



1997 Sri Chinmoy 3100 Mile Race

Follow Your Dreams

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At 6:05 am., on Thursday, June 12, 1997 five runners stepped up to the starting line on the sidewalk near Thomas Edison Vocational High School in Jamaica, to try and circumnavigate a slightly more than 1/2 mile (.5488 miles or 883.2079 meters) course 5,649 times. The first annual Sri Chinmoy 3100 Mile Race was to begin on the same course that the 1996 event had five runners reach their goal of 2700 miles. Three of those lucky five were back to experience their own escape from the humdrum world. They had 51 days to complete their journey. A race designed for runners with high mileage capabilities and fast recovery, the 3100 had an evening curfew from midnight to 6:00am. The rest of the time you ran your best. You had to be a master of mileage to even think of starting: 60.78 miles per day was the required average. Fifty miles a day kept you in the race. This was perhaps the longest race ever

done on a closed course; certainly the longest race available nowadays. The runners slept in apartments near the racecourse, and brought everything they needed for each day. Meals were delivered at regular times each day, and a constant supply of liquids and snacks was available. When they finished at night, a car whisked them away to home for rest.

The Runners

"I came to win this thing, I'm determined to finish, and I expect to average close to 70 miles a day" said **Edward Kelley**, 39, the part-time actor and former track coach living in Long Beach, California. Kelley finished second in the 1996 2700 mile race, trailing Latvian world record holder **Georgs Jermolajevs** by over 100 miles. He said, "People ask me why I do these races. I tell them because I am good at it. I love to race and compete. Obviously the distance scares people. But I have run across the country five times, had two non finishes, plus ran 2700 miles last year. I know I can do better. The 3100 distance intrigues me and inspires me. I've been out of work for a while, so my health and training have been good!"

Georgs Jermolajevs, 54, arrived from his native Latvia only 14 hours before the race began. Having endured another rough winter in the former Soviet republic, Jermolajevs was eager to begin his journey of 10 million steps, free of the constraints and pressures of his then-destitute homeland. He borrowed money from a Mafia-type individual in Riga to get to New York, the banks and lending institutions in the city at the time being corrupt and untrustworthy. The physical education instructor and odd-job worker claimed normal fitness, but hoped to be in top shape after a week or two of road toughening. I wondered whether he was healthy enough or recovered sufficiently to duplicate his great run of last year when he ran 2700 miles in 40 days 15 hours. Motivation is important in these super-long races. Georgs seemed more worried about problems at home and the lack of respect and recognition from his sports federation. "To them I am nothing; this race does not exist" he lamented. Last year he averaged 66.7 miles per day to dominate the race.

Istvan Sipos of Hungary arrived amid rumors that he had not run a step since his victory in the 1000 mile race in 1996. Istvan took the offer to come to New York, hoping to run himself in shape while keeping the others within sight. In 1993 he set the world best for 1300 miles and 2000 km. Some will recall his easy victory in the 1994 Trans America Race, when he glided through the hottest first three weeks on record, and was never challenged in the 64-day stage race (3000 miles). He hoped to still be running when his family would join him and help to crew for him in the middle of July.

A Sri Chinmoy multi-day would not be complete without a tough woman runner or two. This year **Suprabha Beckjord** toed the line for her 20th multi-day race of five days or more in the last 12 years! She was brilliant last year in the 2700, finishing first woman and third overall in 43 days, 0 hours, 46 minutes, an average of 62 miles per day. Fearless and confident, Beckjord came with her health and fitness intact, ready to push her limits again. She was the lone woman in the race, but a relentless competitor nonetheless. Her years of experience and great ability of concentration would surely propel her to the finish line. She was the only runner with a handler or helper for most of the race.

The youngest runner with limited experience but good potential, **Aleksandar Arsic**, 32, from Nis, Yugoslavia was here to fill out a small field and perhaps run 1000 miles or so. He would have to make 50 miles a day to stay in the race, but would be allowed to get past the other weekly cutoffs. He had done four other multi-days, but had never passed 903 miles. Maybe the other talented four would pull his young legs along to new heights.

The start

After a powerful silent meditation by Sri Chinmoy, the runners left the line in a clockwise direction around the concrete course. Ed Kelley took the lead from the gun, hoping to strike hard at his competition and set the tone for the race. Georgs ran and walked to stay close, but Edward widened his lead by the end of the first day. To further illustrate his



intentions, Kelley stayed until everyone else had finished or was near finished for the first day. He wanted Georgs and Istvan to start thinking that ' maybe this guy is serious'. After completing 88.9 miles the first day, Kelley was nearly 12 miles ahead of Georgs, 17 miles ahead of Suprabha and 27 miles ahead of Istvan. But competition is not the only thing that a

race of 3100 miles is about. Consistency, patience, poise and good health are the hallmarks for multi-day success.

