

Larry Switzer

Larry Switzer has been prominent in the Winnipeg running community since the 1960's and he is arguably as big a figure now as he was in the early years. He was an exceptional distance runner and has been a leader as a coach and administrator since before his elite performances were done. It started when his mother wanted to send him to camp and the camp she chose was the Peace Garden Track Camp in 1963 when Larry was only 12 years old. He met Wayne McMahon at that camp and the two have worked together for the past 42 years in starting and building the Optimist Club. In 1963, Larry lived in Basswood, Manitoba, where Larry's Mom was the school principal. When the school closed a couple of years later, Mrs. Switzer found a teaching job in Winnipeg to continue her career. Larry attended Gordon Bell High School from Grade 9 and in the first year, they won the provincial cross-country championship in Birtle, dominating with a team total of 21 (1, 2, 5, 6, 7). Larry was a great track and road runner but he achieved his greatest successes in cross-country, starting with that one.

Larry was one of the top cross-country runners in the province through his high school years, coached by legend Dave Lyon, who taught at Gordon Bell, and ran the Razorback Track Club. Being small in stature, Larry was classified as a primary in those years, and competed against Ron Melnichuk in that classification on the track. When Larry finished 3rd at the Junior National Cross-country championships, it paved the way for him to earn a scholarship to Oklahoma Baptist University, a scholarship that paid \$15,000 in 1969 (when that was a lot of money). In 1971, Larry represented Canada at the Pan Pacific Cross-Country Championships. In 1972, he ran a 30:13 at the national 10 km championships.

He completed his Education degree in 3 ½ years at OBU, and then enrolled at U of MB for a Master's in Education Administration and was able to use 2 more years of eligibility to compete for the Bisons, coached by Chris McCubbins and Jim Daly. At the cross-country nationals, Larry finished 2nd in consecutive years.

Following his university career, Larry got a job at Buchanan Elementary School in Westwood, and continued to train and race. In the first Manitoba Marathon in 1979, he was on the winning Razorback team in the team event and won a trip to the Honolulu marathon that year as a prize, where he was the third fastest Canadian in the Hawaii race. In 1981, he ran a 29:53 10 km in New Orleans and a 2:22 marathon in Boston.

Larry got seriously involved in the administration of the sport in 1979 when he, along with Greg Hershman, Wayne McMahon and Jack Barrington founded the Optimist Track Club of Assiniboia, that would become the Assiniboine Optimist Club and then the Winnipeg Optimist Club as it became one of the leading track clubs in the province. That club started the Boeing Indoor Track Championships in 1981 and it has continued to be the premier annual indoor track event in Manitoba, if not in Western Canada, attracting athletes from across Canada, and especially the prairies and northwest Ontario.

Larry has also served as the Team Leader for Canada's track team in 1984 in Puerto Rico, then at the Commonwealth Games in Scotland in 1986, the Goodwill Games in Seattle in 1987, the European Tour in Poland also in 1987, the Ekiden Relays in Tokyo in 1988, the Commonwealth Games in New Zealand in 1990, the World Championships in Stuttgart in 1993, the Atlanta Olympics in 1996, the World Championships in Seville in 1999, the World Championships in Edmonton in 2001 and in Paris in 2003, the Athens Olympics in 2004 and the World Cup in 2006.

In looking back on a career that has earned him induction into the Manitoba Sports Hall of Fame in 2006, Larry says his favourite road race is still the Manitoba Marathon. His most satisfying achievements include running for Canada and keeping the Boeing championships going for 40 years.

Larry's fastest 1500 was 3:59; his fastest 5 km was 14:45; 10 km was 29:53; 10 mile was 49 minutes in Thunder Bay; 20km was 64 minutes; ½ marathon was 67:30 (the first half of the Olympic trials marathon that was won in 2:16) and full marathon was that 2:22 in Boston in 1981.

Larry's has been a tremendous career as an athlete and as a builder and it is easy to see why he was recognized by the Manitoba Sports Hall of Fame. He has been a significant figure in the first 50 years of the MRA.