

## Cherry Blossom Ten-Miler by Tom Kushinka

*Cherry blossoms....cool shoes....and the Mysterious "Bill"*

A few short weeks ago I entered for the second time the Cherry Blossom Ten-Miler in DC, hoping to improve my time and wishing that leg cramps would stay here in PA. Although the Cherry blossoms were one week early, the weather, nevertheless, was ideal with thousands of runners having entered this popular race.

But of course there were the inevitable snags that rear their ugly heads before, during, and after the race. For instance, when I picked up my race packet, the young woman remarked, "Boy, you must be fast – you have a low number. You're in the elite category." I remembered that my D-tag the previous year had recorded my start time, but for some reason the finish time never registered. When I told the race director what my time was on my GPS, he recorded the wrong time, and consequently I found myself in the first wave of 26,000 runners.

Trying to look ultra cool while feeling totally misplaced, I thought, "No one knows me; I could be as fast as those Kenyans up ahead, or possibly a deranged thief who just minutes ago attacked some runner just for his bib number."

But while feeling totally inept because of a race director's having recorded my time incorrectly, I heard a lean young man one-third my age say, "Cool shoes."

I looked down and realized that I had put two different colored shoes on in the early morning light. One was white while the other was blue. So in addition to feeling awkward in the first wave, I was now Gary the Geek who was apparently making some kind of fashion statement. My solace came again from knowing that I wouldn't know anyone, just as no one knew me. I could have told him that with my shoes – one white, the other blue – and my red shirt, I was just being patriotic – red, white, and blue. But the race was about to start, and I was only a short distance from the real runners: people like Joan Benoit Samuelson who would set a record that day in her age group and Stephen Tum and Lineth Chepkurui, the latter two the eventual winners. I knew they'd go out so fast that it would be as if I were standing still.

The gun went off, and surprisingly only a few hundred speedsters passed me. Within the first few minutes though, I heard some bystanders shouting to a runner near me:

"Go get 'em, Bill."

"You're a winner, Bill."

I knew for sure that they weren't talking to me – my name's not "Bill" and I'm certainly not a winner.

With the next spectator at the first half mile yelling, "Way to go, Bill Rodgers!" I knew I was in august company. This was the same Bill Rodgers who won Boston several times; the same Bill Rodgers who won the Cherry Blossom race four times. The same Bill Rodgers who came back from prostate cancer to run this race. And here I was – Mr. White and Blue Shoe keeping up with him.

People who know me tell me I talk a lot. I do. But never when I run. However, I couldn't resist to blurt out, "Hey, Bill Rodgers! Good to see you back!"

"It's good to be back. Great day for a race. Where are you from?"

I blurted out something because when I run I use my oral cavity for oxygen and not to carry on a conversation. But as we both approached the first mile, I muttered,

"Hey, Bill, if I ran just a bit faster as we approach Mile One, I could say that I beat Bill Rodgers, right?"

"Go for it, friend."

Wow! Not only was he going to let me beat him, but suddenly we were friends for life!

But stupid me thought, "Well, if I can beat him at Mile One, I'll just keep going, and beat him over ten miles."

What fools these mortals be!

In five seconds he was ten yards ahead, and in thirty seconds I couldn't see him at all. So much for keeping up with the great ones.

So as I crossed the finish line, there were several obvious epiphanies:

First, always run your own race, no matter what the color of your shoes;

Second, the real champions can show sympathy for those less gifted;

And last, if you ever try to beat a world-class runner, be sure that you've tied his laces in a double knot.

## NOMINATION SLATE

The following slate has been nominated by the Club's selection committee.  
Please give your approval or rejection and mail back to our P.O. box.

Loretta Dodson  
Jill Forsythe  
Chris Garges  
Nancy Hofmann  
Neal Novak  
Brian Patterson  
Carly Patterson  
Fred Reichenbach  
Laurie Reinhart  
Mike Richardson  
Brian Schaffer  
Bob Shively  
Mike Sosnowski

<input type="checkbox"/> Approve
<input type="checkbox"/> Reject

LVRR  
P.O. Box 592  
Allentown, PA 18105