The early weeks

As the miles began to pile up and days passed, one could notice the slimmer look of each runner. Effort marks on their faces appear but cheerfulness still remained a part of their demeanor. They seemed to have a great awareness of everything around them. They are actually

enjoying this race! On Day 7, hot, humid weather moved into the region. Temperatures rose into the 90's, with the humidity index rising as well. Unlike the unusually cool weather of the last year, the summer began heating up quickly. After one week, Ed Kelley led with 485.6 miles (69.2 per day), firmly in front of Georgs (454.4 miles), Suprabha (444.5) and Istvan (405.5 miles). Even Aleksandar averaged 56 miles a day. The runners settled in for the long haul ahead.

Last year Ed Kelley remarked that you should expect two or three major crises during a run of this magnitude. How well the runner deals with them can forecast their eventual success or failure. Georgs definitely didn't have the same intensity he displayed in the 2700. He had had a few days below 60 miles, and by Day 11 he had some mental problems. Having fallen 40 miles behind Edward, his race started slipping away with the drops of perspiration. A fit Jermolajevs would have no problem staying close to the lead. But this is a year later. Meekly, he stops for the night at 43.9 miles, saying 'he can't sleep, it is too hot.' His resolve is waning. The other competitors were unaware of his predicament until the next morning. We decide to allow him to continue, with a wait and see attitude. That same evening, Istvan's right quadriceps muscle was preventing him from staying close to the required average mileages. Walking slowly and in great pain, he appears distraught. The crises were mounting. Georgs appeared better and ran 71 miles the next day. Istvan tried to walk the next morning,

Sri Chinmoy meditates as he walks around the race course



but it is useless. Sadly he pulls out of the race, a victim of a torn quadriceps muscle with no time to heal.

Ed mounted a counter attack, now that one of his main rivals was gone. He banged out 72 miles and increased his lead to sixty. By the end of two weeks, Kelley totalled 943 miles and had broken up the race for first. We speculated that if he could hang on, his chances of winning were high. Kelley was not immune to problems. He began to suffer breathing problems in the stuffy, humid air. His internal temperature rose to 102°, with spells of dizziness and weakness. Yet, he marched and shuffled on. On day 15 he barely made 50 miles, and the same the next day as he passed 1000 miles in 15 days, one hour. Yet his resolve and determination to fight the good fight carried him on to the end of each day. One day Sri Chinmoy told Edward that a champion always shows his true colors. Kelley passed his first major test.

During this hottest of weeks, Suprabha ran extremely well in the heat, leading with the highest mileage of the field on four of the six hot days. Her consistency paid off, as she slipped ahead of Georgs into second, and even got as close as 22 miles of Edward during the afternoon of Day 16. Ed rebounded on Day 17 with 63 miles, his fever diminished and his strength returning. He began his assault on the distance anew. For the next six days he averaged 65 miles a day and assumed control of the race. Georgs' Achilles tendon became tender, forcing him to rip out the heel counters of his shoes and design an intricate lacing system to allow the tendon to heal itself while he walked. He barely made the cut-off again after another week of sub-par performances for him.

On Day 21 Suprabha encountered her own crisis. While moving along in her comfortable shuffle, she placed her foot down a little awkwardly and slightly pulled a muscle in her upper thigh. She walked the remainder of the day, still totalling 56 miles, but fearful of her long term chances if the injury was serious. Luckily for her, the injury was only minor, and with a good night's rest, she continued running the next day with hardly any noticeable problem. This day would prove to be her only day below 60 miles for the entire race!

Edward guarded his health during the day, not running too hard and taking breaks for proper liquids, vitamins and Chinese herbs to reduce the symptoms of heat and congestion. The other runners did the same. Runners often took immune system herbal supplements to guard against colds and infection.

One had to marvel at the determination and resolve of the athletes to go on. What made them continue when they had run 1000's of miles, with 1000's more to go? To even toe the line for a race of this magnitude is indeed an act of courage, or at the very least, bravery. What kind of person would subject his body to the rigors of 60.7 miles a day, for 51 days, with no pot of gold at the end, with only a trophy and a little adulation? Of course, an ultra-runner -a highly motivated one. Someone who could overcome fits of boredom, fatigue, discomfort and endless hours of running and running- alone with his thoughts, alone with himself for days and weeks. Suprabha often responded to inquiries about her participation that she was exploring new boundaries of her inner self as well as her physical limits. She used her meditation experiences when not running as a catalyst for discovering her true inner capacity. Ed Kelley used his charitable connections with children's disability as a stimulus to cover the miles and reach new goals. These five runners had a glimpse of the farthest goal, and wanted to stand on top of the mountain to see it. Their spirit is perhaps more remarkable than their talent.

Last three weeks

As the race became over four weeks old, the order of places became set, and the number of finishers became clear. Edward Kelley and Suprabha Beckjord were destined to finish within the 51-day time limit. Ed had dominated the race, passing 2000 miles in 30 days 14 hours. Suprabha remained consistent, if not quite as fast as last year, but certainly cheerful and full of poise. She slipped past 2000 miles in 32 days three hours. All the runners had to endure a typical New York summer, hot and humid, with little air movement and an infrequent thunderstorm. We used hundreds of pounds of ice to keep their legs, feet and heads cool, as well as the food and drinks available.

