

Roger Schwegel

To say the least, Roger Schwegel has left a very large, indelible footprint on Manitoba road running. Only three Manitoba runners have ever raced a marathon faster and then by only a little over a minute. His running nickname could be Mr. Manitoba Marathon for his consistent high finishes in Winnipeg's annual Fathers' Day event.

A native of St. Cloud, Minnesota from a large family of 8 children, Roger's dream as a youth was to become a major league baseball pitcher and to earn a varsity sport letter at his high school playing baseball. When these ambitions were not exactly working out his sister asked him gloomily "how are you going to get a sport letterman's jacket?" Serendipity would come to his rescue one spring day in 1969 when, as a grade 10 student, his gym class had to run a mile and his PE instructor announced "anyone who runs the mile under 5:30 would be invited onto the school's C squad for fall cross country." Roger made the standard just barely by running 5:30 in his first ever mile and unwittingly triggered into motion his destiny as an elite runner. That fall in grade 11 he showed up for cross country training starting on the school's C squad, then quickly moved up to the B squad and finally to the esteemed varsity team. By the end of his first season of competitive running he finished second on the varsity squad at the state championship, won by a teammate.

In his final year of high school in 1970 – 71 Roger was chosen captain of his cross country and track teams and ran the second fastest 2 mile time of 9:23 by a high schooler in the state of Minnesota. Roger would get his coveted sport letter with jacket after all, as a varsity runner, to his sister's silent delight. His rapid development as a competitive runner brought him an athletic scholarship to North Dakota State University in Fargo in 1971. In only his second year of college sports he would earn All-American honours in cross country by placing 20th at the NCAA Division II National Championship. A natural leader, in his 3rd and 4th years at NDSU, he was chosen captain of the cross country team and co-captain of the track team. The highlights of his college athletic career include a 4th place finish at the cross country national championship and two 2nd place finishes in the 6 mile event at the track & field national championship. He would qualify for the prestigious All-American team a total of 5 times throughout his outstanding college athletic career during which he posted impressive times of 4:09 – mile, 8:53 – 2 mile, 13:56 – 3 mile, and 28:37 – 6 mile, by training 100 miles a week.

Graduating in 1975 with a Bachelor of Science degree he stopped racing and accepted a job offer in The Pas, Manitoba to teach outdoor education at the high school. He taught there for four years before returning to NDSU to get his Masters Degree. During this period, he did some recreational running and would get his introduction into what would become his signature running event by completing the inaugural Manitoba Marathon in 1979. In 1982 he returned to The Pas for 7 more years as the town's Recreation Programmer. They say "you can't keep a good man down" and apparently a runner either as Roger would return to competitive racing with a vengeance in the early 1980's and the marathon would be his sword. He started by finishing 5th in the 1983 Manitoba Marathon. He followed this up with 2nd – 1984, 3rd – 1985 and top Canadian and Canadian marathon champion, 3rd – 1986, 3rd – 1987, top Canadian - 1989, 1st – 1990, 3rd – 1991, 3rd 1993, top Manitoba runner - 1994. In 1984 at the Montreal Marathon, he ran his fastest marathon of 2:20:23 finishing 10th as the top Canadian and putting him 4th on the all-time Manitoba native marathon list where he remains today. Not a bad record for a discouraged baseball player who barely qualified for his high school's 3rd squad in cross country.

In 1989 he moved his family to Winnipeg and continued his career as a Phys-Ed and health teacher for the next 23 years at St. Maurice School. By now he had become a fixture in MRA road races and had clearly established himself as one of Manitoba's best road runners. When asked if he has a favourite MRA race, he harkens back to his early days as a harrier proclaiming "cross country was my favourite running sport so I always enjoyed doing the Grand Beach Sun Run" - a unique 10K race which is run mostly on the road but with the last 2 miles run along Lake Winnipeg's sandy shoreline finishing at Manitoba's famous Grand Beach resort.

He continued to participate in running events up to the half marathon into his 50's until his doctor advised him to take up a less stressful activity after diagnosing cartilage deterioration in his knees. He stayed active with cycling, cross country skiing and swimming. When asked what running has meant to his life and what he learned as a runner he eloquently answered - "I ran thousands of miles and I ran behind some of the best runners of the day. I learned a lot about how hard work will get you further ahead. I learned what I had to do to be successful at running. I made great friends through running. I received an education because I was a runner. I learned how to handle fear and how to perform under pressure. I was lucky to have a body built for my running. I realized I just didn't have the speed of the good runners. I believe I took my running about as far as I could, I knew where I stood in the world of running. I sleep well at night knowing I went as far as I could go with my God given talent."

Now living in Piney, Manitoba Roger continues his calling working with young people through substitute teaching while maintaining his active outdoor lifestyle with fishing, hunting, cross country skiing, riding and a new avocation - gardening. His legacy as one of Manitoba's best ever marathon runners remains secure in the annals of our sports history.