

Aurora ultra-marathon runner sets Canadian record in ten-day race

By Jake Courtepatte

62-year-old ultra-marathon runner George Biondic is showing no signs of slowing down.

The Aurora resident's latest feat of endurance was a ten-day journey around a one-mile track in Queens, New York, home of the Sri Chinmoy Marathon.

For ten days, Biondic, along with the encouragement and crucial support of his wife Erlinda, endured the elements, slept in a tent, and ran for as many as seventeen hours a day en-route to a sixth-place finish.

The international race meant competition from all corners of the globe, with thirty participants representing seventeen countries. But what is even more amazing is the diversity of ages that competed. Biondic's sixth-place finish was in the open-age category ? in his age category of 60-64, he set a new Canadian record, smashing the old record of 565 miles with five hours to go and adding another 22.

That's roughly the equivalent of running to Quebec City from Toronto in a week and a half.

Although he's been through the process before, the magnitude of his accomplishment is not lost on Biondic.

?The race has been going on for twenty years. In those twenty years, there have been competitors from all around the world. I set the record for men, my age, any nation?it's amazing to think about.?

A timed race, especially one that lasts for an astonishing ten days, must be handled differently than a distance race in both mind and body. While the seasoned veteran Biondic was well-versed in the timed race, a ten-day has been his ultimate challenge, previously going as long as six days.

?This is not a marathon where you spend three or four hours, then go and eat and celebrate and all that,? said Biondic. ?This is a question of survival.?

At the start of the one-mile loop is what Biondic describes as a ?tent village?, where he and Erlinda had a small spot for their tent, a table and a chair. He would spend about four hours a night sleeping, and admits it was quite difficult to find the energy to get up after a quick rest.

?Part of the survival is knowing the proper threshold of sleep. Four hours seems to be where I'm not hallucinating, but I'm not spending too much time resting.?

As one quickly learns when talking with George, a timed race is as much of a mental game as a physical one ? and the same can be said for training.

?The proper amount of sleep, nutrition, your pacing, your breathing?you have to think of every possible factor.?

For any normal man, this can be quite overwhelming. Biondic will be the first to point out that it's not just him out there, but Erlinda who plays such a crucial role as his crew.

?She's been my crew for over thirty years,? said Biondic. ?She stuck it out through the rain, cold, and wind, for ten days, she was there.?

When he felt like quitting, she was there. In terms of strategizing, her input was highly appreciated. Erlinda wears many hats as part of the Biondic team.

?She's my coach, which mentally is something you really need. Physically, any injury I would have, mostly blisters, she would take care of?she was a registered nurse so she's great at it.?

After hitting such a grueling goal, Biondic is now in the process of getting back into training mode. He's already got his training schedule set for the next seven months until the end of 2015. His next competitive step is planned for a six-day race in Phoenix, Arizona at the end of the year.