

Ron Winzen back on top after two knee operations

By Fiona Green



When runners suffer injuries they generally take time off and start back slowly. Depending on the severity of the injury they may decide to retire from the sport and take up something that is easier on the joints. Imagine having not one but two knee operations. It would be enough to have most people hanging up their shoes and checking out lap swimming times at their local pool.



*Runner
in
the Spotlight*

Ron Winzen (shown in photo on left with his son RJ, who ran the Cowtown marathon in 3:15:01) is not like most people, though. The 51-year-old was determined not to let a couple of operations stand in the way of him enjoying the sport he loves. Instead of giving up, he simply modified his training and adjusted his attitude.

I first met Ron at a 10K race in Keller in 2009. I was lucky enough to win the overall female title that day when he won overall male. Because the organizers had failed to order two trophies, Ron insisted I take his, despite the fact that the race was his first in 27 years -- a true gentleman.

At this time, Ron was running on average 40-50 miles per week. Everything changed for him on July 15th, 2011. Here's what happened in his own words.

"I felt an unbelievable pain in my right knee at the start of a 6-mile loop. I had never had any issue with my right knee before. I had felt a little pain/pinch in my left knee every once in a while since early 2009. The following Saturday I ran 3 miles easy and a strong 8 in Grapevine, averaging 6:56s for the last 7 without any issues. When we stopped to have coffee, I could hardly walk. When I got up, I realized that my right knee had swollen almost an inch on both sides. The diagnosis was that over time, due to my bowed legs, I had cracked about an inch in diameter of cartilage from the inside of my femur and I had torn the meniscus.

"I was able to see Dr. Daniel Cooper, a knee specialist and the Cowboy's Team doctor, and he confirmed the original diagnosis. He said he could repair the cartilage by performing a procedure called a micro-fracture. (Poking about 20 holes in my bone where there was no cartilage and allow bone marrow to back fill the void.) He would also clean up the meniscus. He noticed I was bow-legged and said he would like to straighten my step by adding a 10mm bone wedge to the top of my tibia, right below the joint. This procedure, an osteotomy, would change the angle of my leg and displace more than 60% of my weight to the outside of my knee as long as my knees are bent and I don't land on my heels.

On September 20, 2011, my wife's and my 25th wedding anniversary, I had the surgery on my right leg. My very supportive wife spent that night in the hospital with me. Before surgery I ran 2.2 miles with my son RJ and my brother, Ken. The next day ended a 30-year, 298-day streak of not missing a day of running at least 1 mile since November 26, 1980. That was a very tough day for me."

Eight weeks later, Ron started walking and then began rehab, starting off riding a stationary bike and doing weight training. On December 24, 2011, he walked 2 miles with his wife, Dondi, at a 17-minute

pace and said it was painful. The following March, he finally ran a mile in a little under 9 minutes. He continued to walk and occasionally run a little until it wasn't uncomfortable.

Five months later, he and RJ ran a mile together before he had the same procedures done on his left knee. He started back with rehab and by late December he had already run his first mile.

Last May, he started a new running streak and has consistently run 1-3 miles with RJ every day. He has gradually increased his mileage to 9 miles and also has been working on his speed. Anxious to see how he would fare in a race, he registered for the Cowtown 5K in February. Despite concerns about how his knees would handle the heavy pounding, everything went well. He covered the course in 19:17, finishing first in the 50-54 age group and he was thrilled. Racing again after such a long break felt amazing and actually brought tears to his eyes.

When asked what kept him sane during those long months of relative inactivity, he explained he simply focused on the future and credits his wife, son and daughter Tiffany Reese for their unwavering support.

As for the future, he plans to continue to run 5Ks and might attempt a 10K when he feels his body is ready.

We wish him the best of luck and congratulate him on an incredible comeback.