

"You ever break 40 before?" the runner to my right asked. "No" was my short reply. Short because I was just crossing the 6 mile mark in the 10k race. The time on the clock read 38:30. I was pushing hard, trying my best to set a new "P.R." (personal record) of under 40 minutes for the distance; 10 kilometers or 6.2 miles. The 6 mile part was easy, it was the last .2 that was the hardest! As anyone who has run a 10k before knows the last stretch, equivalent to 440 meters or 1 lap on a standard high school track, is the hardest especially when you are shooting for a P.R. I had trained fairly hard all spring as well as the previous running season and now I felt I could pull it off.

I wasn't your typical runner; a former high school offensive lineman on the football team, I was bigger than most "runners" and had taken up the sport to help lose weight and to challenge myself again. After my wife and I had moved to Lombard in 1996 near the Illinois Prairie Path I began to run more and more finding the pathways the perfect setting to log my miles. I started with 2 and 3 mile runs and before I knew it was competing in 5 and 10k races on a regular basis eventually working my way up to the Chicago Marathon.

Running became my new passion and I did fairly well. I finished in the top 10% of my age group in most races and even took home a few 3rd place medals. Not bad for a former "big guy." Running was a much different sports culture than I had been exposed to previously. Although my friends and I, most notably, fellow OnYerLeft founder, Steve Lutz, founded training groups where we would meet to train together, come race day, it was pretty much every runner for himself. Unlike the team sports I had played in high school there was a sense that everyone in a race was out to beat the other guy. At least this is what I had experienced until that one 10k at the aforementioned 6 mile mark.

"No" I had responded to the other runner's question. Partly from lack of breath and partly due to the shock he was actually speaking to me. I was curious, "Why have you ever broken 40?" I returned. He took a second to catch a breath, "No, let's go for it!" I felt a surprising resurgence!

"O.K', Let's do it!" For that last .2 of a mile, doesn't sound very far, but remember we had already run pretty much as fast as we could for 6 miles, we paced each other along each trying to help the other achieve something neither had been able to do thus far. The early June day was sunny and warm about 80 degrees. Not bad weather, but a little warm for setting a P.R. We sprinted the 440 meters to the finish, arms and legs pumping like mad, trying to keep up with each other, passing other runners. As we neared the finisher's corral the clock seemed to click ahead two seconds at a time, in a perverse opposite to that clock on the classroom wall that

always seemed to go backwards before the bell rang! 39:52, 39:54, 39:56.....

As we crossed the finish line gasping for breath, muscles screaming and sweat pouring off our foreheads like rainwater, we looked at the clock 40:09 was the official time!!!! Missed it by nine seconds!! We gave each other a high five and said , "Thanks" and my new friend melted into the crowd of finishers amassed just past the finish line just as quickly as he had appeared. Although my P.R. would have to wait another week, I felt exhilarated. I hadn't realized the possibility of working with my competitor to get ahead in such a seemingly individual sport.

This " Cooperation in competition" is a cornerstone of OnYerLeft.com. We believe running and sport in general does not have to be solely for individual glory, but rather a way to build a community of athletes, while sometimes competing against each other, working in tandem to help each other attain their personal bests! We hope you enjoy your experience with our OnYerLeft community and achieve your "personal bests" in sport and life! See ya on the pathways! Dave.