

Chapter 9

Racing 5's and 10's (Part 1 of 2)

“We turn not older with years, but newer every day.”

—EMILY DICKINSON, Poet

Martin

I was back running, but it was on the treadmill, as it was still too icy to run on Cochrane pathways and I didn't want to take any chances.

At a regular Wednesday session in early April, I chatted with Malc about the upcoming race season. The first race was on Sunday, April 15, and it was the Legacy 5K in Airdrie. We laid out the race plan: Work back from the race start time, which is 9:30 a.m. Give myself 60 minutes for warm-up and 40 minutes to drive there from Cochrane. Have my usual breakfast, of oatmeal, honey, banana, milk and Greek yogurt.

Malc noted that I wouldn't need to eat or drink during the race, as the time I spent running 5 km wouldn't be long enough to deplete energy stores. Also, I needed to be dressed in gear appropriate for the temperatures – but not overdressed, as it would be better to be cooler at the start.

Then he detailed the pre-race warm-up ritual:

- 15 minutes easy run, gradually increasing speed
- Drill, to improve start time and to co-ordinate brain and muscular system
- Strides slow for slower runner / faster for faster runner – to open up and extend gait so that he is running in a fluid manner
- These drills should be completed 10–15 minutes before start time. Then the runner should place himself appropriately for start – look around to see who the other runners are, or for obstacles (chariots etc.)
- For the 5K, the most efficient way to run is to have a consistent pace with even splits, but this may have to be adapted, depending on the course. When most runners get into a rhythm, it's hard to break.
- Post-race, be aware of any issues, e.g., stiffness/soreness, and deal with them straight away – don't just drive home.

The rest of the week I did a couple of sessions on the “Elliptimill,” 30 minutes on the elliptical and 30 minutes on the treadmill. On the Sunday I followed the plan according to Malc. The temperature was 3°C and I pulled up in the parking lot at the start of the race. This event is hosted by Ian Aman, a runner who, in 2016, ran the length of Alberta in 30 days. There were a few other runners milling around, looked like 70–80 in number, but I stayed focused and followed the warm-up routine Malc had laid out.



The countdown started and as the gun was fired I bolted off down the pathway. The first kilometre was brutal. My chest was tight and I was struggling to get enough air into my lungs. As I began to catch my breath another issue started to take over my mind: ice on the pathways. Not only was I trying to be aware of other runners but there were sections of black ice I literally glided over trying to keep my balance.

I worked as hard as I could and crossed the line at 25:05. My target time had been 21:05. This was my first attempt at beating my personal best in a 5-km race and I was a bit disappointed. I wasn't looking forward to my chat with Malc. I wouldn't have to wait long for that meeting. On the Wednesday morning I headed over to Malc's place wondering what he would make of this 4-minute difference between my PB time and my actual time.

He asked me how I felt about the race. I told him that the good news was that I had no issue with the ankle, just some muscle fatigue in the legs. He revealed that, according to the GPS tracking system, I ran more than 5 km due to dodging icy sections and puddles and that my actual 5-km time was 24:30. Every cloud has a silver lining. He pointed out that people tend to look at results, whereas they should look at the backstory. Then I shared with Malc one of my favourite quotes. It's by Nelson Mandela: "I never lose, I either win or learn." I think by the time "62 beats 47" is done I'll have done a lot of learning.

We then discussed the 2018 Boston Marathon and what a race that was. One of the favourite things I like to do on Boston race day is to have a full English breakfast and watch the marathon. This I did, and

when I switched the TV on I was in for a bit of a surprise. The weather in Boston was terrible, with cold temperatures, howling winds and driving rain. Even how the race played out was surprising. Normally the Kenyan and Ethiopian runners take control and never look back. This year was very different.

Japanese runner Yuki Kawauchi went out fast at the start and established a big lead. The weather caused havoc with a number of runners and several of the favourites dropped back or dropped out. Mid-race Yuki started to fall back and he dropped behind the leaders. However, the wind and rain continued, and Yuki found a new lease on life. He picked up his pace, moved to the front and never looked back. What a win.

In the women's race the winner was Desiree "Desi" Linden, the first American to win since 1985.

The Boston Marathon is not Malcolm's favourite race. In his view it is not the best course in terms of speed, you have to be bused in to the start, it's not the largest field, it's not the best field, and it's not great for spectators, especially in the early stages. Well, I like it.

At the Wednesday training session, we discussed the London Marathon, which had taken place the week before. This is the largest charity fundraising event in the world, with many runners in costume.

Guinness World Records

Guinness World Records partners with the Virgin Money London Marathon every year to give participants a shot at being a World Record holder. A team of Guinness World Record adjudicators visit the London Marathon to do their job – check costumes, verify timings and confirm successful record holders that earn their spot in the Guinness Book of World Records.

In 2018, a total of 99 people attempted 91 records. Among those attempted were – the fastest marathon on stilts and the fastest marathon dressed as a toilet. 34 records were successfully broken despite the hot weather this year. Among the records set, the fastest was set by Rob Pope who dressed as a Forrest Gump. He took the title of running the fastest marathon in a film costume. His timing was equally impressive – 2:36:28.

The Guinness World Record opportunity always draws an exceptional amount of great, creative and funny costumes. It's really exciting to see the creativity and weirdness of the outfits. Five of the most interesting included:

- 1. Victoria Bell, dressed as an emoji (poo) 4:18:06*
- 2. Julie Greenwood, dressed as a fairy tale character 4:24:07*
- 3. Bob Johnson, dressed as a three-dimensional toy 4:59:30*
- 4. Colin Haylock, fastest marathon wearing ski boots 5:52:16*
- 5. Michelle Frost, fastest marathon on stilts 6:37:38*

—Excerpted from <https://www.justrunlah.com>

The winner of the marathon was Eliud Kipchoge, the Olympic gold medallist, and he was wearing a pair of Nike Zoom Vaporfly Elite Flyprint, a customized version of the shoe that was used in Breaking2 and with a new and renewed 3D upper.

