

True Obsession: 14,071 Days—and Counting

Through storms and broken bones, Mark Covert has run every day for the last 38 years.

By Chris Taylor

On July 23, 1968, Mark Covert, At the time 17 and just out of high school, went for a run near his home in suburban Los Angeles. Nothing special there--except that he also ran the next day. And the next day, too. When he had gone 100 days in a row without missing a run, Covert realized he had a bit of a streak going. So on day 101, he went for another run...

Today, more than 38 years and 130,000 miles after first lacing up his running shoes, Covert's little streak has become quite historic. Last July 30, when he ran for the 13,885th straight day, he took hold of the record for longest consecutive daily running streak as tracked by the U.S. Running Streak Association. Yes, there's an organization that keeps up with such stuff, and to qualify a runner must log at least one mile a day. Currently, 61 runners have streaks of 25 years or longer, with Jon Sutherland of West Hills, California, trailing Covert by 307 days.

Catching the pack leader won't be easy, though. While some runners are casual, and others dedicated, Covert has his own category: unstoppable. "Obviously," says the stalker, now 56 and living in Lancaster, California, where he's a college cross-country and track coach, "something compulsive's going on here." To say the least. Covert, who had logged 14,071 days at press time, has run on the days his parents died and the days when his four children were born. He's run hours after hemorrhoid surgery and aboard a cruise ship while a tropical storm hit. Then there was the day 20 years ago when he broke his left foot. Although he managed to get home and to the hospital, his foot "was so swollen they couldn't even put a cast on it," Covert recalls. "So the next day I wrapped it in an Ace bandage, put on a makeshift boot, and hobbled through. I wasn't going to miss my run."

The streak, says Covert's wife, Debi, "is almost like a fifth child for us." And yet, Covert is more

than just absurdly faithful to his sport. In 1972, he placed seventh, in 2:23:35, at the U.S. Olympic Marathon Trials and was the first runner ever to cross a finish line in Nikes. Those "Moon Shoes" come out of a safety-deposit box only on rare occasions.

Covert admits age and health will one day have their say (his mile time, for instance, has slipped from a PR of 4:09 to 7:15). But until then, he'll pursue the streak with the same quiet obsession he always has. As he puts it, "I can't ever see myself waking up and saying, 'I don't feel like doing this anymore.'"

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