

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

sports

"I don't want the sympathy angle"

The runner won't let blindness or diabetes keep him from the best times of his life.

By Adrian Dater
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 05/19/2008 12:19:30 AM MDT



Kerry Kuck, left, with the help of runner guide Jackie Hjelden, set a personal-best time Sunday in the half-marathon. (John Leyba, The Denver Post)

Kerry Kuck does not want lightly twinkling piano keys. He does not want to be the feel-good story of the day for the masses, somebody to "help put things all in perspective."

But if anybody out there is inspired by a totally blind, Type 1 diabetic who still runs marathons,

well, sure, Kuck will take that.

"A lot of people say I'm inspiring them, but if they're good athletes with no health problems, I'm not sure how inspiring that can be. They certainly don't want to trade places with me," Kuck said. "But I'd love to hear about someone who heard about me and said, 'Yeah, I want to be like him.' But I don't want the sympathy angle. When people ask me if I'm a diabetic, my latest answer is 'No, I'm not, but I do live with diabetes.'

Multimedia

- View slide show of the Colorado Colfax Marathon, Half-Marathon and Relay

Kuck, 50, set a personal best in the half-marathon Sunday with a time of 2 hours, 48.1 seconds in the Post-News Colorado Colfax Marathon. Tethered to runner guide Jackie Hjelden, Kuck set his record pace just three weeks after becoming what is believed to be the first fully blind, Type 1 diabetic to finish a full marathon, in Oklahoma City.

In a life that has dealt him some tough setbacks, running has helped Kuck pull through.

"Running gives a high better than any drug ever can," said Kuck, a Michigan native.

Granola bar, raisins, Gatorade

Advertisement

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

(303) 832-3232

Subscriptions cost from
63 cents to \$2.50/week
www.denverpost.com/subscribe



Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

Kuck's times have improved thanks to the runner guide program at the Achilles Club of Denver. Previously, Kuck always ran with his beloved guide dog, Audi, but that limited him to usually nothing longer than a 10K. Kuck's times further improved when he tried running behind the guide runner instead of at the guide's side.

"I have a different system than most blind runners use," he said. "The tethers with the guide runner are usually less than 20 inches, and you run side by side. But I wrap a 6-foot dog leash around my guide's waist and follow behind them. That allows my guide to use both arms, and they don't have to talk as much. I pretty much follow whichever direction that leash is pointing in. It's just much quicker, and you don't have to spend as much time talking and thinking about a guide's commands. It's quicker to respond in change of direction from a leash than listening to the guide go 'little right, little left, etc.' "

Running blind isn't the toughest part for Kuck. It's the constant need to keep his blood-sugar levels steady. But with the advances of continuous glucose monitors, Kuck is able to run longer distances without having to stop and take a test with a finger stick. Sunday, Kuck's blood sugar was kept steady with the ingestion of a granola bar, two boxes of raisins and 16 ounces of Gatorade.

Kuck was 13 when he got diabetes and 27 when it took all his sight. He had just been promoted to an engineering position with a Louisville housing firm when the vision started to go.

"I thought the 8 on a blueprint was a zero," he said. "I went, 'Oh, no.' "

Kuck was forced to go on Medicare and Social Security disability. Currently unemployed, he would like to work for a company to design better systems for the blind and disabled, but finding an employer willing to take on a blind, Type 1 diabetic and the inherently steep insurance costs has proved difficult. If he took a menial job doing anything, he probably would lose his Medicare and disability benefits.

"You just deal with it"

So, while there is a trace of anger in his voice at the Catch-22 of the American health care system, he soldiers on the best he can.

"I went through the 'why me?' phase, but you just deal with it," he said.

Hjelden, a former runner at Minnesota-Duluth, credits Kuck for everything he did Sunday.

"Really, I just had to run. That's it," Hjelden said. "For me, it's about sharing the passion for running with someone, and he has it. I didn't have to do much of anything else."

Type 1 diabetes has been in the news locally of late, with Broncos quarterback Jay Cutler having been diagnosed with it. Kuck said Cutler "will be fine."

"But already I can hear people saying, if he has a bad game, 'Aw, it's because of the diabetes,' or if

Advertisement

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

(303) 832-3232

Subscriptions cost from
63 cents to \$2.50/week
www.denverpost.com/subscribe



Print Powered By FormatDynamics™