

Start

I was 31 when I got into running. There was an itch there that needed to be scratched. I had stopped playing GAA about 5 years before but was still riding horses at home and hunting with the local Harrier club. Athletics was always a topic of discussion in our house growing up. With no proper training except running from field to field checking animals etc, I ran the Dromanagh 5 mile race run by West Waterford AC, my first race, coming home in 31.35. I couldn't walk for a month after that and it actually took me another 12 months before I ran a race again. The next venture out was the John Buckley 5k in 2002 followed by the Clashmore 5 miler where I broke 30 minutes for the first time. Thankfully I've stayed at the right side of the 30 mark since. I was looking for a club at the time and I recall rocking up to the East Cork senior cross country in Youghal in 2002 and Denis McCarthy providing me with an East Cork singlet. That was the start and I've run many races over road cross country and track with the club since.

Racing

As I didn't compete when I was younger, I couldn't fully appreciate the art of racing when I started out. My plan was always to go out hard, something which I have refined a bit over the years (supposedly). For me the 5 mile times were an indicator of my form. There were more 5 milers back then as opposed to 5ks so there was plenty to choose from. With the interval training I broke 27 minutes for the first time in the Kinsale 5 mile and again in the Ardmore 5 shortly afterwards. I did a handful of ten milers and one half marathon.

Highlights

The main highlight for me would be the first time I got on the Irish masters over 40 cross country team in 2013. The conditions were horrendous but I had a very good run finishing as the 4th scorer ahead of Pauric McKinney. Peter Matthews led the team home that day. It was special to make the team as it was my third attempt trying.

Another highlight was winning the Munster Masters over 40s cross country in Limerick racecourse in 2011. I remember getting a call from Eric Meade on the way to the race encouraging me to speed up. I was sometimes guilty of arriving a little too close to the start. I managed to make it there in time for a quick warm up. I went out hard from the gun and ran with fear for the rest of the race to take the win over Mike 'Curly' Cunningham.

The race that gave me the greatest appreciation was the national Intermediate cross country of 2004. Making up the team at the last minute, so lacking a lot of training I finished the race punch drunk in 72nd position to get the team into silver medal position. Four places further back it would have been bronze and another two would have been 4th team.

Team wise I was on two Cork Novice winning teams (don't ask me how!), one in 2006 and 2010.

Training

The club training times never really suited me because of the farm work. Thousands that time started at 16:00 and Welshtown didn't suit either. The majority of my training was speed work. I did three sessions a week. Four hundreds with Denis on a Tuesday in Ballynoe, a hill session on a

Wednesday and thousands on a Thursday again with Denis. The hill session consisted of 5 repetitions of a hill in a woods near my home. My average mileage was 20 miles a week. I don't think I ever went above 30 miles a week. That's what worked for me performance wise and it fitted into my work on the farm. I'm constantly on the go with the farm and I would find myself clocking up an extra few miles here as I don't have a quad bike. I never really did long runs but if I was going out for a run it would usually be at a tempo pace. Generally, all my training was hard but with lots of recovery days.

Hindsight

Looking back now I can see my mileage might have been a little low but it suited me at the time. If I was starting out again I would definitely try and arm myself with more knowledge of training and racing. When you don't have the background, you can't fully appreciate the skill involved with racing.

Barefoot

I'm known to train a lot in bare feet. Nearly half of my training would be done without runners. I find it a lot more comfortable and there's probably an element of laziness as well, not having to change into spikes etc. It's a good way to detect niggles also where some injuries can be disguised in shoes.

Future

I'm keeping the fingers crossed that the Masters track and field will go ahead in August. I'd like to try the 5k again, particularly after last year when my leg gave out and I ended up disappointed in third. Outside of that I'm not sure. Perhaps I might try a marathon some day just to have one done because that's all people outside of athletics seem to ask about.

Injuries

The injuries I got when I started were injuries I had carried over from my GAA days or falls from horses. I had an issue for years with what turned out to be a psoas muscle and if I hadn't taken up running it might never have been sorted. That muscle cost me a shot at national masters over 35 one year when training had been going really good. I think injuries are a chance to rest the body and to step back and look at what is happening in training and if something needs to be changed. Liam told me before that if a physio hasn't sorted it after 3 sessions, get a new one.

Coaching

I'm heavily involved with the coaching in St Catherine athletic club. We train Monday, Tuesday and Thursday with both juveniles and adults. I love to see new runners getting into speed work. What I find a little frustrating at times is when people complete a couch to 5k to get them into running they then jump straight into completing a marathon. I don't think people realize the enjoyment and fun you can get out of speedwork and shorter races. Track and field and cross country need to be promoted more to show that it not just for "elites" but that anyone can do it

For the juveniles, it is difficult to keep them in the club once they turn 13 or 14. If you can keep them after that the next big step is to bring them from junior to senior. It's a concern of most senior running clubs now, how do you get the underage athletes to progress to senior. Things like open training sessions involving multiple clubs and bringing the older juveniles to senior training so they can see what's involved. The training sessions for Cork teams last year worked well with the juveniles.