

## Satchel Paige Plays Carnegie Hall by John Farrow

Satchel Paige was never a runner that I am aware of, unless you count what baseball players do as running. He pitched for the Kansas City Monarchs of the old Negro League before joining the St. Louis Browns of the American League when he was in his 40s.

He was a dominating pitcher who also had a way with words. Once, when accused of being a braggart, he replied, "If you can do it, it ain't braggin'."

Today, that ain't necessarily so. Mike Connelly was recently disqualified for "taunting" after he raised his index finger on winning a two-mile run, resulting in his school losing its first track meet after 224 consecutive wins. [*Sports Illustrated*, 5/11/98]. Gracious, he was just indicating his finish position.

Satchel Paige also said "Don't never look back. Somebody might be gaining on you." Of course, the corollary is that if you can see anyone in front of you, don't waste time worrying about those in back.

Important words of advice for American runners these days, as they seem more often than not to have someone in front of them. Witness this year's Boston Marathon, where American men in the top 10 of late have been as rare as hen's teeth. In fact, Joe McVeigh, the top U.S. runner in 17th place, represented only the eighth American to finish in the top 25 in the past six years.

Americans used to dominate that race, top to bottom, but can you name the last American man or woman to wear the laurel wreath? (Hint: it was during the early years of the Reagan administration). Boston used to be a matter of pride almost to the point of it being considered the national marathon. No longer.

But give the foreign runners credit, all of them. They work damn hard. Training in Kenya can include up to 50 kilometers a day over three sessions, with hills and fartleks at better than six minute miles. Said Kenyan Simon Rono, winner of the 1998 Bay to Breakers, of the infamous Hayes Street Hill, "I train on bigger hills than that every day."

It also seems that more American runners are avoiding the big races and the top foreign runners. Many U.S. marathoners skipped Boston for Pittsburgh, and others likewise skipped Bloomsday for something else. Whether it was to avoid the competition for a mutually assured payday or just for self-respect, we can only guess. But it does seem like the confidence level of American runners has taken a few hits of late and may be in need of some shoring up.

Time was when confidence (read "self-esteem" in today's touchy-feelie psycho-babble) came from within, at the end of a job well-done, from dedication and hard work. Lately, however, self-esteem, and not the development of it, has become an end in itself, not to mention a growth industry of feel-good seminars.

Hard work today also seems to be only part of the equation. One runner recently complained that with all the Kenyans allowed to compete in major races, he could run a personal best, finish 12th or something, and win maybe \$200.

Whoa! Perhaps it's time for him to hit the roads and track in renewed earnest, increase his mileage and speed work, attack the hills until the quads burn. And if that doesn't work, maybe he just hasn't found his true calling in life. Instead of distance running, he might want to consider other lines of work for which he may be better qualified, not to mention being a tad more secure. Something like welding.

Satchel Paige worked hard all his life and is now in the Baseball Hall of Fame. He probably never went to Carnegie Hall, but he certainly knew how to get there. Practice, practice, practice.

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