

In it for the long run

Plainville couple top local marathoners

PLAINVILLE - When Lauren and Ron Farkash set off from Hopkinton on their 26.2 mile Boston Marathon journey on Monday, they will be doing something that doesn't usually happen to the Plainville couple. They will be running in the same place at the same time.

For a married couple with three children, it's difficult to manage the affairs of the household and maintain a training schedule. Sometimes running together becomes a casualty of time restraints.

Last year, the couple attained a significant milestone as they were the top local runners at the 2008 Boston Marathon. Ron topped all the area men with a time of 2:58:42 and Lauren was the fastest female at 3:30:35. When you reach the competitive level of the Farkashes, it's remarkable that they can put it all together and maintain a viable lifestyle.

"We do not often get the chance to run together," said Lauren. "Ron and I do juggle a bit to get our training in. He gets one day on the weekend to train with friends, I get the other. During the week, I run in the early a.m. or during the day when the kids are at school. Ron runs during his lunch hour or at night. We occasionally will get a sitter or grandparent so we can do the same long run or a trail run together."

"We put the kid's activities before our activities," said Ron. "We split it up so it doesn't interfere with family time. On special occasions, we work around it. We get to run together once a month." Lauren has been a runner since a child due to the influence of her parents, who were track and road racing aficionados. She was able to squeeze in a couple of marathons in her early twenties but after a marathon in 1993, persistent injuries shut her down.

"I came very close to qualifying (for Boston) but became plagued with injuries and hung up my marathon shoes for a few years," she said.

She took up race walking; not a surprise considering her brother, Kevin Easterly, was an Olympian in 2004 and 2008. "I was competitive in that for a few years," she said. Time passed, their three children came along and her running went somewhat into eclipse.

The past two years have been a running renaissance for her for numerous reasons. "She has more time to focus with the kids in school," said Ron. He also attributes it to her avoidance of injury and a new consistency.

Lauren feels her new found success is due to cross training. "I run less days but my runs now are more quality runs," she said. "I do more things; I took up swimming, triathlons, got on the bike. My fitness level just jumped. That improved my running."

In 2007, she got that coveted Boston Marathon qualifier when she ran the Breakers Marathon in 3:35:59. She trains 40-45 miles a week in addition to her other fitness activities.

In many ways, Lauren has operated in her husband's shadow. Ron has taken on almost mythical status amongst the Wampanoag Road Runners for his prodigious distance accomplishments. He has completed three 100-mile races in the past two years and other ultra races such as the Cascade Crest, Stonecat and the Topsfield Six Hour Run. When he does come down to the marathon distance, he is a force as his sub-three hour Boston effort last year attests.

"People usually tell me that I am crazy and I agree that all endurance athletes are to a certain extent," said Wrentham's Roland Desrochers, a Wampanoag Road Runner with a 3:03 personal marathon best. "But he is a whole different level of crazy. He dreams up, talks about and does things that most of us can't even get our minds around. He has been doing it at a high level for about three years now and seemingly upping the ante every year. We just have to shake our heads every time he turns in a stunning time at a race, places high at an ultra or just effortlessly takes off on us on a training run."

Everyone has a chink in the armor and Attleboro's Sean McNamara has pinpointed Ron's. "His only visible weakness . . ., early morning runs aren't his favorite."

Despite all the accolades, Ron still feels that his wife is "a better runner than I am. When she shows up at a race, she can easily win her age category whereas there are a lot of guys that can beat me." There are occasions when the Farkashes get some extended time together. The three 100 mile races that Ron completed had Lauren as an integral part of the support team, pacing her husband through the last stages. "The most recent was in Seattle last August," she said. "I ran 32 miles with him and we were together for 12 hours. When does that ever happen these days?"

Ron's ultra-mentality has had a beneficial influence on his wife.

"What Ron does is both amazing and crazy," she said. "When I start to feel tired and ready to quit at mile 18 of a marathon I just think, 'At this point I have eight miles left; Ron would have 82! Suck it up!' Training with Ron has absolutely made me a better runner. I know I can run for hours if I have to. Ron has helped me get a little tougher both physically and mentally."

On Monday, the Farkashes will run another Boston together. They will start in different corrals and finish about an hour apart. There will be no competition between the two. That will only happen when they get back to their everyday routine. When they split up their household duties. When they decide as Lauren says, "Who gets to run on Saturday, who gets to run on Sunday?"