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Meet Heide Moebius, an octogenarian distance-running machine [column]



MIKE GROSS | Sports Writer 20 hrs ago



Octogenarian runner Heide Moebius working out near her Willow Vally Communities home. Thursday, June 27, 2019

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DAN MARSCHKA | Staff Photographer

Lancaster County's most remarkable resident/athlete is less than five feet tall, and weighs less than 90 pounds. Heide Moebius' body is more taut than slight, more lean than skinny, and as frankly athletic as that of your standard midfielder or shooting guard.

Also, it runs like an atomic clock.

To get a sense of it, find a treadmill. Set the speed at 6.7 or 6.8 m.p.h. You can easily handle that pace if you're an athlete, a runner or a fitness buff, and tolerate it for a while, even if you're in merely decent shape.

But it's not jogging. It's not casual. It's real running, for almost anybody.

Earlier this month, Moebius ran at that pace for 1,500 meters, essentially a mile, in 5,000-foot altitude.

Moebius runs for enjoyment, is rewarded with medals

"I just had to remember to breathe deeply," she said.

Oh: She's 80 years old.

This was at the National Senior Games in Albuquerque, New Mexico. In the 80-84 age group, Moebius ran away with the gold medal in the 1,500, the 800, the 5K and 10K. Even though she's not a sprinter, she finished second in the 400 by .22 of a second.

Her time in the 10K (6.2 miles), 1:02.33, broke the age-group meet record by over ten minutes.

"I can do these things," she said Thursday at her home in Willow Valley Communities. "I seem to have a recovery period, ... you know, next to nothing. If I have to, I can run every day."

If Moebius is a natural, she has not been an athletic lifer. There were no youth or school sports where she grew up, in Schwabach, Germany. There was plenty of World War II, and Moebius' childhood home was destroyed twice by allied bombing.



80-year-old Lancaster County woman finishes 2nd in her group at marathon in Greece

As a young woman she attended a party during Carnival, which is something like the German Mardi Gras, met her husband Richard, and embarked on a new life.

Richard Moebius was East German, a college graduate, and determined to make it to America. He did it, through Canada and eventually to a management job at the Raybestos-Manhattan plant in Manheim. Heide worked at the Schick Razor plant in Lancaster, where she rose from a secretary to Director of Exports.

Heide rode horses, skied and played tennis, once reaching the quarterfinals of the United States Tennis Association Senior Ladies Grass Court championship.

Competitive running didn't occur to her until age 55, when she was leaving the Hempfield Rec Center after tennis, noticed a group of women embarking on a 5K race and said to Richard, "I can do that."

Turned out to be an understatement.

Richard made himself into a coach, learning about heel strikers vs. toe strikers (heel strikers, like Heide, make better distance runners), oxygen capacity and exchange, pacing and race strategy.

Heide just ran. In addition to the five golds and a silver at the national senior games, she won four golds at the 2009 Senior Olympics, three gold medals in the 2018 Masters World Championships in Poland, won three USA Track and Field national championships.

She has run in 11 marathons, including Boston and Athens, Greece. The one in Athens was last year, a few weeks before the three golds at the World Championships in Poland, and one day after her 80th birthday.

That's only a partial list. Richard said she has run competitively 742 times and won, age group or overall, 647 of them.

"Better than JoePa, or even Pat Summit," he said.

After the '09 Senior Olympics, Richard suggested that, at age 70, having accomplished so much, she consider retirement.

"I was the preacher in the desert," he said.

Heide still competes in about 35 races a year. Other than 25 minutes of calisthenics each morning, there is no regular, structured training routine.

There is tennis two or three times a week, usually on grass courts, almost always against men. Most non-tennis days, she jogs the hilly and scenic trails of the Willow Valley Communities.

"Richard worries that I ask so much of my body, but I feel good," she said. "I do hope I can continue for a while, as long as I enjoy it. If it gets to the point where it becomes you know, not enjoyable, I probably will say enough."

Which means there is no end in sight.

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