

### **It Has Not All Been for Nothing**

It's hard to believe that summer is almost over. Although the days are still hot and humid, the daylight hours are getting noticeably shorter. The sun comes up a little later each morning, and sets negligibly earlier each evening, the first signs that cooler weather is on the way. September is the month that it all starts to happen. And runners live for this time each year, when the relentless heat and humidity of summer lets go of its hold on Atlanta and allows some drier, cooler, refreshing air to replace the stickiness that hovers in the air.

Usually, by this time of year, I have already overcommitted to my fall and winter race calendar. As this year started, I was especially excited about this year's Autumn schedule, since I turn 65 in October. I was really hoping to take the new age group by storm. But as the reality of my 2020 vision became blurred due to the pandemic and races started disappearing, all I can see is a mostly blank race calendar. There are so many fall races I will miss this year because they have been canceled. Races are already being canceled into next year, as it becomes more and more clear that COVID is going to be around for a while.

I was really looking forward to stepping up my game this fall. It has all been part of a process that started almost 3 years ago, when I decided that when I turned 65, I was going to be in the best shape I could possibly be in, and started building my base mileage in preparation for a long three year journey. It probably has not felt much different than an Olympian who focuses on a gold medal up to four years ahead of time, and orchestrates every move to ensure peak shape when the time comes.

I have stuck to my game plan very well. I'm faster than I was three years ago, and I'm running farther and more often than I have in decades. I am also down about 30 pounds from when I started this journey at nearly 190 pounds. On a good day after a long run, I can hit the scales at 155 lately. But as I look at the race calendar, more and more races are drying up and disappearing, and it is likely that some may never come back, and others will look completely different when they do.

And the funny thing is, although I will miss the racing, and the people, and the energy, and the comradery that is racing, these past three years of preparation have been far from wasted. In fact, since the pandemic began, running has become more important than ever before in some ways. Although the competition and the structure of racing are nice, they are not the reason I run. It might be easy to look back at the last three years and say it was all for nothing, but in reality, for me it was a totally growth-promoting experience that has taken me to a height that I have not seen in a long time.

When racing does return fully, and I know it will, I may or may not be ready. But as for the last three years of focus, it has not been for nothing. Just the opposite. It has been for everything.