

The Runner Spotlight

Mike Burns is a big runner, literally. At 6'3" weighing over 200 pounds, Mike looks more like a football or basketball player than a runner. If you asked someone to describe the physical characteristics of a runner, you might hear adjectives like small, lightweight, streamlined, or even skinny. Mike Burns does not fit any of those descriptions. However, do not let physical descriptions fool you, Mike Burns is a runner who runs quite well. Not only quick, Mike has the endurance to compete at any distance and does so with above average results.

Although he has only been running with commitment since 1995, he has always worked out vigorously with weights and participated in team sports. The weight training and sports serve Mike well but something was missing. He looked for an outlet that would increase his cardiovascular condition and that outlet became running. "After practicing for a couple of months, I ran my first race in 1995; the Harrisburg Spring Sprint 5K. I followed that event by running the Harrisburg Mile and the December Dash. I fell in love with the feeling I got from running and competing against myself, however at that point, I thought I would never go beyond the 5K." It did not take long for Mike to figure out that if he trained properly and stayed with the sport, he would find that running beyond the 5K was just as rewarding. Mike related what motivated him to distances longer than 5K. "The inspiration that keeps me running is the 'runners high'. It is a great feeling and I have found that it is a key factor in maintaining a positive approach to dealing with life's daily challenges. I also love the competition against myself in which I try to see improvement and do better than I did last time. This has taken me from the 5K distance to the marathon distance."

As many runners know, without support, training and running alone is not much fun.

Mike confirmed the sentiment and shared his thoughts about those who support his running. "My two friends who started with me in 1995 and continue to run with me today, as well as the new friends that I have met through running, are very inspirational. I really look forward to the races when I get to see and compete with all these people. We also have what we call our 'fan base'. This consists of my parents and my friend's wife and daughter who generally travel to whatever race we are running. Within the last several years, my brother, who never ran, has joined the fray, although he lives in New York. He ran a New York City half marathon and the Marine Corps Marathon with us. All of this keeps me very excited about the sport of running!"

Mike believes that running is one of the best cardiovascular workouts you can get. Besides the fitness value of running, he also believes running helps keep your psyche sharp and your attitude positive. Mike attributes his positive outlook to following his training regimen, even when it requires him to overcome the wind, cold temperatures, and snow.

When asked about his training philosophy, Mike admits he has a lot to learn. "Although I have much to learn about training, my philosophy has developed into 'train smarter'. My first marathon in 2001 (Baltimore), I had trained as hard and long as I could before the race to make sure I was in shape. By the time race day arrived, I was beat up. To make things worse, I raced a 5K the next weekend, which I followed up by running on a relay team in the Harrisburg Marathon. That overwork sidelined me with runner's knee from November until late February. It was a hard lesson."

Mike did not let his injury slow him. In fact, if it did anything it made him a better runner. "Since that time I've talked with lots of other runners, read some books, and scanned the Internet. Now, I learned that smarter is much better than harder!" The information Mike gathered from all his

sources helped him to form the foundation of his training routine. "Generally, I try to mix up distances and insert hill and speed workouts. I drink and refuel properly and always rest when I get signals from my body. This seems to be working and I attribute my marathon PR at Marine Corps to smarter training. I actually felt good afterward and have not had any injury problems to date."

When Mike was training for the 2002 Marine Corps Marathon where he ran his PR, he was averaging between 40-60 miles per week. Since he is not training for a marathon right now, he usually runs 20-30 miles per week while keeping his gym routine year round. Mike lifts weights 4 days per week, trains on the Stairmaster 2 or 3 times per week and still manages to run 3 or 4 days per week.

As a lifelong Pennsylvanian, Mike was born in Harrisburg in 1965. He graduated from Millersville University in 1987 and became a Certified Public Accountant in 1989. Mike is a Personal Income Tax Practitioner and works in the Commonwealth's Assistant Comptroller for Audits Office in Harrisburg. He remains single having never married and fills his free time by being active. Besides running, Mike enjoys biking, hiking, and being outdoors.

