



THOUGHTS OF A SENIOR AMBASSADOR

Yesterday, I walked. Today I ran. Tomorrow will be another walk day. Three or so miles at a time. I will also take a couple of days off completely over the next week, and I can still call it progress.

So far, this has been working for me as I start to learn once again what my current limits are. This is hopefully just the start of the latest cycle in my running life, and the beginning of my latest round of self-discovery as I again test the waters before diving back in.

My fingers are crossed that I can put this bout of Plantar Fasciitis behind me. In almost 40 years of running, I had never experienced it until early April of this year. By the end of that month, I had to stop running completely. I didn't do a very good job of listening to the early warning signs, and very quickly, alarms went off. Even walking a mile or two would cause it to flare up, so in an instant, I went from running nearly 200 miles a month to no activity at all.

Every couple of weeks, I would try to run again, and every time I did, the PF would flare back up later in the day, and then it would take several days before I could stand without pain. It didn't impact my day to day living. It actually only impacted one thing. But it was the most important thing. Running. After a couple of weeks, I would try again with the same results, and each time, the mile or two I would run would get slower and slower.

At some point I decided that if I was only able to run once every week or so, I would "make it count" and make that run a race. Not too smart to race on no training, but I love the race atmosphere, and have many friends in the running community, so that's what I decided to do. Looking back, it was a bad idea in many ways, mostly because the races were not pretty. Although I was injured and out of shape, I found early on in the process that I was "racing from memory." Starting at a sub 10-minute pace, a minute slower than I was racing before the injury, had me out of breath within the first mile, and the rest of the race involved a lot of walking, and finishing times around 8 minutes slower than just a few months earlier. To say I was discouraged was an understatement.

After two or three races like that, I decided to start slower, closer to a 12 minute pace, just to see if I could run 3 miles without stopping to walk. That seemed to work, and even though my overall times were still very slow, the overall experience started to feel a little better, and the confidence started to come back that maybe I could start to train again and capture some semblance of my former self.

It wasn't until October that I started to do short training runs again, 2 or 3 miles, every other day or so. I found I was able to do all of these runs without walk breaks again, and without pain the following day, and it gave me more confidence that I could run quicker 5Ks once real training started to take hold again.

I am fully aware that, at age 66, I will most likely not return to the kind of shape I was in even a year ago, and that's OK. Sometimes, I have to remind myself that I am very fortunate to be able to run at all. Every setback is a reminder that there are no guarantees in this running life, and as we age, the risks

become greater that we will at some point move from experiences to memories. And when I look back on almost 40 years of memories, I truly realize for the first time how much I have accomplished.

Until this year, I raced longer distances, and trained much higher mileage. I had run at least one half marathon a month for nearly 2 years, and didn't see an end in sight. I had run 100 mile months for close to 3 years and felt it could go on forever. My current reality is that I won't be looking beyond 5K races for the foreseeable future, and 40 mile weeks will probably not be happening any more. But something...anything is better than nothing, and my current goal is simply enough to feel like I am still a runner.

It is too soon to talk about goals again, but I suppose that getting my 5K time down below 30 minutes again would be nice start. But just being out there competing with myself is the most important thing. At the end of every year, I think ahead to the next one, and set goals. For next year, my goals are simple. They don't have to do with fast times. They have to do with good times, and these kinds of times are not measured in minutes and seconds. They are measured by happiness and warm feelings, even in the cold days of winter. I hope to share these good times with my fellow runners.

Occasionally, someone will come up to me before or after a race and introduce themselves and tell me they have read my articles. It always surprises me when that happens, but I always appreciate knowing that people actually read my thoughts. For those of you who do, thank you. I've been writing on and off about running for over 25 years now, and often wonder if it still touches people. Please let me know if it does. I would love to hear from you, so please look for me at a race and introduce yourself, or e-mail me if these articles have an impact. I can be reached at durunruner@yahoo.com.

Have a great month of running,

Michael