

OPRC PROFILE: *Don Jensen*

Date of Birth: 8-31-46

Occupation: Liver Specialist at University of Chicago Hospital

High School: Springfield (Illinois)

Colleges: University of Illinois, University of Illinois Medical School, Fellowship at Kings College Hospital in London, England

Family: Married to Donna 29 years. 2 kids: Colin 24, Emily 20

Favorite Film: "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation" (1989)

Music: Classic Rock

Reading: History books

Personal Strengths: Motivation

Personal Weakness: Too self-centered

Hobbies/Interests: Reading, Baseball (White Sox fan)

Secret Ambition: To write a book on English castles

Greatest Adventure: "Living in England for 2 years during my fellowship in liver disease. Donna and I went to the theatre every Friday evening after work and a pub meal, and went sightseeing every weekend in the country. We traveled all over, but particularly enjoyed the southeast of England (Kent, Sussex, and Surrey) and the Welsh castles."

PR's: 5K (18:55), 10K (39:24), 10M (1:05:45), 13.1M (1:28:11), Marathon (3:23:00, Chicago 1991), Triathlon (2:25:16, Olympic)

Perfect Run: Through the woods with daughter Emily on a cool, morning during the peak colors of fall.

Most Rewarding Accomplishment: Breaking 19 minutes in the 5K at The Race That's Good For Life

Toughest race: 1st Boston Marathon—bonked at 20, hung on for a 3:39

With your demanding career, how often are you able to race? What is your training regimen like?

"Usually, I start off the season doing the Shamrock Shuffle and, sometimes, The Wacky Snacky, and I'll evaluate my goals at that time. If it looks like I'm competitive, then I'll put a little more effort into the Cara Circuit and see if I can finish in the top ten for my age group. If I'm not running as well, then I'll race less and run more recreationally. And part of it is that it's a bit of an effort for me to race. My work schedule doesn't always lend itself to being free to race, so I have to jiggle things when I really get serious for the season. Since I just turned 60 and am in a new age group, I've been thinking, 'Well, maybe I could work a little harder this winter, and going into next spring, see if I can really do something.' Regarding my training, if I'm seriously training, I'm doing 35-40 miles a week. That would include a couple of 7-milers, some speed work—400s and 800s at a controlled race pace with a short rest interval—a Saturday tempo run, and a longer run on Sunday, something like 10-12 miles. When I'm running 40-45 miles a week, I'm getting injured. I've learned, as you get older, you have to train smarter—you have to listen to your body a bit more."

As an elite liver specialist, what have you learned about carbo-loading before a longer event?

"The data is that, as long as you are taking in extra carbohydrates during a race, there is no advantage to carbo-loading before the event. About 3-4 hours before say, a marathon, you need to eat something. I don't think it is so important what you eat. A lot of people focus on easily digested carbohydrates—bagels and so forth, but if you go back and look at what people did 50 years ago, they were eating bacon and eggs—and they ran great races. So, I don't think it's so important what you eat, but you should have something—a couple of hundred grams of carbohydrates—because overnight when fasting during sleep, you deplete your liver glycogen stores. A lot of people carbo-load the night before a race—a lot of pasta and potatoes. But then, you set yourself up for a 'carbo-dump' and depending on your G.I. track, that could be in the middle of the race. So, I don't do that anymore—I think pasta feeds are more of a cultural thing. These days, I'm looking for something that's lower residue because I don't want to have a bowel full of pasta."

So, you would prefer a more balanced meal the night before a longer event?

"Yes. You need to bear in mind the relationship between your body weight and your efficiency as a runner. There is some data that says for every pound gained in body weight, it costs you one second per mile. So, if you gain 10 pounds,

that's 10 seconds per mile, and over say, a 10K race, your time would be over a minute slower. By looking at fluctuations of my weight and my own times over the years, it seems like body weight is almost as predictive of my race times as my training habits leading up to a race. So, if you taper and carbo-load before a marathon, your weight can go up 3-4 pounds in a couple of days--and with it, loss of running efficiency. Logically, it would make sense to have your muscles 'normally' loaded with glycogen and go into a race at normal weight and then take in carbohydrates and water to maintain proper balance while racing. There's a fairly decent formula—about every 20 minutes, take in 100 grams of carbohydrate, which is basically a GU packet, with 6-8 ounces of water.”

