

## THE WINNING ATTITUDE

The starting pistol was fired. I sprinted for the first one-hundred yards, hoping to be near the front of the pack but not at its head—realizing that the wind would give me a disadvantage if I led the race too early.

My months of training would culminate in this. I was already a fairly good runner, but I had known that I would need to improve to have a chance at winning the Beaver Falls 5K. There were some fairly good runners in Beaver Falls as well as a few who ran on regional tours. I practiced intervals, alternating between running and sprinting—unlike some of the more amateur runners who alternated between running and walking. When I began, my one-mile time was under 5:30; as the weeks went on, I improved it to the point at which it was comparable to last year's medalists.

The race began with a sharp curve toward the right followed by a sharp left; I lost sight of three other runners ahead of me as I passed these curves but maintained pace with the group I was in—a group of about ten runners who had all started quite well.

Following the curves was a long downhill straightaway and a steep incline which veered to the right in a spiral pattern around a small peak on the mountain range in which the course was set. Being a native of Beaver Falls, the elevation didn't bother me whatsoever, and I kept my position as I approached the top. John Thompson, another native of Beaver Falls, was still ahead of me, and as I looked backward, I noticed that some of the regional competitors had dropped slightly behind.

As I finished crossing the bridge at the top of the

spiral, I passed the one-mile mark, where the timer read 5:03. I was keeping the pace I had planned and was happy with my position.

The next segment of the course was a long, gentle downhill slope on which the road curved slightly toward the right. Here, with my interval training in mind, I began sprinting, immediately passed John, and caught up with one of the better regional competitors—a woman with a dark brown ponytail who was wearing jersey number 71. I stayed directly behind her until the next uphill segment—where I passed her quite easily to my left.

After getting ahead of her and reaching the top of the hill, my viewpoint was clearer, and I could see the two runners of whom I had lost sight earlier. One of the runners, wearing jersey number 115, was a bald man, whom I had recognized from Beaver Falls but did not know personally. The other was a regional competitor who was too far away from me to describe, but I could see that he was wearing jersey number 7. As I positioned him in my sight, I passed the second mile-marker, where the clock read 9:44.

I was becoming fatigued, but I knew from my training that I could keep a similar pace for the rest of the run. The final stretch of the run would be a sharp right turn, a long, flat straightaway, and then a short but steep slope leading to the finish line. I kept the pace I had been running, and as I approached the straightaway, Runner 115 was slowing down. After a quarter of a mile, I had easily caught him—leaving only Runner 7 ahead of me.

With a half-mile left, I could clearly see him about

one-hundred feet in front of me. I began sprinting—quite close but still behind him at the end of the straightaway. The slope increased quickly as I looked to my right; I saw him immediately beside me. He began sprinting and once again took the lead, but there was five-hundred feet of hill left, and I was determined not only to win—but also not to let a regional competitor take first place in our race. I flashed him a dirty look and leaned forward ever more intensely as my feet took giant leaps up the slope. I was panting—my calves throbbing—but I knew he wouldn't keep up.

With the line less than twenty feet ahead of me, I gave one final push. There was no tape across the line, but I didn't see any tape on the ground either, and it looked as if there had never been any tape. Both of us lifted our feet at the same time, but mine landed first—on the far side of the line.

At the end of the race were two clocks; one continued to count, and the other stopped as some lights flashed—revealing my time of 14:41.

My girlfriend stepped out onto the roadway and threw her arms around me, and I could hear my family on the curb cheering and shouting, "Congratulations!" I watched Runner 115 cross the line, followed by John Thompson about fifteen seconds later.

I sat on the sidewalk for a few minutes, recollecting my breath, decompressing, and shoving as much water down my throat as I possibly could. I stared at the rocky design of the pavement as a huge smile crept onto my face.

After a few more minutes, a local reporter whom I had recognized came up to me and asked if I would be willing to

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do a live interview on the local news.

"Absolutely," I said.

The reporter could see I was winded, and as such, began by asking me a fairly simple question which was as short and open-ended as possible: "So what are your thoughts on the race?"

"It was a great race and an absolutely beautiful day for this event." I caught my breath. "I'm very thankful for the support of my girlfriend, my family, of Beaver Falls. I couldn't have done it without them. And I'm very proud to have given Beaver Falls a hometown win."

The reporter looked at me as though I had spontaneously generated a third arm since the interview began. "But—," he laughed, "you didn't win."

"Huh?"

"Yeah. Frank Orsean won. You finished—." He looked down at his computer for a moment. "—forty-first."