

Punxsutawney Phil

Monday was another experience in slow running, a cause of a below range testosterone count leading to below range hemoglobin leading to way to high of a glucose level, all showing that I am fatigued, unable to produce the running power needed, and no blood sugar released into my body offering the fuel required to . . . actually run.

On Monday's 3.5-mile run, which looked like an opening mile in what felt like a walk. The day was bathed in bright, warm sunshine, people scattered throughout the park. I felt like whale dung stuck in the muck. Running on the mile-long odd-shaped oval, I occasionally saw my shadow, the day after Groundhog's Day. The shadow showed a scary skeleton, moving over the faded asphalt path in rickety fashion. I stopped a mile into the short run to retie my left shoe.

Heading out the bike path away from the park, the slog of a pace quickened only imperceptibly, with my focus on keeping some sort of rhythm in the constant mental task to keep my left shoe from scrapping my inner right ankle bone. The day was warm, but I was not yet perspiring. Hell, my breath was barely being expelled. I stopped at the turnaround, listening to the passing train's whistle, while I mentally regrouped.

Returning to the park, my skeleton shadow following me, my running form feeling as awkward to me as I thought it was to the fellow pedestrians I passed, hopeful that the next phase of the effect of a run would kick in, realizing that it would not be so today, I remained focused on lifting my knees, which lifted my ankles, the effect being that my feet didn't meet. Reaching my car, I stopped.

Tuesday was a much colder continuation of Monday's run. It was also confirmation of a pattern that had developed. I could not run continuously or with ease, but that was not the new pattern. I couldn't run other than slowly, but that was not new, either. I could not run continuously past an hour. Even that was questionable.

I've run this variations of this route weekly for over a decade, a decade in which I've raced marathons used for Boston Marathon qualifications, half marathons for racing fun, and many, many training miles in getting to where I wanted to be as a runner. the route's pine is a long, meandering bike path, along which five different neighborhoods

adjoining the path are available, each including miles to run on quiet streets with pride-of-ownership homes. I know the parts I want to run fast, including what is dubbed the School Hill because it starts or ends at the high school, passing the middle school and finishing or beginning at the elementary school. It stands out, just as the mile-long section that runs alongside the small stream that, following a heavy rain becomes a dramatic river beside and just below us.

We chose to head up the riverside portion of the path in starting the run, stopping to use the always open restrooms. It was locked. We entered the adjoining neighborhood, and toured the shortest portion closest to the restroom. Returning to the restroom, we stopped to find it remained locked. Continuing to the cars, we stopped for gloves before running into the next neighborhood, up the long middle street before turning to run down the quietest of the three streets, back onto the path to the schools. We stopped at the high school before running up School Hill and down through the apartment complex so large that we count it as a neighborhood.

We were now an hour into our run. We stopped because I had no energy. We walked because I had no energy. We started running even though I had no energy. We walked because I had no energy. We started running even though I had no energy. This pattern continued to our finish back at the cars. I'd found rock bottom.

Wednesday was a workout day. I'd chosen to run four 5:00 repeats at 5km pace, modest as that pace is for me. Knowing I wasn't able to run long, these repeats had a 30-second rest between each built into the plan. The warmup mile reminded me that I didn't have the physical strength to run continuously, much less fast. On the fly, I changed the repeats to 4:30 in time, extending the rest to 1:00. The run sucked, the pace not remotely approximating my 5km pace, or my 10km pace, or my half marathon pace.

Thursday was a repeat of Monday, and of Tuesday, and of Wednesday's efforts. All the blood work had now been drawn – twice. My general practitioner clearly wanted to button down all possibilities, despite the obviousness of the test results. My orthopedist ruled out osteoporosis from my hip ex-rays, making clear that the below-range testosterone would eventually cause issues. My endocrinologist clearly elucidated the wide net the below-range testosterone was causing me on all levels, seeking a few more labs.

