

February 2017 Wingfoot Spotlight: When a Race Speaks to You, Listen

By Barbara Huebner

Like art (Botticelli? Picasso? Cindy Sherman?) or music (Chopin? Billie Holiday? Jimmy Buffett?), road races have different styles and rhythms that draw people to them and bring them back again and again. Whether it's a locale or a theme or a friend who inspires you, something compels you and soon you realize that you've found your niche race.

Even elite runners feel the pull. Amby Burfoot, winner of the 1968 Boston Marathon and longtime editor of *Runner's World* magazine, grew up in Groton, CT, and has run the nearby 4.748-mile Manchester Road Race every Thanksgiving for the past 54 years. As a 17-year-old in 1963, it was the first road race he ever ran, and just before his 50th Manchester in 2012 he told *Race Results Weekly* that the streak is better than his Boston victory.

"It's a different achievement as we all know," said Burfoot, who also won Manchester nine times. "In my mind, it is a greater achievement. I think one could say that there are more Boston Marathon winners than there are runners who have run the same road race 50 years in a row... To me the spirit and ethic of endurance running is not just doing it one day, but doing it for a lifetime."



That's about how long Nick Arciniaga hopes to run the Star Wars Half Marathon at Disneyland. For Arciniaga, who finished 10th in the 2016 U.S. Olympic Marathon Trials and was the 2013 USA Marathon Champion, the appeal is as obvious as the Death Star cookie jar over his fridge and the Boba Fett toilet seat in the guest bathroom. Arciniaga won inaugural race in 2015, came back last year to break the tape with a light saber, and ran again last month.

"This will be the race where I want to have a streak," said Arciniaga before defending last year's title. "It speaks to me more than anything else."

And that, more than anything, explains the lure of that one special race for so many of us, including the four runners profiled below.

The Falmouth Five

After the finish of the first Falmouth Road Race on a rainy, windswept day in 1973, Brian Salzberg was among those who adjourned directly to the Brothers Four to find the great Johnny Kelley—a two-time winner of the Boston Marathon who would go on to run Boston a record 61 times—already "looking fresh as a daisy in a Hawaiian shirt, jitterbugging with his wife. We were impressed."

Impressed enough that Salzberg has run every year since, crossing the finish line for the 40th consecutive year last August.

"From the second year of the race, you were able to compete together with the best runners in the world," he said. "The camaraderie, the small-town atmosphere... I don't have that same association with other races."

Now a professor of neuroscience and physiology at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Medicine, Salzberg in 1973 was a post-doctoral student at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, where he was inspired by a running colleague, Mike Bennett. When word of a new "bar race" started circulating around the lab, they both decided to give it a try. (The New Balance Falmouth Road Race still begins at the Captain Kidd in Woods Hole, MA; the Brothers Four in Falmouth Heights no longer exists.) After about 10 years, the men who'd run every race "realized there was something unusual about this" and began celebrating together; by the race's 25th anniversary the group was down to six. When Kelley retired, the "Falmouth Five"—which still includes Bennett, too—was born, and carries on to this day.

Although he moved to Philadelphia in 1975, Salzberg maintained a lab in Woods Hole until 1995 and spent summers on Cape Cod. Since then he has made the yearly pilgrimage from Philly, but that's hardly the biggest obstacle he's faced: In 2008, he completed the race on crutches after spraining a ligament in his left foot, and two years later walked it after surgery for a benign brain tumor earlier that summer. And in 1978, he shared a post-race room in Falmouth Hospital with Alberto Salazar after they both suffered heat stroke.

Salzberg will be 75 when Falmouth marks its 45th running this year, and he's looking forward to it. "It's a real happening," he said.



Low-Key Queen of the Dutchess County Classic

Marisa Sutera Strange has won the Dutchess County Classic 5K 23 times, including 17 consecutive victories. Those totals give her the most total wins and most consecutive wins in history, anywhere in the world, male or female, at the same race.



"I never kept track," said Sutera Strange, 53. "I just went for the enjoyment of it. A lot of times you go to races to see the people. Then eventually someone said to me, 'Do you realize you're getting close to some world record?'"

It was just this September that Sutera Strange, who has also won "about 20" U.S. age-group championships and holds the U.S. 50-54 record for 3000 meters indoors, broke the overall world record for most consecutive wins at a road race. Her 17th-straight Classic victory vaulted her past two men, a Brit and a South African, who were tied at 16.

But don't expect her to recite too many facts, figures or dates. She isn't kidding when she says she doesn't keep track, which is one reason that her astonishing records aren't better known in the running community. That, and the fact that she encourages her local newspaper to write about other runners "with better stories."

