

THE GOLDEN RUN

By Jim Honchar

Gold. One of the strongest metals on earth. A measure of wealth, power and fortune. For thousands of years, gold has been the standard to measure worth. The number 50 has often been linked with the gold standard. When we reach our 50's, we are approaching our golden years. Gold is the symbol for 50th anniversaries. Many often retire in their 50's ending a successful career with a gold watch.

For legendary HARRC runner Jeff White, 50 was both a milestone and a goal. His goal was to complete 50 marathons before age 50. On April 25, 2004 he did just that, with 5 months to spare.

Jeff, a native of Youngstown Ohio, returned to his home State to run his 50th marathon in Cleveland, the site where 20 years earlier, he set a PR in the Marathon running a blistering 2:39.

Jeff's 50 marathons span a 26-year running career. Equally impressive is that many of his 50 marathons are sub-three hour marathons. It is significant to point out that he did not run a marathon during an eight-year period due to a chronic heel injury, which ultimately required surgery. When he returned to the marathon scene, he returned with a vengeance. With one exception, all of his marathons since his surgery have been sub-3:15 marathons.

Jeff's consistency and determination define the long distance runner – ordinary people accomplishing extraordinary feats. In his quiet, unassuming way, Jeff has always been the leader of the Saturday morning runs from the City Island and the nightly runs at the YMCA. He never gives unsolicited running advice. Even when others approach him for advice, rather than lecture, he will say “this is what I do”. Those who have followed his advice and training have prospered. Those who have not, have usually regretted it.

I had the privilege of running with Jeff for the last 9 years and running with him in Cleveland during his 50th marathon. This was Jeff's day. Much of the crowd called out to Jeff by his bib number or the logo on his legendary Adidas singlet (just about as old as Jeff!) On one occasion, a gentleman in the crowd yelled out “Number 1711 my money is on you!” Jeff didn't realize at first the man was talking about him. He looked down at his bib and said “Hey that's me!) Though we ran most of the course together, at Mile 21 he pulled away from Jeff Brent and me with a spring in his step as if he were running his PR run 20 years ago. It was a joyful site. It was if all the years of training, the heartaches, the injuries, and the 49 prior marathons were being re-lived in the last couple miles of his 50th. He looked back for a moment at the last water stop and I just waived to him to go on. We couldn't keep up with him. On this day, no one could.

Congratulations Jeff on your golden run, and we wish you as much success in your next 50 marathons.