



On Joe Henderson on Running

I was a “young pup” in the sport of running in the early 1980s (although age-wise, I was far from a pup). During that time, I was turned on to *Runner's World* and one of its regular contributors: Joe Henderson. He spoke to the broad swath of the running community, not just the fast or the long, and he always had something encouraging to say to us.

In this issue of the journal, we have the privilege of reprinting a column in which Joe wrote about the consolidation of the running community in the mid-1980s, after the first boom of the 1970s ended (see “Talking About Training” on page 12). This peek into history is fascinating because, since that time, we have seen not only a resurgence of running but also a vast growth in participation in the other distance sports.

When I ran the New York City Marathon in the late 80s to early 90s, the number of participants was a “phenomenal” 25,000. In 2011 there were 46,000 registered participants and the New York Road Runners has announced they are expanding the number to 55,000 for 2012. Back in 1984, when I did the Marine Corps Marathon at which AMAA has had a presence for so many years, you could virtually walk up to the starting line to sign up. No longer! And there are marathons and half-marathons, 10Ks and 5Ks all over the place. There's evidence of the second running boom for sure, with no signs this time that it will go away anytime soon.

There has also been a vast expansion in the number of participants in the other distance sports. Take mine, multi-sport racing. When I joined the Triathlon Federation USA (now known as USA Triathlon) soon after its founding in 1983, there were approximately 3,000 members. There are now over 150,000 members. The Sporting Goods Manufacturers of America, the successor organization to the National Sporting Goods Association, cited by Joe in his

article, estimated that in 2010 2.3 million individuals competed in at least one triathlon.

To what can we attribute this remarkable growth in distance-sport participation? Not all the factors are known and, to my knowledge, there are no surveys on such questions. But one can make several reasonable suppositions regarding the question. First, there is ongoing expansion of the knowledge on the relationship between regular exercise and health. For example, in the February 2012 issue of the American College of Sports Medicine's journal *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise*, there are reports of two studies on the subject done under the leadership of Steven Blair, PhD (1,2). These studies report the positive effects of regular exercise in delaying the onset of dementia and in dealing with the management of depression.

Then there has been the growth in available facilities for regular exercise, from the expansion of the health club industry to the expansion in the number of exercise and health units attached to hospitals and other health care institutions. This can be shown by the growth of the Medical Fitness Association to the growth in the number of running and cycling trails developed from the conversion of old railroad rights-of-way.

You can also safely surmise that the growth in the number and availability of health professionals with training and expertise in various aspects of exercise has also been important in the growth of distance-sport participation. Sports medicine beyond orthopedics has come into its own. And there has been steady growth in the number of sports and exercise professionals certified by the American College of Sports Medicine (3), as well as other organizations.

And finally, we come back to racing. There are certainly many folks who train to race, and there always have been. That is they are fast and want to get faster, and perhaps go longer. And so they train to do that. But my guess is that the distance-racing boom has been fueled in

part by folks like me who race to train. We are slow, or at least slower than the folks up front. The racing aspect is certainly fun but part of the reason we do it is that it simply keeps us in training, which we otherwise might not do. And who has been with us all along the way? None other than Joe Henderson.

Thanks for coming along for the run in this issue of the *AMAA Journal*, Joe. We are happy to have you here.

Go well,
Dr. Steve Jonas

REFERENCES

1. Liu R, Sui X, Laditka JN, Church TS, Colabianchi N, Hussey J, Blair SN. Cardiorespiratory fitness as predictor of dementia mortality in men and women. *Med Sci Sports Exerc* 2012;44(2):253.
2. Sieverdes JC, Ray BM, Sui X, Lee DC, Hand GA, Baruth M, Blair SN. Association between leisure time physical activity and depressive symptoms in men. *Med Sci Sports Exerc* 2012;(44)2:260.
3. ACSM: “Get Certified” (<http://www.acsm.org/get-certified>).