A two-time All-American 400-meter hurdler while at Ithaca College, Sutera Strange was living in Saratoga Springs, NY, when she decided to

come home for race weekend in 1989. After soon moving back to the area, doing the Classic every year “was easy because it was local—especially with kids.”

One of the things she loves most about the race, she says, is that it’s an out-and-back.

“That’s really wonderful,” she says. “I’ll yell for a few people, and they’ll yell for me. I’m really grateful that at 53 I’m still able to win it, but if it doesn’t happen next year, oh well. At my age I’m glad to be able to get to the starting line and run.”

Sutera Strange almost skipped the Classic a few years ago to watch her son, Sibby, run a cross country meet for North Carolina State, but then decided to fly back in time so that he wouldn’t be disappointed that she missed it.

“I hope he gets the same joy from running that I’ve gotten,” she says of the son who stood cheering at many a Classic.

Her One Annual Race: Tufts Health Plan 10K for Women

“I’m a runner with a very small ‘r’ now,” says Kathy Sastavickas. “I race once a year, and that’s the Tufts 10K.”

Sastavickas, 66, is one of 13 women who have completed every Tufts Health Plan 10K for Women in Boston. Despite battling two arthritic knees, she finished the 40th edition of the race last October and headed straight to the medical tent to get iced.

“I know it’s coming and I don’t mind,” she says of the pain. “My goal used to be time: under 50 minutes, under an hour. Now I want to run it without any additional injuries.” To get ready for the race, she jogs and kicks laps in a pool, running outside “maybe twice.”

The race began in 1977 as the Bonne Bell Mini Marathon, part of a 12-race series of women-only races held across the country. Sastavickas was 26, trying to maintain her weight after recently having quit smoking; her first “training run” took her as far as a nearby dumpster. Her most-vivid memories of that first race are running up a set of stairs on the course and the presence of what she recalls as only three porta-potties for over 2,000 women. (Race organizers were expecting perhaps 200.) But she finished the race, and after five years went by realized that she had created a tradition for herself.

The winner of that first race, 17-year-old Lynn Jennings, soon created a tradition for herself, as well, going on to notch six victories and five runner-up finishes. In 1990, she told the *Boston Globe* that other than the Olympics or the World Cross Country Championships, Tufts was her favorite race in the world.

Over the decades, Sastavickas—a retired human resources manager from Ashland, MA, who is now a bartender and involved in CASA, which assists abused and neglected children—has run the race with a temperature of 103 degrees and walked it with a broken collarbone. From 1994 to 2008, while living in California, she planned family visits to coincide with race weekend.

“It was part of my fabric,” she says. “I think it was because it was my first. I liked that it was all women—I can remember being outraged about women not being allowed to run the Boston Marathon [before 1972]. Women didn’t always have the chance to feel good about themselves as athletes. Now I get excited about the first- and second-year runners because I imagine that it’s the start of something for them.”

Running for Two at Peachtree

Relationships have put Bill Harkins on the starting line of the AJC Peachtree Road Race for 40 consecutive years.

In 1977, a friend and former Rhodes College teammate named Mark Edwards convinced Harkins that he could keep running even after his collegiate career as a 400-meter runner ended. "We're running Peachtree," said Edwards. "I'll be your coach." A yearly tradition was born.

It's not the only relationship that has kept Harkins lining up every July 4.

"It's fascinating how the race has become part of the tapestry of my professional life," said Harkins, an Episcopal priest and a marriage and family therapist.

At about two miles, the race runs right past the Cathedral of St. Philip, at which Harkins is a priest associate, where Dean Sam Candler blesses the runners with holy water and Harkins can count on being greeted by friends and parishioners. Further down Peachtree Road, he passes by the Brookwood Exchange Building, where he has supervised doctoral students every Friday for many years. Harkins has run Peachtree—and even auctioned himself off as a coach—to raise funds for professional causes, and has begun to run on behalf of Atlanta Track Club's Kilometer Kids.

"That has been huge, to be a part of contributing to getting kids, especially from the city schools, interested in running," he said.



In February of 1992, the college teammate who started it all was diagnosed with melanoma. In early December, in a final conversation at a favorite hangout, Edwards asked Harkins to keep running Peachtree every year for both of them. Edwards died later that month.

"In the early years, I was excited about the growing number of people who were doing it, and the top athletes like Frank Shorter and Bill Rodgers [who finished 1-2 in 1977, Harkins' first year]," Harkins says of the race. "I was young, and they had free beer in Piedmont Park at the end of the race. My reasons for running have changed, but they have added, not detracted."

Running Peachtree every year, he said, "has taken on a life of its own."