Running 8.5 miles on the Bottoms bike path alongside the river, I walked for one minute starting each mile before then running the remainder, the remainder falling from slow to slogging. The path was fuller than would be normal on a weekday afternoon. Feeling the day's warmth, listening to the birds, and watching the younger deer dare to step out of the woods to watch all of us using the path, I had no energy. This was nothing new. Each segment initiated at the usual pace; a pace that slowed with an immediacy I'd not experienced before. I'd found my new normal. Until someone with the authority to address the issue actually steps up.

I didn't run on Friday.

Saturday was the weekly weekend group run. We chose the library. I arrived 15 minutes earlier than the rest, choosing a route they wouldn't run, set my watch to go off at 6:00 segments followed by a 30-second walking segment. For 10 miles, I ran a pace that felt faster than it was, a pace I knew wasn't fast enough to warrant my even running it. As I said afterwards, during the post-run brunch, it was a great day for a run with an overcast sky, moderate temperatures requiring only one top layer, and just enough humidity in the air, creating one of the better running mornings of the year. Too bad, I said that I wasn't there to run in it.

Each segment matched the segment before and after with the usual pace that I know to be my practice pace followed by a rapid pace decline to the end of the segment, followed by a short walk. The run evolved into a constant battle in maintaining even the new normal pace. Two months ago, I ran this loop with the rest at a pace that was minutes per mile faster than I accomplished this morning. It didn't help that my memory of this run was of the large pack of male runners, running shirtless, going past the other way, or of group playing bocce while they waited for me to finish.

I'm past cursing to myself. The thought that this is not my fault continually crosses my mind. I know that I am not unique in thinking that way. My wife's multiple sclerosis has advanced well beyond any physical ailments she had envisioned when she was diagnosed in her twenty's. I see people on my running routes who are barely able to run, striding in a manner they know isn't running while realizing the alternative is less than ideal. I view walkers getting along the bike paths carrying the baggage that are their legs and joints. I watch people throw themselves from their cars to the nearest park bench just so they can sit and enjoy the day. I am not unique.

Then again, I am unique. I know my. I know who I am. I have visions of me based on memories of me and hopes of being a better me. Realizing the visions and the hopes begin with me, rather than repeatedly replay the frustration in running without energy and of unfulfilled expectations, a different tack is needed. Until the physicians figure out that waiting for perfection in test results achieves very little in my regaining a quality of life, I'll do a workaround.

In the upcoming week, I have a workout set for Tuesday and a short but quicker workout on Friday. As what I want is to run at the pace I know, and because I cannot maintain that pace for very long, then, the run/walk method appears to be the answer.

On Monday's easy run, where pace is not as important, the run segment will match the walking portion, say 1:00 running, followed by 1:00 walking. 45 minutes of that should be sufficient. On Tuesday, because the Bottoms has quarter-mile posts for 4.25 miles (the unspoken secret is that the out-and-back is just a bit short of a full eight miles because the fifth mile is not quite that long), I'll run a quarter, jog a quarter, rinse and repeat. Wednesday will be a repeat of Monday. Thursday will be a bit more challenging in that, I want to see how long I can run without taking a break. I sense a massive fail. Friday will repeat Monday and Wednesday's runs. The Saturday longer run I'll fake, running longer segments with short walk breaks.

Though now much older, I'm still that kid willing to grab a shovel in search of the pony in the room full of horse manure. That mindset is how I've approached living my life. No reason to stop now. I am facing death, just yet. Wha I am facing is a seeming indifference from my medical team. One day in their lives they'll each have a threshold to cross, but that thought doesn't help me. I want to run as part of my daily life. Only I can make that happen.

My body doesn't know the pace or distance. It does know time. So, I run based on time on feet, a phrase I normally use for long runs. Just in the doing do I gain so much. Just run. Just breath. Just eat. Just smile. Always love. Kinda covers the bases, don't ya think?

Damned groundhog.