

Mike Fussell hasn't stopped running since he began as a freshman in high school



Runner in the Spotlight

Mike Fussell is much like Forrest Gump. He started running as a freshman in high school and has never stopped. Not only has he not stopped, but at 54, he is among the contenders in just about any race he enters. By August, Mike had won at least eight masters titles, and one overall 5K title and has been among the leaders in several other races. In 2012, his best times through August have been 17:36 for a 5K and 37:33 for a 10K.



Mike has had numerous highlights in his running career, but said he doesn't look back but focuses on making new highlights. "Creating highlights is what it's all about," he said. "I guess that's why I keep running."

He enjoyed great success at Hagerstown (MD) Junior College and at the University of Georgia and his highlights continued to mount after he turned 40 and joined the Masters ranks. He has won gold medals in the 3,000 steeplechase, 3,000 and 5K, and in the pentathlon. In 2007, he posted a 1:16:12 at the Austin 3M Half Marathon, which was the sixth best time in the U.S. in the 50-54 age division. He beat renown runner Dick Beardsley in the process. Among Beardsley's highlights was setting a course record of 2:09:37 at the 1981 Grandma's Marathon in Minnesota and placed a close second to Alberto Salazar at the 1982 Boston Marathon.

Mike is a Respiratory Therapist and said he fits in his training just as fits in eating or sleeping. "It's just something you do; there's no magic to it," he said. "If it isn't a priority, then it isn't going to happen. I like to think about training as being just the opposite of what many other people think about watching a TV show or movie...I prefer to train and get some long-lasting value, like being able to run a race or do something active on the weekend rather than watch TV and gain nothing of enduring value."

He usually trains five days a week, though now he takes more recovery days. "As one ages, taking more recovery days is absolutely necessary in order to allow the training effect to take place, although from time-to-time, I train two-three weeks without a break, usually when I'm building base or wanting to create some muscle confusion. On average, I'd say I'm around 40-50 miles per week, but the amount fluctuates greatly as I'm a big believer in keeping the muscles "fresh" by performing a wide variety of workouts."

His core training includes long, slow distance runs of 12-18 miles, tempo runs, intervals, speed repetitions, along with various intensities using four different heart rate ranges. "My training is based off many years of coaching and racing experience as well as listening and incorporating aspects of numerous experts. Currently, I'm experiencing a renaissance in my training and racing by following Joe Boyle's (of Texas Running Center) uniquely designed plan; it really works great and reduces the risk of injury and over-training."

He has two children and his youngest, Ryan, ran high school cross country and was a decathlete at Western Carolina University. His oldest son Matt was captain of the 10-meter Olympic air rifle team at The Citadel. But neither has caught the running bug as has their dad. Mike said he believes the only difference between him and others he ran with in college is that he never stopped. "If they had done the same, they'd be out there racing and running good times, too," he said.

Below is a capsule of Mike's career as of August, 2012:

South Carroll High School, Sykesville, MD (1970-75) -- Best times: 4:23.4 Mile; 1:58.6 880 yards.

Hagerstown Junior College, Hagerstown, MD (1975-77) -- NJCAA National Champion 1500 meters 1977 (3:47.39); NJCAA National record setting relay team at 4 x 880 (7:35.33); 3 time NJCAA All-American.

University of Georgia, Athens, GA (1977-79) -- Captain, Cross-Country and Track (1978-79); USTFF National Indoor Championships 1 Mile All-American (2nd place); 5 UGA school records; Best times: 3:45.48 for 1500 meters / 24:14 for 5 Miles / 30:45 for 10K / 1:08:48 1/2 Marathon. During this time I had the great fortune to race against Frank Shorter (10K), Marty Liquori (5K), Bill Rodgers (5K), Dick Buerkle (1500m), Barry Brown (10K), Craig Masback (1500m); and even got a chance to be the "rabbit" for Alberto Salazar's attempt at an American record in the 5000m at the Martin Luther King Games in Atlanta (1980).

Masters: 2007 USATF Masters National Champion 3000m Steeplechase (45-49 male): 11:04; 2008 WMA North American, Central American, Caribbean 50-54 male Gold Medal (3000m Steeplechase); Silver Medal (1500m); Gold Medal (Pentathlon); 2012 Huntsman World Senior Masters (50+) Gold Medal 3000m and 5K Road Race. 2007 Austin 3M 1/2 Marathon 1:16:12 (6th best time in U.S. for 50-54 age group for that year, beating Dick Beardsley who was in my age group)

Locally in 2012 (age 54): 10:33 3K; 17:36 5K; 37:33 10K included in the following races: Overall Masters Winner: Fireman's 5K (Ft. Worth); Lone Star 5K (Arlington); Mid-Year Muse & Motion 5K (Grand Prairie); Arlington Reads Book It 5K; Race For Jack 5K (Arlington); Southlake Run For the Kids 5K; Brook Hester Hustle 5K (Kennedale); FUMC Son Run 5K (Mansfield); PACS Dash 5K (Ft. Worth); St Patrick's Day Festival 5K (Ft. Worth). Overall Winner: Bikila USA 5K (Dallas)

Other distances this year, Overall Masters Winner: Five and Dime Run 5 Miles (Dallas); DadFest Dad & Child 26+ Team Winner (Dallas - with son Ryan); Joe's Run 10K (Ft. Worth)