Mike is a relatively new member to HARRC, which he joined in August 2002. When asked why he joined, he shared this HARRC story. "Summer 2002. I was doing a light practice run over near Wildwood Lake after completing a half marathon in New York City three days earlier. When my friend and I came around the lake, we saw a group of runners lining up for a race. They looked very cheery and flagged us down to see if we wanted to join them. We ended up racing. After the race, they shared some pizza and good conversation and I collected a race prize and a door prize. Afterward, with our stomachs filled and arms loaded, Lisa Stokes graciously gave us a ride back to our vehicles in the HACC parking lot. We intended to pay the race fee but

embarrassingly, neither of us had our wallets in our cars. We consequently sent her a donation for the food bank via mail and joined the club. How could we not join such a great club?"

Mike's favorite race distance has shifted from the 5K to the 10K. His favorite race at that distance is the Turkey Hill Country Classic. He loves the workout when climbing the hill in the second half of the race, but enjoys the Turkey Hill ice cream, iced tea, and hot dogs just as much. Although the 10K is his favorite distance, Mike also enjoys the marathon. "My favorite feeling for accomplishment has been the marathon. The race anticipation during the training and the shared fellowship with your training partners is great. Race day excitement with all the runners, spectators and entertainers, and the lasting feeling of accomplishment afterward has combined to make it one of the thrills of my lifetime."

When asked to relate his favorite running moment, Mike shared another great story. "In my first December Dash 5K conditions were frigid and windy. By the time I reached the upper portion of the river walk by the Governor's mansion, I was ready to quit. I noticed that I had a line of runners behind me. As we went on the upper portion of the river walk and headed back down the river, I noticed that everybody passed me. When the race was over, a few people came up and thanked me. They were thanking me because they used me used me to block the wind coming up river! Just this summer I saw one of the runners who reminded me of it! It is a fun memory and gives me a laugh when I think of it!"

Mike's career running highlight again has a lot to do with his size. Only this time, instead of someone else taking advantage of his frame, he did. "I was in Fenwick, Delaware for a vacation. On a whim one morning, my friend and I drove to Rehobeth Beach to run a 5K. While registering, I was asked if I was registering as a Clydesdale. (Clydesdale refers to a male entrant who

weighs 200 pounds or more.) I realized I was and registered as one. I ran the race uncertain to the impact of the Clydesdale label. It turned out that this race was the Delaware Clydesdale State Championship. I was the first “Clyde” to finish and the next thing I know, I am standing up between some Kenyan runners and the “Philly” winner (Female at 150 pounds or more) holding a trophy with a big horse on it. What a thrill! I did get catcalls that sounded like a horse from my friends, but it was really nice and the people were great.”

Since racing in 1995, Mike has competed in 141 races ranging from 1 mile to the marathon. He admits he cannot compete with seasoned runners and is happy just giving his best. His best often earns him an award in his age category. His PR’s indicate his quickness despite his “Clydesdale’ label.

1 mile	5:03
2 mile	11:32
5K	18:56
5 mile	33:05
10K	40:44
15K	1:00:08
½ marathon	1:30:08
Marathon	3:22:35

Mike’s future running plans include completing the Frozen Foot series in Elizabethtown and one marathon in 2003, but beyond that Mike has not planned much. “Once spring starts there will be plenty of 5K’s and 10K’s to choose from. I like to try different races. The next larger races I plan to run include a half marathon in the spring (not yet picked), another half marathon in the summer (probably in NY), and the Harrisburg Half Marathon. All of this will lead up to my goal of completing the New York City Marathon in 2003.”

Regardless of where and when Mike will run his next race, he knows he will have the support of his training partners and his fan base. He loves the sport and the effect it has on his physical and mental fitness. He has

struck a great balance between his cardiovascular training while maintaining muscular strength and endurance. Running, for Mike, has become more than a sport. Like many other runners, running has moved from being a sport to becoming an integral part of defining him. Defining Mike as a runner is easy. He is a big runner, literally.