

Three Lessons I Learned From John

Susan Brookman

1. Chocolate covered coffee beans are great pre-race energy boosters, but not so great as a late night snack. One Sunday morning several months ago, John was really dragging, and so was running in the back of the pack with those of us HRHers who travel at a more leisurely pace than some of the more fleet footed harriers in our group. John wasn't typically a back-of-the-pack man, so I knew there had to be a reason... Turns out he and Diane had stopped at the confectionary store the evening before, and he'd purchased a bagful of his favorite pick-me-ups. Unable to resist their lure, he started munching away later that night as he watched television. After too many handfuls, he realized he wasn't the least bit sleepy despite the fact that it was way past bedtime! He said he did finally get some sleep that night, but suffice it to say that morning came way too early for his liking, and the effects of the caffeine in his treats had long since worn off. I really enjoyed his company that day – his tiredness made him more of a self-deprecating goofball than usual, and I think I laughed my way through all ten miles of that run!
2. Although the importance of being color-coordinated can't be overstated, it is a good idea to make sure your shoes are comfortable. John's penchant for making sure he would pass muster with Danielle before he headed out for his runs is the stuff of legends. His beloved daughter evidently thought he was a bit fashion-challenged and took him under her wing to help him develop a sense of style that even Beverly "it's better to look good than run fast" Atkinson would approve of. After years of putting on whatever running clothes were at the top of his dresser drawer, John was transformed into quite the dapperly-donned runner, wearing even socks and shoes that matched his shirts, shorts and hats! One day, he showed up for a run in a scarlet-colored ensemble, with fire-engine red shoes to complete the look. While he seemed truly appreciative of all the positive feedback he received about his appearance that day, after a few of us noticed that his gait seemed a little awkward, he was a bit chagrined to admit that although they looked stunning, the red shoes actually made his feet hurt. He kept grinning though – what's a little pain when you know you're looking good?!
3. Every accomplishment comes as a result of teamwork, even in seemingly individual sports such as long distance running and the triathlon. John was dedicated to learning and improving, always striving to better his technique and his times. As a result, he spent *a lot* of hours pedaling, pounding the pavement (and the trails, and the treadmill) and stroking through the water to get out of what he called the guppy lane. His response whenever I congratulated him after a race was to acknowledge his training partners, his coaches and his wife for their contributions to his success. He credited them, especially Diane, for all that he was able to do. His appreciation for her steadfast companionship and unwavering support through hour after hour of training runs, swimming clinics, and races was tremendous. It was always lovely to see them together, and my favorite picture of John is the one of him crossing the finishing line at Ironman Florida, hand in hand with his Ironmate, Diane. That's the image I'll forever hold in my head of John, because it epitomizes his zest for life, he looks great and he is with his favorite training partner.