

Featured Runner of the Month – April, 2008

Pam Mertz

Editors Note: This interview was conducted in mid-March, 2008.

Our featured runner this month is the 2007 WCC Female Champion, Pam Mertz. In fact, Pam is the only Female Champion that the WCC has ever known. She continues to hold every school record at Hagerstown High School for distances 800 meters through 1600 meters in track and the 4,000 meter record for girls cross-country. She holds numerous Tri-Eastern Conference records as well in virtually every distance event. She is listed as the holder of many records at various track and cross-country invitational events in this portion of Indiana. With that resume, it's no surprise that she has established a remarkable standard for women's distance running not only in the WCC, but in all of eastern Indiana and much of western Ohio.

Pam shares some of her thoughts and insights for distance running that have enabled her to consistently reach this high level of success.

How did you become a runner and when did you first realize that you had some talent as a runner?

I never really thought about it. My older sister ran and went to the regional and I just wanted to follow in her footsteps. The Hagerstown records that I took over belonged to her. I never gave it much thought until my high school XC coach told me I should go to college because he had been receiving calls about me. I did not run XC until my junior year after the volleyball coach told me I should maybe try XC. Apparently, I wasn't good at volleyball and the XC coach had asked about me. That year I ran on the all boys team and placed 15th at state. The next year, we had the first ever Hagerstown girls team (1985) and I placed 7th. Back then, there wasn't a conference race for the girls. I ran on the boy's team.

You mention that you don't hold the 3200 meter record (which is surprising). Why is that?

The reason is because I am one year too old. Had I graduated in 1987 I could have run the 3200, but it wasn't a girl's event prior to 1987. I have had several people ask me this question.

What motivates you to run?

(Right now, nothing.)

I run to keep my weight down. Surprisingly enough, I weigh anywhere from 135-145 when I race (145 at Indy last year). I drink 8-12 soda

pops per day and eat whatever I want. Not a great diet. I run whenever I can fit it in. Nothing set in stone. I usually try to log 25-30 miles per week. Maybe once or twice since Ball State have I run over 40 miles per week. I don't alter my training. I usually run 5 miles per day and 5 days per week. I take the day off before a race.

What's your favorite WCC race and why is it a favorite?

My favorite WWC race is the Girls Inc. Why? It's the first race of the year and it's always nice to see everyone come out of hiding. It is usually raining and my legs are usually sore from the Indy 5k the week before. But I really like the loop course.

You've run in some large events on the big stage. Does any one race hold special memories or is there a favorite?

I love the Indy 5k race. Every year, I am amazed that I win it since there are a lot of runners that can run a 5k faster than I can. Most of them run the 1/2 marathon. Since I will be 40 this year, I'll go into the race thinking this may be the year some younger or thinner runner will beat me.

I am old.... and fat...

I also love Ohio races where I can run in the heavyweight division. It is rough being so heavy since most runners weight 90-120 pounds. In Ohio they offer a race for us bigger runners. I do get asked to step on the scales to prove my weight since I am a size 4 and win the Grand Dames Division. Heavyweight starts at 140 lbs.

Between my sophomore and junior year, Hagerstown switched track coaches and I weighed 137. My new coach told me I was too fat and not going to make it to state like I did the previous year. At the state meet, I remember calling him on what he said earlier in the season. I was seeded 2nd in the 800, but in the finals, placed 8th due to it being my fourth race of the day. That is pretty heavy (137 lbs.) to be running 2:16 for an 800 meter run.

As for a favorite place to train, I like anywhere that's quiet and I don't have dogs chasing me. I'm not particular as long as there aren't too many obstacles.

What's the best & worst thing about running for you?

The best thing: Friends, seeing everyone (winning is fun, but I wish we could just donate money to the cause and skip the awards).

The worst thing: Having to struggle to find the time to run. I can't always run when I want to. Also, vomiting at the finish line and running in the heat.

What are your short & long term goals as a runner?

Short term goals - Start lifting weights, running hills and doing speed workouts. I always say this, but never do. I am lazy when I train. I can't remember the last time I lifted or did a speed workout. It has to be natural ability, no other way to explain it. My goal is to run under 17:49 for 5k. I ran that at Ball State and have always wanted to run faster than in college. I don't believe I have ever really tried to run hard. I am lazy and do only what I need to.

What advice can you offer to other female runners?

Don't compare yourself to anyone else. Compete against yourself. Some people just have natural abilities and don't have to work as hard (Me). Make sure you have the proper equipment, shoes, shorts, sports bras, shirts. (Please, no white see-through sports bras). I remember a conversation with a high school coach several years ago. I was always beating his girls and for some reason he wanted to impress me by telling me he had his girls running twice a day and running an ungodly amount of miles. He then asked me what I did. I told him 5 miles a day/5 days a week at 7-8 minute/mile pace. No speed/no weights. I don't think he believed me. I tried to explain to him not everyone needed high mileage to race well. I think he over trained them because after sectional, his girls really fell down. It isn't all about numbers. It is the quality of the workouts and taking breaks when needed. I know I could race better if I trained harder and had a plan, but I have a busy life and just want to enjoy life. There are many aspects in life and running is just one part. Some people think I live for running, but I don't. In fact, in the past six months, I have run very little. I needed a break and keep thinking about starting up again for the year. Maybe I will start today.

Congratulations, Pam, on another successful WCC season. We look forward to watching you continue to inspire others to strive for personal excellence in 2008. Continue to stay healthy and run well for many years to come.

This interview was conducted by Dale Bolser for the WCC.
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