Malc noted that it was a hot day and the participants ran out of water. There was an issue with Farrah's water bottle and he explained why it's important for the elite runners to have their own. Malc also talked about over-hydrating and why this can be a major issue. For my homework Malc set me a challenge session, running fartleks at 3 minutes higher pace / 2 minutes slower pace – repeats.

My next challenge for “62 beats 47” was the Calgary Marathon 5K on May 27, but before that I had another huge challenge: granddaughter Autumn versus Papa Martin in a 5-km race.

Autumn lives in Sudbury, Ontario, and has joined me on a number of runs. The first one was during the year I ran 250 marathons in 2010. I went to Sudbury and completed a marathon there. Autumn was 6 years old and joined me on the Laurentian University track for a couple of loops. The next time was when she was visiting Sue and me in Cochrane in July 2017. She was 14 at the time and wanted to run a 5K along the pathways by the Bow River. She did a great job, running her first 5K in 43:48, but definitely suffered at the end of it.

However, this was different. She had been training with her track team and I knew she was going to give me a run for my money. She also had another goal, to beat her mom Kristina's time of 39:54 set at the Massey 5K.

In early May I travelled up to Sudbury then rented a car and headed to Sault Ste. Marie. Our son Kyle lives there and it was great to hang out with him for a few days. Returning to Sudbury I met up with Autumn the night before and we talked strategy. We agreed that we would run together and enjoy the moment of crossing the line hand in hand.

On the Sunday morning I arrived at the start of the Sudbury Rocks 5K. My old friend Vince Purdue was already there, helping out with the organization of the event. I've known Vince since 2002, and the Sudbury Rocks Running Club was the first place I went to after I had accepted the marathon challenge from my brother.

The race start was 9 a.m. and participants were milling around the event tent, picking up their race bibs and grabbing coffee and something to eat. Autumn arrived, with her dad, Ross, and we started a warm-up session. With five minutes to go Vince called us to the start line. Ross's partner Krysta and their two kids Ayls and Jack were there in support. What a thrill to be lined up to race my granddaughter.

The gun went off and away we went. For 2½ km the three of us stayed together, then Ross picked up the pace and pulled away. Autumn and I kept up a steady pace and with 1 km to go we took it up a notch. Around the final bend Autumn's competitive streak kicked in and she sprinted away. I had one thought: “No way, granddaughter,” and put the hammer down. I got closer and closer to her and we crossed the finish line together. In fact, looking at the chip time afterwards we both finished in exactly the same time: 36:34. Brilliant.



The other thing Autumn was thrilled about was that she had beaten her mom's time by 3:20. Go girl! Back in Cochrane I got a call from Autumn the following week. She had qualified to run for her district school in the 1200 m.

Returning home, it wasn't long before the Calgary Marathon 5K. It was scheduled for May 27 and it was my final chance to beat my PB at that distance before moving on to the longer runs.

However, before then I had to do my first long run. My running buddy Roy Ellis joined me and he really pushed the pace. Roy has two speeds: fast or faster. We were supposed to be doing a 5:30–5:40 pace, but he raised it to around 4:40 and at times, close to 4:20. Roy pulled away from me on the second 10 km and I really struggled. I had been a fool. I hadn't stuck to my plan and was suffering for it. On the following Wednesday, I felt a bit dispirited when I went to see Malc. But he reassured me that it hadn't been a waste of time, as the body always learns and it was a good test of my endurance.

Malc asked if I had had any after-effects and I said that I had soreness in my calf muscles for a few days. From the data, Malc could see that I could maintain a higher pace for one hour and then my body switched to endurance running – teaching the body to just keep going.

No rest for the wicked. On Sunday I headed into Calgary and made my way to the 5K start line. What a difference from the Legacy 5K and Sudbury 5K. Here the start line was jammed, and I knew I had to head up to the front if I didn't want to get tangled up with a mass of other runners. It was a cool, crisp day and I felt good. The gun went off and before I knew it I was crossing the finish line. Chip time: 24:00. Close but no cigar.

I was wondering if I was barking up the wrong tree. I was still 2:55 slower than my PB time.

I looked at the race as a learning experience and the following Wednesday talked with Malc about the Bad news / Good news balance.

- Bad news – Didn't achieve my goal
- Good news – Came 35th in my gender / 41st out of 1,827 runners in the 5K
- Good news – Came first in my 60–65 age group and, therefore, got a trophy to put in my trophy cabinet alongside my other trophy I had won for coming first in a snowshoe marathon in Yellowknife in 2013.

It was three weeks to the next race, the Sport Life Calgary 10K, and Malc told me that my goal now was to keep my energy levels up and stay motivated.

June 1 came around, the halfway point of the year, and things were not going well. The first half had been a real grind (injury and two sub-PB efforts). I was still waiting for a breakthrough and could certainly understand how runners get disillusioned and wonder if it's worth it. Malc tried to console me. He said that a breakthrough would occur when body decided, not before. He added that it works in leaps and bounds, that it's hard to plan ahead and that this is different from skill-based sports.

Despite all my self-doubts, I was trying to stay positive and started to get excited about the 10-km race in the middle of the month. I decided to adopt my "Finish the Race Attitude," set goals, overcome obstacles to achieve outstanding results, and to "chunk it down" and concentrate on the 10K and not think about the half-marathon.