines, look for Webb to have a major impact on the collegiate scene this outdoor season if he's healthy again.
- Running Times Senior Writer Andy Palmer, Ph.D., a national class runner who along with his wife Zika had just recently embarked on a project of creating a self-funded elite distance running camp, passed away recently during a long run. The autopsy revealed a heart attack caused by advanced coronary artery disease. Palmer, a gifted runner and writer and a two-time Olympic Trials qualifier in the marathon, was only 48 year old.

This month in history

March 26th, 1994 – At the "Legs Not Arms" Road Race, the Athlete's Foot Racing Team outruns the Mohegan Striders (2nd) and the Hartford Track Club (3rd) to win the Men's Championship at the competitive USATF opener in New Haven. Norwalk's Tom Harding, who would go on to run 2:21:26 at the Boston Marathon three weeks later, is the overall winner, touring the 5 mile race course through East Rock Park in 24:04 for a 23 second win over Hartford TC's Peter Pazik. Recent Naval Academy graduate Todd Washburn, on assignment at the U.S. Sub Base and with a 13:58 5K best to his credit, leads the Striders with his 4th place finish in 24:55. Other Mohegan Striders scoring include Jim Uhrig (10th; 25:26), Ed Zubritsky (11th; 25:29), Chris Hansen (17th; 25:51) and Sean Delaney (22nd 26:05). Derby's Allison Lapinski is the top female finisher, 37th overall in 27:41. For college basketball fans, the race followed on the eve of Donyell Marshall's two clanked free throws during the game's final seconds, allowing the Florida Gators to advance in overtime.

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