

Excerpts from *Runners on Running*

—from “My Old Buick,” by Don Kardong

For years I suffered from a sharp pain in my left knee, which was especially acute during downhill running. After five or six years of flirting with ice, aspirin, and cortisone treatments, the pain finally subsided with the development of better running shoes. Apparently the problem was bursitis, but knowing that didn't seem to help much. And though doctors in recent years have gotten better at treating the well-hidden glitches in human athletic machinery, they're not always sympathetic to the excesses of long-distance runners.

A college teammate of mine who had injured his knee complained to his doctor that the joint would tighten up when he tried to run more than five miles a day.

The doctor was incredulous. “Well then, don't run more than five miles a day,” he said.

—from “Get Out of My Race and Give Me Those Numbers!” by Kathrine Switzer

Then suddenly, a man with an overcoat and felt hat was in the middle of the road shaking his finger at me; he said something to me as I passed and reached out for my hand, catching my glove instead and pulling it off. I did a kind of stutter step, and we all had to jostle around him. I thought he was a nutty spectator, but when I passed I caught a glimpse of a blue and gold BAA ribbon on his lapel. Where had he come from?

Moments later, I heard the scraping noise of leather shoes coming up fast behind me, an alien and alarming sound amid the muted thump-thumping of the rubber running shoes. When a runner hears that kind of noise, it's usually danger—just like hearing a dog's claws on the pavement. Instinctively I jerked my head around quickly and looked squarely into the most vicious face I'd ever seen. A big man, a huge man, with bared teeth was set to pounce, and before I could react he grabbed my shoulder and flung me back screaming, “Get the hell out of my race and give me those numbers!” Then he swiped down my front, trying to rip off my bib number, just as I leapt backward from him. He missed the numbers but I was so surprised and frightened that I slightly wet my pants, and turned to run. But now the man had the back of my shirt and was swiping at the bib number on my back. I was making little cries of aa-uh, aa-uh, not thinking at all, just trying to get away, when I saw tiny brave Arnie bat at him and try to push him away, shouting, “Leave her alone, Jock, I've trained her, she's okay, leave her alone!” And the man screamed, “Stay out of this, Arnie!” and swatted him away like a gnat.

—from “Duel in the Sun” by John Brant

After watching the early part of the race on TV, and discovering that an extraordinary contest was in progress—two runners, stripped down to bone and will, relentlessly moving down the streets of their city—the citizens of Boston turned out of their houses to witness the finish. Fathers lifted their children up on their shoulders and told them to pay attention, as an estimated crowd of two million turned out to watch some part of the 1982 Boston Marathon.

Beardsley had come off Heartbreak with Salazar breathing down his neck. The crowd pressed so close there was barely a path to run through. They were screaming so loud he couldn't hear himself think. He couldn't feel his legs. They seemed to belong to somebody else.

Twenty-one miles into the eighty-sixth Boston Marathon, and he was running a stride in front of the great Salazar, who must be hurting too. Because if Salazar wasn't fried, he would have blown past him by now.

Five more miles was unthinkable. Beardsley decided he'd just go one more mile. That would be easy—or at least possible. Stay ahead of Salazar for one more mile. After that—well, he'd think of something.

He couldn't feel his legs. One more mile.

Meanwhile, Salazar was hurting. Shards of pain splintered up from Salazar's left hamstring. Sometime during the last few miles he had stopped sweating. His singlet had stiffened, as if covered in dried blood.

All that mattered now was not losing. That made things simple. He could forget about his time and focus on that single and sovereign goal. He might lose a ten-thousand-meter race to a Henry Rono, but he did not lose marathons, especially to a palooka in a painter's cap. Any moment now Beardsley might blow up and drop away like a disintegrating booster rocket. If he could maintain the pace, then it would simply be a matter of outkicking him.