

Ralph Waples

Ralph Waples was an elite hockey player who after playing through his youth, went on to play 3 years of University hockey with the likes of the late great Wayne Fleming. Running was a means to a fitness end, and so Ralph ran in the summer and fall to be ready for hockey season. When the 1979 Manitoba Marathon was announced, Ralph decided it was time to meet that challenge and test his running against his contemporaries and entered and trained for that race. His first road race was the 1979 Tribune 10 km. In that 1979 Manitoba Marathon, he managed a 3:04 under difficult conditions. Not bad for a hockey player hobby runner!

As he started his running career, Ralph discovered that he had neighbours who were good runners. He and Bob Moody joined with Doug Sammons and his Phidippides running group, and soon John Thresher and Ken James and later Steve Chipman joined the group. They also called themselves the River Heights Ironmen, and entered (and excelled at) one of the Manitoba Marathon relay events under that name, as well as doing 2 of the Banff-Jasper relay events.

Ralph improved his time to 2:47 in the 1980 Manitoba Marathon, good for about 75th place. He started running the Gimli 10 mile race in 1980 and has the distinction of finishing 10th in three straight races on that course, which was a little short of 10 miles until the course was certified a few years later. Interestingly, although his placement was the same each year, his time improved from 56 minutes to 54 minutes to 53 minutes. Regardless of his improvement, the same nemeses continued to finish ahead of him! And somewhere far ahead was Chris McCubbins winning each race.

When Ralph ran 2:34 in the Manitoba Marathon in 1981, he was the 4th Manitoban and 13th overall in the race, showing how many fast visitors ran our race in those years. That same year, Ralph ran the same time in the Twin Cities Marathon in the fall.

Ralph taught for 40 years at St. John's Ravenscourt school and taught Phys Ed and coached hockey. There was not a real track program there, but the students had Phys Ed every day and so were kept active. Ralph ran to and from school from his home on Ash Street and the students would wave at him as they passed him on the school bus. He modeled rather than taught a running lifestyle.

Ralph kept running, and skating, until very recently when a knee injury sidelined him. He hopes to be able to return to both if the injury can be resolved. He gave up racing after his 15 year old son beat him in the Manitoba Half Marathon, when Ralph for the first time experienced "the wall" and still finished in the 1:30's.

The most satisfying achievement of Ralph's running career was getting a number of students to make running part of their life's routine, and having them greet him over the years since with thanks for giving them the gift of a healthy lifestyle.

His favourite races were Bird's Hill, Pinawa and Gimli. A favourite story was running the Pacesetter Prediction 10 km with Chris Weber, one of the fastest road runners Manitoba ever produced, and Ralph giving the supreme effort while Chris chatted amiably beside him. Ralph was just 4 seconds off his predicted time and still did not finish among the top 3 predictors!

Ralph ran a lot more 10 kms than 5 kms and as a result his best 5 km result is actually slower pace than his 10 km! Personal bests are 16:08 for 5 km; 32:08 for 10 km; 53 minutes for 10 miles (on the old course that was a few meters short); 1:14 for the half marathon; and 2:34 for the marathon.

So, for those of you who have had little respect for the running ability of hockey players, don't be too quick to assume that some of them can't outrun you. Remember that Larry Switzer was a hockey player before he was a runner too!