Running Imitates Life Imitates Running

Everyone knows the saying "Like is a marathon, not a sprint." There is also another saying "Slow and Steady wins the race", usually illustrated by the Tortoise and the Hare fable. You already know the details, and each has its own meaning to each person, so I'll spare the details.

I realized on this morning's run how true both of these sayings are to me, and ironically, the conclusion I came to was "Running is a marathon, not a sprint." It probably seems strange that I use running itself as an analogy for running, so I'll explain.

When I first started running in 1982, every run I did was like a track meet. It was all about speed and improvement, and when you're new to running, PRs are a lot easier to come by. So just about every day, I'd go to the track and try to run faster than I did the day before. Sometimes I did, and other times, I didn't. I also had a lot of injuries that seemed to pop up every week: Strained Achilles tendons, sharp pains in my knees, shin splints, ankle sprains, and so on. It seemed like every week, my 26 year old body was failing me in one way or another. Although I was improving in leaps and bounds, I was also missing days, and sometimes weeks due to the various injuries I was experiencing. I was experiencing the "Hare Syndrome" of going out too fast and crashing before the finish.

As I got older, it took me a long time to learn some lessons. Through my 30s and 40s, I wasn't trying to run PRs every workout any more, but I was still running harder than I should have, only I didn't know it. I would still do must of my training runs not a whole lot slower than race pace, and now, I was getting different kinds of injuries. Not so much the strains, and aches of a new runner, but more serious injuries, this time due to overuse and lack of proper recovery. Stress fractures, a torn meniscus, and sciatica grounded me for months at a time. These are the kinds of injuries that can make you think about giving up running all together.

When I was 48, I got a coach for the first time in my life, and he showed me what I had been way to blind to have ever seen on my own. He introduced me to effort-based training with a heart rate monitor. Once I determined my resting and maximum heart rate, he coached me to forget completely about pace per mile, and instead focused on beats per minute, and that is truly when my running life changed.

At first, I hated it. My self-coached 9 minute training pace dropped to an effort-based 10:30-11:00 pace overnight. That was almost so slow it was uncomfortable. I started with him in April of 2004, with a goal marathon, Twin Cities, a day after my 49th birthday in October. He'd outline my running week by week based on the previous week's feedback, and I did everything by distance and heart rate. By early September, he had me up to 65 miles a week, and regular long runs of 20-24 miles, and what surprised me was my body didn't fall apart. In fact, It almost felt easy.

The day after my 49th birthday, thank to his coaching, I set a marathon PR. It was the first time I ever felt prepared for a marathon in my life. I was able to enjoy the race, run steady, and probably passed a thousand people in the last 10K. I had become the tortoise.

After that race, I stopped using a coach. Although I had gotten good results, it was a little more structured than what I wanted running to be for me, so I went back to some of my old ways, trained faster than what was probably healthy for me, and after a while, started getting a little burned out with running in general, and became an infrequent runner, which lasted throughout most of my 50s.

But as I got closer to 60, I gained a renewed interest in running, and competing. For years, I said to myself that some day, my running peers would slow down, and if I could just continue to maintain, I'd eventually catch them. I was also seeing that the older I was getting, the fewer people there were in each new age group, and one of the largest population drops seemed to be between the 55-59 age group and the 60-64 age group. I noticed that a lot of the runners who I couldn't touch in my 30s and 40s, the hares, were falling back in the field and I was getting

closer and closer to catching them. In addition, a lot of runners who use to clean my clock 20 years earlier were no longer around. There is no telling what happened to them, but lives change in an instant for any number of reasons.

At 62, recovering from my own health scare that sidelined me for almost two years, I reset my running life, and set my sights on the next age group, 65-69, and started my most recent 3 year journey. I started slow, this time self-coached, and started building my base mileage again, and in the process, started jumping back into racing. My first 5K races were in the 32-33 minute range and my 10Ks were well over an hour. Slowly, and gradually, I increased my distance, and in the process, I get into overall better shape, and since then, the tortoise has poked out his head. Here's my progression the past three years.

2018 First race back 5K- 33:26
2018 5K PR   28:31
2019 5K PR   26:16
2020 5K RP   25:31

2018 first race back 10K 1:06:59
2018 10K PR   1:00:26
2019 10K PR   56:07
2020 10K PR   53:59

2018 First race back HM 2:14:06
2018 HM PR   2:08:40
2019 HM PR   2:05:31
2020 HM PR   2:03:57

As with most of us, I only had 2 and a half months to work with early in the year before races stopped. My fastest times at all distances have been since the weather turned cooler and races started springing back up. But the most important thing is, with my 65th birthday now in the rear view, and with only a month to go before the end of the year, I'm still out there doing it, and doing it as well as I can. If you're young, pace yourself for the long run. If you're an older runner like me, you can always reset and look forward to what's in your future instead of dwelling on your past. It's never too late to surprise yourself.

In the long run, running is a marathon, not a sprint. It's a lot like life.