

Kid's Play

I'd asked him if that evening after work he wanted to join me in running as fast as we could the Club's weekly five-mile course. He'd agreed. We both showed up at the appointed time. I got out of my car first, wearing my fastest running shoes, running shorts, and a race shirt. Exiting his car, I saw his running shoes, his shorts, and a race number attached to his running shirt. We both laughed. That was our last conversation.

Jogging to the road-wide crack in asphalt, the "official" start of the course that we'd each run almost every Wednesday night for almost a decade, we each silently pressed the lap button on our running watches, looked up the slight half-mile incline, pressing immediately into our accelerated pace. He had always been just a step ahead of me no matter the distance. All I had was tenacity. Well into the first mile, just as the incline leveled out, I took a small two-step lead. He took his position just off my right shoulder.

We came out of the apartment-filled neighborhood onto the wide sidewalk along the boulevard. Heading into the first of the four righthand turns onto the other main thoroughfare at the intersection, he cruised just past me. Accelerating to maintain contact, I pressed to stay just a stride behind him. Turning right again, now in the third mile, I surged past him. He assumed his prior position. Passing the two-story condos on our right, heading into the third righthand turn, he pulled past me coming out of the turn. I strained in succeeding to hang tough. One turn in the final mile remained.

Now racing in the dark, we were oblivious to the car traffic always to our left, and the constant din surrounding us. I could hear my practiced breathing. At this pace and at this point in our route, there was much else to hear. All I could do was focus on staying with his stride, each grabbing more ground than I could gain in one stride. His racing form was tall, smooth, effortless. I hung tough.

We leaned heavily into the final turn, running the slight incline leading to a gentle decline to the tall oak tree, the unofficial finish. I sprinted up the hill. He ran faster. I sprinted down to the tree. He was faster. I saw him finish. He heard me finish. Easing into a slow jog, we turned to one another, each of us smiling, which led to shared laughing. We may be adults, but we hadn't forgotten that we had been kids first. Being kids at play is serious business. My turn to pay for the pizza and beer.