

Featured Runner of the Month – October, 2008

Kevin Shelley

Editor's note: Kevin was the WCC 35-39M Age Group winner of 2005.

Our featured runner this month is Kevin Shelley. Kevin is part of an exclusive group who has never missed a race in the history of the WCC. That is quite an achievement when you consider that he (and wife Ralana) live in the Indianapolis area and must commute a considerable distance to each event.

Kevin is a personal trainer for other athletes as well as a martial arts expert. His martial arts activities have brought him some considerable notoriety in various events around the world. Kevin graciously took a few moments to share his thoughts on running and how it has enhanced his life.

When did you start running and what motivated you to take up this activity?

When I was growing up in Williamsburg, IN, I started running 4-8 miles each day (around a country block) only as a way to help me with martial arts training. Then, I didn't run throughout my twenties or into my thirties. After considerable weight gain, a girlfriend introduced me to my first 5k race back in 2003. It gave me the feel that I once got from sparring. In other words, I felt like I was going to die. I was out of shape, unable to find anything that looked like a pace, didn't know what I was doing, and I think I was actually wearing some slip-on Sketchers for shoes. But, I fought with myself throughout.

I joke to people that, as I get older, the less I want to fight and the more I want to run. But being in the ring is MUCH easier than pushing yourself in a race...trust me. From that first battle within myself in the Girls Inc 5k in 2003, I was hooked.

How many miles do you try to run each week? Do you have a favorite place to train?

This is an embarrassing question. My wife, Ralana, and I are both very ADD about our hobbies. We cram so many things into our lives for play time. So, although running is the one thing I would keep above all the others, it often takes a back seat. Consequently, there are some weeks where we may put 20 miles under our feet; and then there have also been the occasional three-week stretches without running a single step. When it comes to training, I am not a very good example.

As for my favorite place to train We are very lucky to live right by the Monon Trail in Carmel, IN. Some of my favorite Sundays have been to run down to the IMA and picnic on the grounds. Then, after an air-conditioned walk through the exhibits, a 7 mile run back. So that is my favorite typical run. The non-typical paths are found when

we travel. Ralana and I perform sword and board breaking stunts on TV throughout the world. We always take our gear and try and “collect” a new running experience when we do so. So far, I have been fortunate to run along the Seine, the Rhine, the Thames, and the Turkish Riviera. I have raced through Central Park, NY, in the same week as running through Griffith Park in LA. In 2009, we hope to run along the base of Mt. Fuji in Japan, and on the Great Wall of China. To put it another way..... My favorite places to run are those places that I don't yet know are favorites.

What's the best (and worst) thing about running for you?

I have never allowed myself to take running so seriously that I could have a “worst” thing about it. I did almost miss out on a show in Germany once (along with five figures for the stunt), just because they wanted me the same weekend as a race that I refused to miss (I wanted to keep my perfect attendance record). That would have really bit. But I got the Germans to work around the WCC race (look for a highly dignified picture on page 101 of the current Guinness Book). Someday, when a show passes on me rather than rescheduling, THAT will be the worst thing about my running hobby. The best thing about it is easy for me to define. Running is not finite. I know that I will never be the best runner in the world. In fact, I don't think I'll ever be a particularly good runner. I just hope for those moments of triumph over my laziness. It is a constant in my life that allows me to always try to do better at something. It keeps me motivated because there will always be room to improve. Were I a Kenyan, I'd probably be a hockey player or something.

What's your favorite WCC race & why?

It used to be the Home Run Trot. But now that that one is gone, my favorite is the Jubilee. I never brake when going downhill. This is probably due to a combination of being “quick-footed” from martial studies, and being a little on the stupid side from being an adrenaline junkie. But speeding down the hills is an element of danger that I love. It's like combining my running with my skydiving. Pushing myself back up the hills that follow... that's just a price to pay.

Do you have a special race memory (or running memory) that you care to share?

The first time I brought my wife (then girlfriend) to a race. Ralana had no interest in becoming a runner, and showed up to the Firefighter 5k in her sundress and sandals to cheer me on. She liked to do things like Yoga and sword practice from before we met, but she

and I had resigned ourselves that she had no interest in running. Although I love to introduce people to running, and have done so quite a bit in the past, I totally understood that she was never going to be one of them.

After she saw me finish that race, and the euphoria that I felt, she wanted in. I was so surprised and excited to see this person in my life suddenly re-think the idea of being a runner. It was an even cooler moment for me than our first actual run together. It was also the last race that she would ever wear sandals to.

What are your goals as a runner?

I haven't yet committed to it, but I would really like to break 20 at some point before I die...unless that is what kills me. My PR to date is 23:10. In the meantime, I enjoy looking to others that run just a little better than I, and see how close I can come to catching them. I've always got about four role models at each race (you guys know who you are...I'm still gunning for you).

What advice would you give to a beginning runner?

Never "make" yourself run. I have introduced people close to me to running before. I actually have a couple of clients that I've hooked on the WCC races that drive all the way to them from Indy. With anyone new that I've brought into running, I encourage them; I help them; I coach them; I try to be supportive, but I have found never to push them into a single run that they are not up for. When it comes to new runners, never let it feel like something you HAVE to do. Then it becomes a job for which you can see no immediate pay.

Congratulations, Kevin, on your continued race streak. It's a testament to your efforts and training to stay injury free. All of us look forward to seeing you at the WCC races for many years to come.

This interview was conducted by Dale Bolser for the WCC.
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