A Run Down Memory Lane

I've been running and racing since way back in 1982. During those nearly 40 years, the act of running hasn't changed at all. It's still just a matter of putting one foot in front of the other as fast as you can while you open up your stride as far as possible. Of course, a mile used to be 5,280 feet, but I am sure they are making them much longer now. There is no other explanation why it takes so much longer to run one than it used to way back then.

And a lot of other things about running have changed too. Cotton was the best product to run in, from top to bottom.Cotton T-shirts were the best, and short cotton shorts were the only choice. Running socks were also cotton, and always had rings at the top.

My very first watch was a Casio, and it looked like this.

Casio dominated the running market back in the early 80's. The watches were ok for the era, but there wasn't GPS technology back then, so watches didn't measure distance. What they did have, however, was an ability to set a cadence with audible beeps, so if you wanted to set a stride of 180 steps per minute, you could program it into the watch, and it would actually constantly beep 180 times every….single….minute. It was so fun to race and be surrounded by the avalanche of beeps from every surrounding runner.

So, if a watch didn't measure distance, how did you know how far you were going each time you ran. Well, if you didn't own a calibrated wheel, you'd have to hop in your car and drive the course to get an estimate of the distance. Car odometers were different back then too. They only went to 99,999 miles, and measured to the 10th of a mile. So when you hit 100,000 miles, the odometer actually went back to zero. That was always a "call the neighbors" event.

Sure, you could drive 3.1 miles, and call it a 5K, but the downside to this, other than the fact that it wasn't all that accurate, was that once you mapped out a course, you never wanted to deviate from it, lest you run extra distance that you didn't quite know how to document in your trusty paperback Jim Fixx running log. So once you had a course measured, you were stuck running the same course over and over and over again. Otherwise, you'd have to hop back in your car and drive the new course. Nobody had personal computers back then, and the thought of an on-line running log could not even be fathomed.
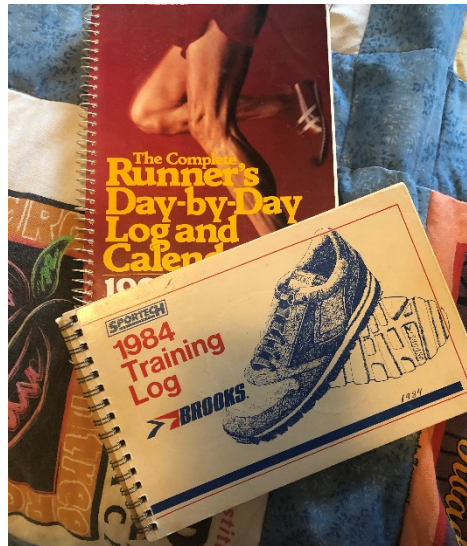
The way we dressed for races was a little different than it is today, too. I'll just post a couple of pictures from my early races, and leave it at that. But it wasn't just me. It was everyone. (OK, I'll admit, I only threw that second picture in there to prove that at one time, many years ago, I could actually run with both feet off the ground at the same time.

The demographics of racing has changed as much as anything. In 1982, I would guess that most races longer than 10K were 90% male, and even shorter distances were probably split 80/20. And the age demographics was a lot different as well. Most racers were in their teens and 20's, and the 30-39 year age group was considered old. Most races stopped awards at 50 and over. That wouldn't fly in today's running world. Median race times were a lot faster, too. In a typical 5K race, if you ran a 30 minute race, the sweep vehicle was impatiently on your heels honking at you to hurry up and finish. You'd be finishing dead last. In most races, close to half of a typical 5K field was under 20 minutes. I usually ran between 20 and 21 minutes back in the 80s, and was always middle of the pack. I certainly never won an age group award, or even came close.

I laugh when I think of some of the popular and revolutionary products that were going to change the running world. See if you remember any of them.

Sorbothane Insoles- We used to put 8 ounce Sorbothane Insoles in our shoes to absorb the shock incurred during running. Forget about the negative energy.

DMSO- (or Dimethyl sulfoxide) is commonly used in veterinary medicine as a liniment for horses, but became very popular with runners in the early 80s as an anti-inflammatory topical solution and an anti-oxidant, without any clinical proof. You would rub it in, and it would actually penetrate through the skin to the underlying muscles, dragging any dirt or other contaminants with it, so it also came with a lot of warnings. I used it for a short time, and it made my breath stink for several days after. That was enough to scare me off, but there are people who still swear by it.

Shoe Goo- This was another catchy one that people would put on the worn wear on their shoes to extend their life for another 500 miles or so. Forget about the fact that midsoles are already broken

down before tread wear even starts to show.

Gore-Tex Running Suits- They were a fairly new innovation when I first started running, but admittedly, they have come a long way since then. The one I bought was an original Moss Brown 10-Miler and it looked and felt like a Moon Suit. It was shiny and stiff, and didn't really work as advertised. I was very proud at the time to have gotten it for a steal at only $269.00 right in the original store in Georgetown.

They sell on eBay for $10.00 today.

So that about wraps up my thoughts on this topic. Even Senior runners have to look over their shoulder sometimes.