

Featured Runner of the Month – December, 2008

Michelle Dafler

Editor's note: Michelle was second overall WCC Female in 2006, third overall in 2005, and is a two time WCC age-group winner. Her consistent improvement as a runner has been amazing and inspirational over the past few years.

Our featured runner this month is Michelle Dafler. As all runners know, our sport comes with a risk of injury. Michelle knows this all too well as she suffered a serious knee injury during the Hagerstown Jubilee Days 5K this past August. Michelle has graciously taken the time to give us an update on her progress as well as sharing her thoughts on how running has enhanced her life.

How is the knee at this point? Do you have an idea as to when (or if) you'll run competitively again?

My knee is progressing, just at a much slower rate than I expected. I have almost all of my range of motion back and now I am concentrating on my strength. I had a great physical therapist, Chuck Harrison, who constantly told me to be patient! I am getting back into jogging very slowly, but not for very long at one time. As I taper back into running (jogging at the moment), I will gradually add time as I go. Speed will come after I get my legs strong again. It is amazing how quickly you lose muscle and how long it takes to build it back. It is frustrating knowing a year ago I could hop on a treadmill, set the speed at 7+ mph, and run for an hour. This is just a roadblock I have to overcome, but I am planning on coming back . . . hopefully for the Girls Inc. 5K run, and I will be able to return to the 2009 WCC for the year. It is undetermined how competitive I will be at this point, but we will find out!

When did you start running? Has anyone influenced you as a runner?

My first organized run was the Turkey Chase 7K in 2003. Prior to that I had not run very much. I had started at a gym earlier that year and really liked the elliptical, strength training, and fitness classes. I ended up becoming addicted to the feeling I had after I ran, it was a great positive feeling and sense of accomplishment. The dedication of other county runners has influenced me to run and do my best. We have a great group of runners among us!

How many miles per week do you try to run (when you're healthy)? Are you a pavement runner or do you head off-road on occasion?

Most of the time I would run about 15 miles during the week, but at times it was 20+ . . . especially when I was training for the Indy Mini

Marathon. I am not always consistent with my days of running; sometimes I have to fit it in when I can. Often times I would run while my daughter had a ball practice or during my lunch break at work, and then in the evenings. Family time is important to me and running has to be scheduled in fit around that. I like to run out on country roads that aren't very busy and finding a route with some hills provides some good training. I do also like to run off-road, it seems to be easier on my legs. I don't mind the cross country or trail paths, it makes for a nice change of scenery. Running on the beach in Florida this summer was a fun and channeling endeavor.

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

I am motivated to stay in shape and be healthy. Running helps with that. Running is a big stress reliever and mood booster. It gives me such a great positive burst of energy! Even when you get stiff and sore from it, that is a good feeling because you are doing something that is good for you. The best thing about running is the feelings I get from running! I love the races because they are filled with a positive vibe from all the runners. I have made lots of great friends and met wonderful caring people. Running is something you can share with others, regardless of talent.

The worst thing about running is getting injured and not being able to run. Running and good health isn't something to be taken for granted. The aches and pains I get from running I could live without, but that is part of it. You really have to listen to your body and take care of it.

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

I have lots of short term goals at the moment under the circumstances. I am going one week at a time to progress back into running. Being able to jog 10 minutes continuously is a goal right now. Then 20 minutes, and work on back into a slow running pace. That is a start and progress from there. I signed up to run the Indy Mini in May. I am uncertain if I will be able to at this point, but I have something to work towards. I plan to run all the WCC races next year. I will continue to run as long as my body lets me!

Do you have a favorite or memorable race?

I like all the WCC races, but if I had to pick a favorite it would probably be the IU East Sizzlin' Summer Classic 5K. I like the mix of the course being on road and trail. It provides some quick up and downs, this run has always been a good challenging and rewarding run for me.

What advice can you offer to other runners? What advice would you offer to a beginning runner?

Keep your goals achievable and work to make it happen! You can do it! Take care of yourself and your body. If you get injured, “be patient”. (That is really tough for me.) Recovery for the long term is better than pushing it and having setbacks. My biggest piece of advice for new runners is to not compare yourself to anyone else! Do what you can do. Other runners may have been running their whole life and you are not expected to compete with that. Just compete and have a challenge with yourself. Set goals and compare your times to only you. Have fun with it!

Thanks, Michelle. Our thoughts & prayers are with you as you continue to recover. Congratulations on your past success as a runner. We look forward to your complete recovery and having you join us in the WCC races for the 2009 season.

This interview was conducted by Dale Bolser for the WCC.
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