

Get An Attitude!

by John Farrow

"It's hard to take the L.A. Marathon seriously as a major sporting event." [Randy Harvey, Los Angeles Times, February 26, 1997].

What's going here? One of the world's top marathons isn't to be taken seriously?

Hundreds of world-class runners converge on one of the country's major cities to run 26.2 miles for big bucks in prize money, and this isn't to be taken seriously? Add tens of thousands of other runners, all having a great time while getting in a great workout, and this still isn't to be taken seriously? Suppose everyone is abducted *en masse* by aliens to complete the race in another galaxy. Then is it something to be taken seriously?

Does running have an image problem? Did the sun come up today?

Running is a sport that deserves to be taken seriously and runners would make ideal role models for today's kids. After all, running is one of the most natural things that we do, and one of the first things we try to do after we stop crawling. But who do kids have these days to look up to? Consider some of the choices.

Baseball players? They mostly sit around and scratch and chew and spit and rearrange themselves and go on strike. When they do actually exert themselves, they usually wind up running 90 feet or so (*feet*, mind you). If anyone hits a home run and has to run all the way around the base path (an entire 360 feet), you can count on such a leisurely trot as to allow plenty of time for another brew and a hot dog before play resumes.

John Kruk of the Philadelphia Phillies was at

least honest a few years ago when a woman saw him smoking a cigarette in a restaurant and told him that it was bad for athletes to smoke. "Lady," he replied, "I ain't no athlete. I'm a baseball player!"

Basketball players? Extremely large people who unfortunately haven't yet figured out the concept of fan loyalty and who tend to switch teams every other month. They also have developed the very annoying habit of moonlighting (though not successfully) as baseball players, wrestlers or movie stars.

Football players? Most runners are about the size of the left leg on the average football player these days. And if you happened to run into an interior lineman, you might actually suffocate before you found your way out of all that flab.

And just as basketball players have developed a penchant for spending much of their time away from the court, many football players too often seem to spend much of their time in court.

One problem that running has is that most runners are very regular, hard-working people. If, according to Thoreau, most men lead lives of quiet desperation, then most runners simply lead quiet lives. The news media is just not interested in someone with zero body fat like Michael Johnson who can carry on an intelligent conversation and doesn't do drugs or trash nightclubs.

Uta Pippig? A delightful woman with sparkling eyes and a great sense of humor who exudes such joy and happiness in her everyday life. If she were running down the beach on some TV show, I might pay more attention to television. At least she is fluent in several languages, where too often TV dialog is

fluent in less than one.

Let's not let the Randy Harveys of the world define our sport. Get involved. Volunteer. Attend events if you're not competing. Send in race results to your local newspaper. Write letters to the editor requesting more coverage of running events. Write the articles for him if he refuses to do it. Be a pain in the ass if an editor refuses to cover running events. Get an attitude!

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