

## Henry Rono and Me

by John Farrow

I finally raced Henry Rono, head to head, and as much as I would like to say that I beat him, I didn't. But second in your age group to Henry Rono ain't bad. In fact, not only did I lead him for much of the first mile, I even had him in sight at the finish. Well, in sight through some trees, around a corner and across the tennis courts, pool and parking lot. But in sight.

Henry Rono is one of the legendary figures of middle-distance racing, having rewritten multiple pages of the record books during the summer of 1978. Henry now lives and works in Albuquerque coaching high school runners. Although he and I are roughly the same age, we had never met before in a race.

It's a daunting task running in your age group against the former world record holder in that event, in this case the 5k. Therefore, believing that knowledge is power, and in preparation for our next meeting, I decided to check on Henry's records and compare them to my own admittedly less well known, but nonetheless somewhat significant (at least to me) accomplishments at about the same time.

Henry Rono's trek into the record and history books began on April 8, 1978, in Berkeley, California, when he took more than four seconds off the world 5000 meter mark with a time of 13:08.4. He would lower this record to 13:06.2 three years later.

For me at this time, I volunteered to help a law-school classmate qualify for Boston and promptly threw up on our first run. He would later qualify in spite of my help and in spite of being treated to the Fabulous Thunderbirds at Deep Ellum the night before the Dallas White Rock Marathon.

Moving up the West coast to Seattle the following month, Henry lowered the

3000 meter steeplechase world record to 8:05.4 on May 13, 1978. This mark would stand for more than eleven years, and still remains one of the ten best steeplechase performances of all time.

On that day for me, my eight-day old daughter went through 66 diapers in one 24-hour period. We promptly ordered the Industrial Strength Super Pooper Special from the diaper service, renewed every third day.

On the European circuit, Henry became the first African to hold the 10,000 meter world record with a time of 27:22.5 in Vienna on June 11, 1978. His performance demolished the previous record by more than eight seconds, with the record standing for almost seven years.

I didn't make it to Europe that summer, but I did pitch my softball team to victory in its first game of the season and went 2 for 4 at the plate. However, I finished the season with a 1-9 record and was traded for a player to be named later.

Finally, on June 27, 1978, Henry took more than three seconds off the world 3000 meter record with a time of 7:32.1 in Oslo, Norway. That mark also stood for more than eleven years.

My final accomplishment that summer was a winning toss of 118' 3" in the First Unofficial World Sail-Toad Championships held near Austin, unofficially sponsored by Lone Star beer. Future events were cancelled due to the uproar from various animal rights activists protesting the fact that squashed toad carcasses dried on the asphalt by the hot South Texas sun were being unceremoniously flung about like so many four-footed Frisbees (hence the term "sail-toad").

So, there you have it. My record and his. And if I may say so, they both speak for themselves.

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