Regarding gels like GU, I know of people who take them prior to a race or training run as an energy boost.

“It may be the caffeine in the gels that kick-starts some people rather than their carbohydrate value. There is very good evidence that caffeine makes you a more efficient runner. Not only does it psychologically counteract the weariness that you get during a long run, it keeps you sharper, more focused. There is also evidence caffeine improves the efficiency of your body in mobilizing fat. So, if I were running a longer event, I would definitely take NoDoz or a caffeine tablet before the start of the race...As a side note regarding gels, when I'm taking GU during a race, I'm taking it with water. At the water stops when I'm not taking GU, I'll take Gatorade or whatever replacement drink is available. You don't want to take GU and carbohydrate drink at the same time, because the amount of carbohydrate you're dumping into your stomach gets too high, actually slowing the ability of your stomach to empty it. So, if you were to just take GU and not drink enough water, that GU might just sit in your stomach and not be as absorbed as quickly as it should be. Sports drinks are usually between 6-8 percent carbohydrate which is the optimum amount for gastric emptying, and that gastric emptying gives you both the fluid you need to replete, as well as the carbohydrates and electrolytes that you need.”

Has being a runner affected the way you treat your patients?

“Oh yeah--big time. I counsel people all the time on the importance of exercise and I think I've gotten people to do it better. The obesity epidemic is reflected in the number of people with liver disease. Every day, I see patients who have liver disease because they're overweight, they have diabetes, and they don't exercise. And it gets into a vicious cycle due to the fact they often lack the ability to exercise for any period of time because it's hard on their joints. So yes, counseling is a big part of what I do, and I think it helps patients to hear it from a doctor who also exercises.”

Your daughter is a fine cross-country runner at Knox College. How much influence did you have on her running?

“Before Emily started high school, she was concerned about having an interest outside of her schoolwork. So one day, she approached me and said, ‘I think I want to go out for cross-country.’ And I said, ‘Sure, but we'll have to get you trained.’ So, I would run with her. And it was literally run a block, walk a block, and we'd do maybe a mile and she'd be exhausted. But, over the course of the next few months, we got up to where she could run 6-7 miles. And she wound up making the varsity at Trinity by the middle of her freshman year. Then, during high school, we would do long runs on weekends and there was a time when she was getting up at 5:30 am during the week so we could run together. There's something very special about running with your kid, when it's just the two of you--no iPod, cruising along through the quiet woods together. There's a real bonding. I think she got as much out of it as I did. We still enjoy running together.”

Why do you run? What does it bring to your life?

“There's a sense when you're running, that you're looking for that Oneness between the mind, the body, and Nature all coming together. There are those perfect runs when everything comes together and you're breathing easily, and your stride is smooth, and I think THAT is what keeps you coming back for more. You want that Nirvana feeling—both during the run and afterwards. You can talk about how running controls your weight, keeps you fit, helps your heart and your blood vessels, and all this other stuff, but I think if you didn't have THAT FEELING when you ran, you probably wouldn't do it. And, as you know, you don't have it all the time—some runs are agony—but you run because you know that maybe around the corner, that next Saturday run, it's going to feel that way. And you can get that feeling just as easily running 8-minute miles as you can running 5-minute miles. It doesn't matter what the pace is—you know the feeling when you're there. I think if I couldn't run—yeah, I'd bike or swim or do something else—but I'd miss that sense you get with running. Just having that sense of the environment, and the air, and your breathing, and your feet plodding along the ground. I think that sense of unity is not to be duplicated in any other physical endeavor.”

Don was a 3-sport athlete in high school. Not only did he blaze a 4:45 mile on the track team, but was a swimmer, and made two appearances at the state meet in cross-country.

