

Challenge of marathon — to endure



Limbering up before starting on his daily run, Allan Gelfond reads himself for a 15-mile jog. (Photo by Allen Schlossberg)

Raider no-hits HP

North Farmington baseball coach Jerry Maxwell had said that Ron Fredericks would be his No. 1 pitcher this spring. Last Thursday, Fredericks showed that he deserved the honor.

Fredericks, a senior righthander, pitched a no-hitter as North whipped non-league Highland Park, 14-0, in the first game of a double header, which opened the season for the Raiders.

Fredericks, who struck out nine and walked none, missed a perfect game when first baseman Tom Herrington made an infield error in the second inning.

North, which had 12 hits, was paced by Rich Nutter, who drove in two runs with a triple and a pair of singles. Tom Jeffery had two doubles and drove in two runs, and Dan Gasser drove in two runs with two hits and stole three bases.

North won the nightcap, 12-0, as sophomore lefthander Matt Rued pitched a four-hitter. He fanned 12 and walked two. Fredericks was the batting star with a single and a triple and four runs batted in. Teammate Jim Carrier knocked in two runs with a pair of singles.

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Endurance.

That is the challenge of the marathon. Not how fast one can finish the 26 mile, 385 yard course. Just if he can finish it.

Conditioning can carry the runner through the first half, maybe even two-thirds of the course. The body can take that much of a strain. The endurance begins in the final 10 miles or so.

The body is drained, as both fluids and energy pour out of it. That is when the endurance comes in — pushing an exhausted body beyond its capabilities, beyond pain, with the mind capable of just one function, the command to "Keep going!"

This test of human strength is aptly named. It was after the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C., in which the Greeks defeated the Persians, that an unknown soldier raced from the battlefield back to Athens with the news. After delivering the message, he died.

Since then, distance running has always intrigued man. Now, more men than ever are capable of finishing a marathon. Over 7,000 started at the most famous run of all, the Boston Marathon, last Monday. And several were from this area.

Allan Gelfond of Farmington was one. It was Gelfond's third run at Boston. His first, in 1977, ended in disaster with just two or three miles remaining. "I could see the Prudential Building (the finish line) when it happened," he recalled. "It was a hot day, in the 80s, and no one told me you had to drink a lot of liquids. After 22 or 23 miles I just passed out."

He was taken to the hospital with a 108 degree temperature after his

aborted attempt, but he returned the next year more determined than ever. This time he finished in three hours, 22 minutes.

GELFOND, NOW 43, was never an athlete during his younger days. "I was not well-coordinated as a kid," he said. "In fact, 20 years ago, I weighed about 260 and smoked about three packs of cigarettes a day."

"I was from the school of non-athletes."

That all changed a few years ago, when Gelfond, now 170 pounds, started running. It was three years back when he really started on the distance trail.

"A friend was hosting a 10-mile run, so I gave it a try. The first eight weren't so bad, but the last two were tough."

"But I had done it. I had never run that far before. A friend and I started joking about entering the West Bloomfield Marathon, and then started training for it."

"During our first training session, I went about 12 or 15 miles and was exhausted. I couldn't go any further and we had to hitchhike home. But, when the West Bloomfield event came up, I made it through it."

Now, Gelfond trains by going about 15 miles daily. He ran in his third straight West Bloomfield Marathon this past March, at Belle Isle in Detroit, and finished the course in his best time to date, three hours and 17 minutes.

That personal record didn't last long. In Boston last week, he turned in his best performance, three hours, seven minutes.

"IT WAS REALLY an accident," Gelfond said of his accomplishment. "I went to the bathroom before the race, and when I came back, I couldn't find my friends."

"I started looking all over for them, but couldn't find them. When the race started, I found myself in among the first 500 runners."

That alone will shave about four minutes off someone's time, since it takes about that long to get all 7,000 runners started. Gelfond, who had started in the back of the pack in previous years, found himself in the front, and running at a much faster pace than he normally did.

"When I got to the halfway point and saw my time was one hour, 29 minutes, I thought, 'Wow, a three-hour marathon!' But, towards the end, I could see a lot of guys dropping out, so I slowed down to make sure I'd finish."

Gelfond was one of seven locals who took part in and finished the marathon. Neal Schechter of West Bloomfield, and Sheldon Bross and Murray Levin of Birmingham were all racing for the first time at Boston. Lou Milgrom of Franklin, and Simon Cook and Ronald Michaelson of Farmington Hills were all racing in their third marathon.

None are youngsters. Milgrom is 57, Schechter and Levin are both 49, Bross is 48, Cook is 44, and Michaelson is 36. And none were outstanding athletes in high school, according to Gelfond.

Now, you might think the challenge of the marathon is enough for these men. You'd be wrong.

"I'm going to take a crack at the ultra-marathon," Gelfond said. "They have distances of 50, 62, and 100 miles. I'm going to try the 62 mile."

"If I don't make it, I can always stop at 50 miles."

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