

**James Jackson once was the runner to beat in the DFW area,
and now at 46 he's showing flashes of his younger self**



James Jackson, now 45, was among the “elite” competitors in the DFW area when in his prime. He won most of what was considered the top races in the DFW area, including the Cowtown 10K in 1992 when it attracted most of not just the local fastest runners but many from other areas. When James toed the starting line, the other runners knew he usually was the one to beat.

And now the Aubrey resident is back and is showing signs he can be just as dominant as a masters runner and has been selected as the Clines Runner Corner's 2011 Male Masters Runner of the Year.

In the past few years, James has enjoyed some success, though his training and comeback have been interrupted at times because of injuries. But in 2011, a more injury-free James has showed flashes of his younger self and is making an impact in the masters division by posting some impressive times and victories.

“I am currently training as hard as I have in 15-17 years,” James said. “I haven’t run more than 40 miles a week since I was in my 20s. I am at about 60 miles a week right now.”

James said he ran in only 13, but mostly highly competitive, races in 2011, and he made his few appearances count. He finished in the top eight overall or better in all of them and was undefeated in the masters division, including the Oklahoma City Half Marathon where he ran a 1:18:35.

The past few years as James has struggled with various injuries, he said he ran “a little but it was mostly just to stay fit, not compete. I would say 15-25 miles a week or not at all.”

Now that he’s healthy again and training hard, he said “I have big goals. I would like to get in the 32s for the 10K and low 15s for the 5K.”

He said his 15-year-old son Cameron, who runs for Ryan High School in Denton, has been his inspiration for getting serious about running again. “I trained with him all summer and was actually very fit going into the fall. I won first overall at the Hustle for Health 10K on Aug. 27, then I won the masters division and was eighth overall at the Tour de Fleurs 10K with a 35:15. But then I hurt my back right after and missed six weeks of running.”

His son had worse luck. After he had run his season best of 15:31 for a 5K, he stepped into a hole and sustained a broken leg while training in October. “We were so bummed out; he was in shape to run in the low 15s and I believed he had a shot at a state championship. He ran the district meet with a cracked bone in his leg and still won. He was so sick afterward, he had to shut it down for the season.

“Seeing his desire and toughness just made me want to get back out there and compete. I was really bummed out about both of us being injured, but I decided I would try again.

“So, I started building up my mileage while he was not running and healing. I thought I could get in shape while he was down and we could train together when he came back. I decided to jump back in a few races and things just started clicking.”

His first race after the injury was the Four Seasons Cool 5K at Las Colinas in Irving. “I took a wrong turn in the 5K and ended up in the 10K. I think I ran about a mile extra, but I still won the masters title with a 41:00 something. I think that was the slowest 10K I had ever run. It was kinda fun running as hard as I had to see (41 minutes on the clock), but it worked out OK.” He won \$150 for his victory.

He followed that with the The Colony 5K and won first overall with a 17:22. His next attempt was the Arlington Turkey Trot 5K and he finished sixth overall and won the masters title with a 17:03. Another masters victory came at the Don Zetnick Arlington Winter Run 10K on Dec. 3. He finished fourth overall with a 34:55. James rang up another overall victory at the Frosty 5K in Frisco with a 17:10 and then finished the year at the Jog’r Egg Nog’r in Dallas with a zippy 16:32, which was good for fifth overall and first in the masters division.

James is certainly accustomed to high-level competition. Before he won the Cowtown 10K in ’92, he was engaged in a hard-fought battle in the 1990 Cowtown against the legendary Bill Rodgers (who was 42 at the time), Agapius Masong, one of the top area runners at the time, and eventual winner Calvin McGill, a tough competitor from Arlington. James, who attended Lewisville High School, and Calvin had met several times before in schoolboy events. On this day, James and Masong had taken the lead, but Rodgers and Calvin weren’t far behind. When Rodgers began passing Calvin just after the halfway mark, Calvin felt a rush of adrenaline and picked up the pace. He thought that running with a running legend for a while would be cool.

Then he and Rodgers started gaining on the leaders, and finally caught them heading into the finish. Calvin began pulling away when the final stretch was downhill on Exchange Street in the Stockyards. Calvin crossed the finish line in 30:10 and Masong finished in 30:16. Rodgers was another step behind in 30:17 and James crossed in 30:19 in what was regarded at that time as the closest race in Cowtown history. It certainly was the most exciting. Jackson’s time, incidentally was the same in 1992 when he won.

James has quite an extensive and impressive running background. He started running when in the 10th grade at Lewisville High School and notched a 4:10 mile PR, a 9:01 in the 2-mile and a 14:49 in the 5K. He was a two-time High School All American and was a provisional Olympics Trials 5,000 qualifier with a 13:48 after college. In his running prime, he won about every major race at that time in the DFW area. Injuries hampered him in college, plus he had to cope with his parents' divorce and the death of his father.

After winning just about everything in the area during his prime years, James took a hiatus from competitive running but kept in touch by coaching a few runners. And now he's back and has set new goals.

James is aiming to set masters PRs at every distance and qualify for the Boston Marathon. "I haven't run a marathon in 20 years and I want to run Boston before I get too much older," he said. He hopes to run a marathon in the fall to begin his build-up for a possible Boston qualifier. "I have run only two marathons in my life but have always wanted to run Boston."