

# It's Not Just a 5K

By John Farrow

It was a great day for a race – sunny, cool, a great crowd and lots of excitement. And then, well, we've all heard it before, maybe even said it. And nothing rankles my keister more.

*What're you running today?  
Just the 5K.*

Oh, the condescension, the scorn! **Just** the 5K? As if the race of Paavo Nurmi, Emil Zatopek, Gunder Hagg, Ron Clarke, Kip Keino, Henry Rono, Said Aouita, or Haile Gebrselassie was somehow, well, not quite good enough. As if we all could toss off 12:37.35 5Ks (the current world record, held by Kenenisa Bekele of Ethiopia) every other weekend if we wanted. That's a pace of 4:04 and change, for those keeping score. Four minutes a mile, for more than three miles!

While there is something to be said for both distance and speed, it probably shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone that no American has ever held the world 5K record (nor the 10K either, for that matter). Not that we haven't taken distance running to heart, though. An American has held the world marathon best -- during the Camelot days of the Kennedy Administration. After that, you have to go all the way back to Prohibition to find an American on that list.

Time was, however, that you could even race the former 5K world record holder right here in town. Note that I said "race" and not "beat," as for several years Henry Rono lived and coached in Albuquerque and was still capable of running a half-way decent race, though nowhere near what he ran in 1978 to become the first African to hold the record. His best times at both the 5K and 10K (he set world records in both) still rank as some of the fastest ever run.

But where did this unwritten rule come from that everyone has to enter the longest race offered, anyway? I mean, if miles in your log book are all that matters, head on down the road to your heart's content. But if it's a challenge you want, for my money a good 5K is hard to beat.

The 5K is such a challenge because it has always seemed just the right distance to run fast enough to actually enjoy a semblance of running with the breeze rushing by while providing something of a test to see how long you can sustain the quicker pace (not to mention that some of the best of the Rolling Stones is just the right beat to start you up). The faster pace of the shorter race can be daunting but it's a good way to get those fast twitch fibers into play now and then.

By way of illustration, take the per-mile pace from your best 10K time and knock off 10%. Then try and run a 5K at that pace. Or try this with your best half-marathon time, but knock off at least 12%. And let me know how you do. Is it still **just** a 5K?

There comes a time to put in the miles, but let's not "diss" a perfectly good event.

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