

My Best Race: 50 Runners and the Finish Line They'll Never Forget

BY CHRIS COOPER

Every runner who's been at it a while can readily cite both a best and a worst race. For many of us, our worst race stands out more clearly than our best because many of us tend to learn more easily from failures than from successes: the more spectacular the failure, the more enduring the lesson.

Let's face it: Unless you are perfection personified, you've had more failures than successes.

But a stunning success, whether accidental or well-planned, often stands out because it illuminates what amounts to a peak performance, a race where everything clicked and brilliance shone. It should be noted that a successful race does not mean that you have to win the race. If that were so, the rate of success at today's mega-races would be pitiful.

One of the delightful aspects of *My Best Race* is that not all of the 50 racers who shared their best race with Chris Cooper won that particular race, and of those who did, it is often pleasantly surprising to learn that their best race was not necessarily the race they are most famous for.

In fact, in some cases, the best race occurred back in high school or college and not necessarily on the professional circuit. And, another aspect that keeps the book fresh, is that the author does not only deal with professionals. He presents a nice mix of pros and amateurs, and often the amateurs have better stories to tell than do the pros.

Cooper, whose previous book was *Long May You Run: all. things. running*, is a sub-3:00 marathoner and host of the blog "Writing on the Run," so he is plugged into his subject and able to access some of the more accomplished racers in the sport. His book contains best races from Kara Goucher and Jeff Galloway, Zola Budd Pieterse and Scott Tinley, Marty Liquori and Craig Virgin. It is a virtual who's who of running over the past four decades. But he balances out all of the star power with racers we've never heard of—until now.

The recreation of the prime races is long enough to give pertinent details, but short enough to sample a handful of them at each sitting. Cooper does a nice job of giving sufficient background on the specific runner while at the same time not

slowing down the race in question. At the end of each race, the runner shares a simple piece of advice; none of them are especially profound, but they are all practical and easy enough to fold into our own running and racing. Things like: “Plan a strategy and don’t forget to execute that plan in the race. You can’t go into a race and just wing it.” That’s from Miguel Galeana’s account of the 2000 Chuckanut 7-Mile Foot Race. You’re right. I did not know who Miguel Galeana was and I had never heard of the Chuckanut 7-Mile Foot Race, but that glaring ignorance has now been corrected.

Although it was tempting to race through the book in a handful of settings, it was more enjoyable to read two or three race accounts at a time and let them ferment overnight before digesting a few more. Kind of like practicing self-control by eating only one handful of Doritos a day. The anticipation of the next handful is thereby heightened.

There are only a few areas of complaint:

At this time, the book is only available in a digital format. (It is published by Diversion Books, i.e. www.DiversionBooks.com.)

And Chris Cooper is listed as “editor.” In reality, Chris Cooper interviewed each of the 50 racers, and then wrote up each of the 50 race profiles, each of which flows well and is tightly drawn, so let’s call him the author. One sign of a good author is that the writing flows so easily that you’re never conscious of the author.

Being the Luddite than I am, I’m hoping that a publisher comes out with an ink-on-paper version, but in the meantime, you can’t go wrong listening in on these 50 stories of races both memorable and educational.