

Featured Runner of the Month – January, 2009

Dale Bolser

Editor's note: Dale Bolser is a strong advocate of trail running and a dedicated supporter of the WCC. He has been very successful in the WCC series, accumulating overall and age-group awards each year from 2003 to 2007.

How long have you been a runner? Tell me how you got started.

I decided to give running a try in December of 2000. Our kids (Kelli & Kevin) were running for the high school & middle school respectively. I thought “if they can do it, I can too.” I’ll never forget that first attempt at running any distance. I was on our treadmill (something that I avoid like the plague now) and it took me 10 minutes to go 6/10 of a mile. I thought I was going to die! I decided then and there that I needed to “get off of the couch.” I worked up to more mileage on the treadmill before taking my efforts to Whitewater State Park in February or March of 2001. My first effort at the park was the 2.5 mile Memorial Loop trail. My time . . . 28+ minutes and I stopped to walk 4 times. (Today, I run the same loop in about 16:30 and have a PR of 15:43 set in September of 2005.)

Where are some of your favorite places to run?

I run nearly all of my training miles at the park these days. Except for an occasional track workout at Earlham College, all of my running miles are off-road (trails). I run at Earlham in the woods, the Miami University trail network near Oxford, Ohio, but mostly at Whitewater State Park as it's only 5 miles or so from home. I also like the Hayes Arboretum. Those trails have wood chips (in many places) for a base and are very soft. They are wonderful! My favorite workout is (what we call) the 3 trail loop at WSP. This incorporates a portion of Memorial Loop, part of the Red Springs Loop, and the entire Veterans Vista loop. The total distance is about 7.5 miles. There are various hills to climb along the way and they are spaced to allow recovery as you go. But, they also come along at the end of the run on the return trip to test your “toughness” (both physical & mental). We use the same route (out & back) in the first and last mile. I have a tree marked that is 1/2 mile from the start & finish. I like to check my watch going out and run the last 1/2 mile faster than the first in an effort to maintain a “kick” for races. This also challenges your mental fortitude as you must push yourself when you're tired. My normal first and last 1/2 miles are 3:30 or so (out) and 3:10-3:20 (coming back). I have been just under 3:00 the last 1/2 mile on a couple occasions (those are very rare). A normal time for me on this run is 52-55 minutes, but occasionally, the trails are conducive to speed and, if I'm in shape I can get under 50 minutes (PR is 49:41). I did run a

49:42 this past spring.....so I'm not too old just yet. The key to a quick time on this route (or any trail) is pace. You must be smooth & steady.

You've been able to stay relatively injury free. How do you do it? What about injuries? Isn't trail running a little dangerous?

When I run in the woods, I focus my line of vision on a spot about 30 feet in front of me. That gives me about 2 seconds (normally) to make any adjustments needed to avoid an obstacle. That's usually enough time to keep on cruising along with no issues. It's amazing at how well God enables us to do what we do! Many people ask me about twisting an ankle. This is one of the risks of trail running (but none of us are immune to injury). I believe that my training actually makes my ankles stronger and thus helps to prevent these injuries. But, I must confess that I too have had some "disasters." However, since 2001, I've probably logged close to 8,000 miles in the woods somewhere on various runs. I've only twisted/sprained an ankle badly enough to prevent running (the next day) on two occasions. So, with those odds, I'll continue to take my chances. However, I know the trails at WSP like the palm of my hand. That helps a lot and is critical if you're running the clock for time. If you ever run there with me, you'll see what I mean. Like any race car driver, I have a "preferred line." One thing about trail running . . . it greatly improves your sense of balance. Your feet become very sensitive to the slightest terrain change. That element, combined with the increased strength makes this type of running no more dangerous than anything else. It just takes some practice.

How many training miles do you typically run each week? I know you also do some biking. How do you blend the two?

As for training miles, I try to maintain 25 miles each week. I normally run 4 days each week during reasonable weather. During my "peak season" (2005), I was running about 40 miles each week and "hammered" the speed workouts. This led to injury. Through the winter months (November thru February), I run more days (and a little more mileage) as the weather is usually too cold to ride my bike. During the summer, I try to run 25 miles and ride the bike about 100 miles each week. I love the bike as it gives you chance to stay fit (with no impact) and also see the countryside at a slower pace (than a car). My bout with plantar fasciitis in 2005 brought about my switch to the bike. This has been a good move for me (but may not be for everyone). Traffic doesn't bother me on the bike (but I do watch it closely, rear view mirrors are a must). My main concern on the bike is dogs. You just never know what you're going to get from a dog. Pepper spray (which I carry) usually takes care of the problem canines. I then try to avoid those areas on future excursions.

What motivates you to run? Why do you do it?

Many people (co-workers & customers) ask me why I run. I guess my best response is this.....because I can. I believe that the ability we have is God's gift to us. Hardly a day goes by that I don't take a brief moment to give thanks for the ability to get out and run. I'm sure that many of us ask ourselves why we do this. But, consider those that are in wheelchairs (or worse) and will never even walk. They would give anything to do what we do routinely. For this reason, I consider running a "gift."

Do you have a favorite race or an especially memorable race? What was your first race like?

