

## **You Don't Stop Running Because You Grow Old You Grow Old Because You Stop Running**

*By Bob Hartless*

Last December, when I turned sixty years old, and after running for over twenty-eight years, I asked myself why do I still run ? Is it because of the comradely, or trying to stay in shape, or maybe I enjoy pain and sacrifice. Well, all of the above. But the main reason I run is because I like to compete. I enjoy setting goals and achieving them. Setting goals keeps me motivated and makes me focus on doing my best.

My main goal for 2004 was to run in the Virginia Senior Games (age 50 and over) held on May 13 - 16 at Virginia Beach and to qualify for the National Senior Olympics, held on 3 - 18 June, 2005 in Pittsburgh. In order to qualify for the Nationals you have to come in first or second in your age group and run a standard time set by the USATF.

I signed up for the 10K road race to be held on Sunday, and since I would already be there on Saturday I decided to enter the 800 meter race, Since Donna, Nancy, and Wilbert and I have been doing track work on a regular basis I thought it would be fun to compete in a formal track meet. I knew our average times for our 800's was 3:00 - 3:15 and would not hold up to win or place so I would have to dig deeper.

My 800 was scheduled for noon, and it was over 90 degrees. Richard Brooks, who had come along for support, warmed up with me before the race. We both knew heat would be a factor, but I kept thinking it is only two laps. The final call was made and with my luck I drew the inside lane with all my competitors staggered ahead of me all the way to lane eight. All of a sudden, I had a fear of all the other runners swooping down in front of me after we made the first turn. The gun sounded and we were off. I can't explain it, but I couldn't see anybody, I couldn't hear anybody, and everything seemed to be a blur. I was in the lead and I went through the first 400 meters in 74 seconds. When no one passed me with about 100 meters to go, I eased back to finish with a time of 2:38. I had won my age division and had qualified for the Nationals in the 800 meters. WOW !

The next day it had cooled down to about 85 degrees and I was ready to run the 10K road race. There were only about 20 runners but I recognized Peter Blanks and Dr. Mel Williams who had both run the 1500 meters in about 5:30 the day before. Could they run that pace for 6,2 miles in the heat ? We were told that a bike rider would lead us through the course since there were a lot of turns and running in and out of dead end streets. The gun went off. The pace was very slow so I decided to take the lead. I was ahead at the 5K point with a time of 20:32. My secret was to focus on the biker and try to catch him. Then it happened. The biker pulled off the course and about a quarter of a mile down the road I took a wrong turn and ran into an empty parking lot. Lucky for me the biker saw me and came to direct me back on the course. I was still in the lead but the group was closing in fast. Somehow I was able to run my fastest mile and maintained my lead to win the race with a time of 42:07. I was not happy with my time but I had qualified for the Senior National 10K. I had met my main goal for 2004 and by winning the 800 meter and 10K races in my age group I have my goal for 2005 already set. Bring home a medal from the Nationals.

Running in the Senior Games is a great experience. It is rewarding to see 50 and 90 year old runners in the 100 yard dash and the various other events. At that age everyone is a winner.

*"Life begins at 50 with fitness and Gold."*