(Gentle)Men of Leisure

April 2008



The now named “Men of Leisure” coed running club started in a small way back in ’05. It was then called Gentlemen of Leisure or GOL for short as none of the members of the trio worked. Actually most of their parts worked but those parts conducive to gainful employment were sadly dysfunctional. There were Don, Vinnie and Brian – good for nothing gentlemen in search of culture and conversation in the mornings as they traversed the Route 6 bridge from New Bedford to Fairhaven and back. They were so famous that Peter Pereira, photographer extraordinaire of the Standard Times, cast their reputation in print with headlines greater than those of the Red Sox.

Among the great truths that they pursued was that of honesty, particularly with respect to that Gentlemen Only Ladies Forbidden pastime, born in Scotland a couple of centuries ago. For example, what is the definition of winter rules as applied to improving one’s lie, in summertime? Is a Mulligan not a Mulligan if the others are not watching? Is it permissible to place a substitute ball on the fairway, without penalty, so long as it is no closer to the pin than where you estimated the original ball to have left the golf course to be found at some time in the future by a boy and his dog? Can you claim a “gimme” if your ball is within four club lengths of the hole? Are genuine addition errors allowed to go uncorrected when totaling the score? Does forgetting that you have not paid for coffee for at least three weeks constitute sufficient reason for banishment?

These three gentlemen of leisure pounded the pavements mercilessly while training for the New Bedford Half, the Spooner Ten and the Boston Big One. As they pounded they worked on their excuses – painful injuries, athlete’s foot, deficient genes, hangover, temporary obesity, temporary emaciation, hills, heat and heavy running shoes. They ran and talked, which means that they were not running hard enough. Then they talked and they walked, because if they talked and didn’t walk they wouldn’t get back to the coffee shop in time to talk about their walk. What was most important was that they showed up at the Y at 8.15 come rain, wind or snow.

Talking of coffee shops it is generally agreed that the old Green Bean is the official site of the establishment of the Gentlemen of Leisure running group, when it was in fact a gentlemen’s preserve. The new Green Bean is now the club’s headquarters of a much more politically correct community having admitted members of the fair sex into their midst. Following this significant change there has been a substantial improvement in the level of conversation; but more on that later.

After the early days of the trotting trio (Don, Vinnie and Brian for those who forget) the club’s reach was extended to others of various persuasions. There was Richie who once designed roads but now puts out fires and who would tilt at windmills if there were any on the South Coast. Then there was Professor Pete the physicist who explains that the best way to conserve energy is to lose weight. He voted for the new name of the club to be G2 (Guys and Gals), but the consensus was that this was too technical of a title. And Russell the used car lot owner who has his grandfather’s golf swing. Lori the masseuse gallops the marathon like a long legged spring chicken and still finds time to smile. The most vocal newcomer is Fernando (Freddie) the would be politician who has youth on his side. Finally there is Stephanie, lawyer to be, and business entrepreneur, who labeled the T shirts “Men of Leisure: Coed Running Club” whatever that means.

The standard route from the YMCA is to the bridge where we wait for the fishing boats to pass. Sometimes the bridge operator waits for us to pass before he swings the bridge around to let the boats pass through. Parenthetically we would rather he was not so considerate – we like the rest and time to watch the seals play in the harbor. We are known to the bridge operators as “those guys that run across the bridge” rather than GOL or MOL. Next we run around Fairhaven past Elizabeth and Margaret’s restaurants and Joe Fernandez’ place. Every morning the elderly one points out the house he used to live in a century or so ago. Next we have great views of the harbor and the New Bedford skyline; New York is nothing compared with this city on a hill side. The return takes us up towards the most castle-like high school in the world, back across the bridge down the steps and back to the Y. An alternative takes the hardy crowd up the busy Union Street around the park and down past the resuscitation wall where those with weak hearts lie on the highest shelf and get pounded back to life. When this fails there is a convenient church and cemetery nearby. Occasionally the route goes south and out past the sea wall to the fort, which it is rumored was built to repel the loyalists or was it the confederates?

Conversations today ranged from Obama, Osama and Chelsea's momma, money isn't everything, resuscitation wall, Mini Coopers, and discussions of excuses that need to be made for future running events.  More technical discussions address style and lack of it. Should one lift up one’s head to survey the horizon or look at the ground and both prevent tripping and find quarters or even pennies.

As participants in GOL, we go by the Groucho Marx’ credo "I don't care to belong to a club that accepts people like me as members".   So, we don't have members, more like associates ... kinda like Walmart.  We are all an equal part of the greater whole although some are more whole and holy than others.  Such wholesome statements like this spur heated discussions amongst the running group inciting debates about how the sum of the parts cannot be greater than the whole, unless the statisticians get to include both the main effects and the interactions in the total sum of squares. This is not to imply that the members of the club are squares; far from it, they are mostly round due to a congenital imbalance between intake and output.

At the end of the run and after the java the parting volleys include “see you tomorrow if you live that long”, “I’ve got to go and pretend to work” or “see you next year if you’re lucky.” This motley crew is always on the lookout for (in)mates to listen to their boring drivel. Come bring your friends. Partake of the life giving loping and, of course the Green Bean java.