As for a favorite race, my Indy Mini in 2004 was a memorable day (I might try that one again sometime). I don't have a single favorite race (I like several). One that I like is the 5 mile trail run at Mounds State Park near Anderson. Being a trail run, it fits well into my normal training. The State to State in Oxford is a great event that is well organized and well presented. I've run the 5k each year that it's been held. I used to run the Levi Coffin 10k (a WCC race) in Fountain City on Saturday night and run the 5k in Oxford the next morning. Maybe one day I'll tackle the half-marathon. Who knows?

The first race that I ran was the Red Brick Run 5k at Miami University in 2001. I had never been in a race before and just wanted to make it to the finish without walking. I ran a 21:49 and finished 41st of 176 runners. Needless to say, I was hooked! I ran 4 races that year and the rest is history. I make it a point to run this each year to keep the tradition going. It also gives me a chance to see how things are working in a "race" situation before the WCC season begins. I also run the Liberty Freedom Run as it is our "local" event. I have never run a race that is more challenging. Those hills are killers (especially the 2nd one). I recall Cecil's comment that "they will change your life." That's putting it mildly!

Do you have a favorite WCC race?

I like all of the WCC races mainly because of the people. I've received numerous awards over the past several years from running. But, no award compares to the countless people that I've met and the friends that I've made thru this "gift" of running. All of us share a common bond and are "gifts" to one another. I don't really have a favorite WCC race, but I like the Turkey Chase & Frostbite because of the "festive" time of year. It's also not so "hot" like it is in August at the Jubilee race (that's another good one). The WCC series in general is a good series. I'd like to see it branch out to include other races from around the area and possibly offer more various distances for some of its events. But, these things take time.....so we'll see.

What advice would you give to a beginning runner?

If I were to give advice to a beginning runner, it might be this. Don't become obsessed with running and don't "worship" the clock. I made the mistake of getting obsessed with "time" a few years back and paid the price with injury. We need to enjoy every day that we can run and be thankful for the "gift." Also, don't compare yourself to someone else. I'll share a quote from Guidepost reader Ellen Forbes of Ocala, Florida..... "Be the best that you can be. Everybody else has already been taken." I think that's pretty good advice. I'd recommend that you get fitted for the proper shoes and start slowly with what you can handle. Some of us have more time in our schedules than others. Run when you can and don't worry about missing a day on occasion. Also, if you miss a day, use it as a "rest" day. Our bodies need to recover and a day off never hurts anyone. Don't run with your watch every time (I had a hard time with this one). But, I do leave the watch in the truck on some easy runs and really enjoy the relaxation of not timing the effort. No worries.....just run. Just enjoy yourself and every day that you're able to get out. Share your joys with others and have them join you. All of you will be healthier for it!

What kind of goals do you set for yourself as a runner?

As for goals as a runner.....I just want to keep going. I get a lot of inspiration from our buddy, Gene Black. He not only continues to run, but does so very well. If Gene can do this, I see no reason for the rest of us to consider slowing down. Mainly though, I just want to challenge myself to run as well as I can for as long as I'm able and meet as many new friends as possible. If I can continue along that path, anything that I achieve will be very rewarding.

Do you have any memorable trail runs you'd like to share?

There have been many, but these three stand out from the rest. A few years back, Alan Bell & I went to Oxford for a long run in the woods on the Miami trails. It had rained all morning and was about 55 degrees (this was between Christmas & New Years....unusually warm). We ran in the rain for about 9 miles in nearly 4" of water on the trails all the way. At one point, you must cross the creek (aka river). There is a suspension bridge that's really neat and about 100' long. Once you cross the bridge you run the east trails and get to the other crossing downstream. About ¾ mile downstream is the other crossing to get back to the original side of the creek. They have concrete "pillars" that you use as stepping stones to get across. The problem was that the water was over the pillars (they are about 3' tall). Alan waded across on the upstream side and I literally crawled from pillar to pillar. It was hilarious! We got back to the truck and were completely soaked to the bone and couldn't have been happier.

We still laugh about that day. It was a blast! We were like two hogs in a mudhole. It doesn't get any better for trail runners!

One year, I went out on Christmas morning for a short run. It had snowed about 3" the night before and I "had" to get out to the park for at least 2 or 3 miles (I love to run in the snow!! soft & quiet)). I started around Memorial Loop and after about a 1/2 mile decided to stop. The sun was coming up thru the trees (about 8:30 a.m.) and the snow was just beautiful. I felt guilty about "messing up" God's trail and its beauty. But, HE told me that I was there to enjoy that moment and asked me to share it with others that they might enjoy HIS beauty as well. So.....I hope you get the picture. It was amazing!

My most memorable moment came on the beginning of a 3 trail loop run @ WSP. I was about 3 minutes into the run and a doe was on the trail about 125 yards ahead of me. This is not unusual so I didn't give it much thought. As I got closer (75 yards or so), she stayed put (rather odd at this point). Finally, she jumped into the bushes. As I turned a corner on the trail (around a tree), I saw why she stayed put. There in the middle of the trail was the fawn. He was probably not more than a day or two old as it was no larger than a big cat. I had to stop or I would have stepped on him. I literally stepped over the little guy and went on my way. When I came back thru about 40 minutes later, they (mother & fawn) were gone. I only wish that I'd had a camera. But, I'm grateful for the chance that God gave me to experience nature so closely.

As I mentioned earlier, I've received many awards as a runner. But, none are as precious as the many friends that I've made in my travels from race to race. I thank all of you for the many joys that you bring to my life. I hope that I've made a positive impression on your life as well. May all of us enjoy many more happy miles together for years to come. Stay Healthy!

Thanks, Dale.



