

Know your own limits and keep within them

By Bill Shaw

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In the third mile of a four-miler Friday, I explored a couple of subjects for this column. First, I tried to draft a Halloween horror story or poem, but I just couldn't come up with an idea.

With my hamstring still half strung and my left foot still flopping flat on the street, I thought about my long recovery from an injury that kept me off the streets and trails from July 22 until Sept. 25. Even with major surgery and broken bones, plantar fasciitis, chronic back problems and torn muscles, I haven't had a longer down time.

Coming back was tough and tested my character. On my first walks/jogs, I could hardly make the curves of the new 440 track behind the Freeport Intermediate School.

I was really depressed when I read the September essay in Marty Jerome's "The Complete Runner's Day-by-Day Log and Calendar." The essay begins, "Picture the injury that would make you stop running. ... More likely, persistent, low-grade pain will do you in. The joy will be hounded from your workouts until you quit."

"So this is it," I thought. "This is the injury and persistent, low-

grade pain that will take me off the streets and trails and off the sports page every other Monday."

Needless to say, I was immersed in a dark blue funk at the perspectives.

I put the dark thoughts and pessimistic voices out of my mind and kept on slogging slowly through my runs.

In October, the blue funk began to fade. My mileage went up; my times went down.

So in that third mile of the four-miler Friday, I thought of running the Saturday Monster Dash 5K. My ego kept me from making up my mind to run the race. I knew I would be at the end of the pack, maybe even last to cross the finish line.

Friday night I struggled with my pride and set out my racing togs. I decided to run no matter what my time or pace or place. I need to develop humility. My only anxieties were that I would fall, injure or embarrass myself.

Saturday morning, I toed the line with 58 other runners and walkers.

I finished 54th out of 58, 8:45 slower than I finished the Monster Dash last year. But I finished. My career is not over. I am not a "has been." I am a "still doing," a slow "still doing," but a "still doing."

The injury that makes you stop running for good, says Jerome, "is particularly bitter

medicine for racers. But there's no fighting it. One way or another, you'll have to make peace with your body."

Patience helps us make peace with our bodies when they betray us or we abuse them with overtraining, as I did, whether you are 67, as I am, or an elite athlete in his teens or 20s at the peak of his prowess and speed.

"No, the sure cure for pain is a change in expectations," Jerome writes. "Recovery from running injuries is unfathomably slow."

When I think about my slow recovery in the whole scheme of things, a couple of months is not very long. I spent more than two decades in my 20s and 30s smoking, overeating and abusing my body. For more than two decades now, I have been living a fit and more disciplined life.

I resolve, then, not to lament my wasted years, my physical injuries or limitations or the inexorable advance of age. Instead, I shall revel in what I can do despite my limitations and my age. So can you.

Carpe diem!

Bill Shaw's running column appears every other Monday in *The Facts*.