One particular episode with a storm was a little too close for comfort. On July 18th, a heavy storm had hit the area in the afternoon, dumping an inch of rain in a matter of minutes. Soon the sun came out and all seemed well. But a few hours later, the sky clouded up, with black clouds surrounding the northern half of the sky, and red-tinted thunderheads massing to the south. Within minutes the raindrops came, then the sky blackened, the wind shifted, and hell broke loose. Suprabha and Aleksander donned raincoats and continued. Ed and Georgs dived into the vans and waited. The wind blasted through, blowing everything away that was not tied down. Branches and trees started falling, almost if unteathered from the ground. The rain came in swirls and in all directions. Hailstones started clanking on the vans

and cars. A large tree came down near the course, and the sidewalk was flooded in ankle-deep water. I held on to the canopy on front of the van for dear life, almost ready to stop the race and dive for cover. But still the two runners circled the track. The winds had reached 70 miles an hour, closing the two local airports. A mini tornado had touched down less than ten miles away from us. As the rain and wind finally subsided, we were glad to be alive, but more amazed to see the race still breathing. Numbers from our scoreboard were found two blocks away.

Georgs began to emerge from his emotional downs and put up more respectable numbers. This was not to be his race, but by staying in when victory was impossible he taught himself valuable lessons about survival and acceptance. Prior to this race, Georgs had won the four previous multi-days he had entered here in New York. It must have been hard for him to accept defeat, knowing he had easily beaten Edward Kelley last year. He passed 2000 miles on Day 36, almost six days slower than Kelley's split for 2000 miles. He spent so much time manicuring his worn out running shoes that it was difficult to sustain a running rhythm. When Georgs ran well it gave everyone a lift. The competitors fed off of each others' energy. If Edward saw Georgs running well, he would invariably follow and mirror Georgs' effort. Aleksandar had passed four weeks and was still in the race. If he averaged only 53 miles per day, he could hit 2700 miles before the end of the race. He was also putting pressure on Georgs from behind for third place.

As the remaining quartet of runners approached forty days, they began to peek ahead to when the finish line would appear for the last time. Edward Kelley was almost assured of victory, and began to cruise the last few days, full of satisfaction and contentment. His dreams had profoundly taken form and shape. He ran for the Robert Klass Foundation, a charity which solicited funds to help protect young children. A few days before the end of his epic run, his fiancée Kim Browning from Long Beach, California arrived to crew the last few days and share his elation.

Ed had run a near perfect race. He had managed the crises well, gave himself easy days when his body begged for rest, and stayed in good spirits. He reached **3000 miles** in a time of 46 days six hours, the first man to pass this milestone in a certified race. On Tuesday, July 29th, he became the first man to reach **3100 miles** in 47 days 15 hours - 130 miles ahead of Suprabha. A throng of nearly 100 people witnessed his historic triumph. On camera he thanked everyone for their support, and told people to never give up, follow your dreams.

Forty minutes after reaching 3100, he returned to the course to record 13 more laps, passing the magical **5000 km** distance in 47 days 19 hours. Three significant firsts for the world were the result of his dedicated effort. A few days later at the awards ceremony, he recounted his grandmother's urgings to always think big and follow your aspirations. He truly had become a phenomenon in the super-long running world. To his credit, he averaged 65+ miles per day for 47 days - a mighty feat in any arena. His steely determination carried him to the goal.



Suprabha Beckjord closed in on her goal, her compact shuffle steady and focused as always. On Friday August 1st she passed 3100 miles in 50 days, two hours. When she crossed the line, many of her friends showered her with gifts, bouquets and placards extolling this herculean effort. She averaged 61.9 miles per day, another amazing feat for such a modest, humble and talented athlete.

Georgs Jermolajevs stopped with 2717 miles, far from his own expectations, but much fitter than when he started. Aleksandar Arsic reached his pinnacle of 2700 miles on the last day, grateful for the experience and ready for the next challenge.

A multi-day runner is always assured that when the race ends, he is never the same person that he was when he started. He or she has endured long days and nights of endless miles, always moving forward, never backward. These lucky five runners had gone through ups and downs, never falling victim to doubt. So it is with life. If we dream our dreams and fulfill our visions, then we will transcend our own goals. As Sri Chinmoy often said, "Today's goal is tomorrow's starting point."

The succession of more annual 3100 Mile races has continued for 21 editions, as 41 people have completed the distance through 2017. Impossibility has taken a back seat to inner and outer progress. We will continue to reveal the stories behind this most amazing race as the years have unfolded.



“This 3,100 miles is an unprecedented journey in our world-peace-manifestation-dream. World-peace can come into existence only when we are inundated with patience and perseverance. Infinite patience we need in our inner life, and perseverance we need in our outer life.

“These 3,100 miles remind us of one divine and supreme reality: we can and must do everything at our command to transform the world of lethargy and unwillingness to be dynamic. Willingness to give, willingness to achieve, willingness to grow and glow should be the message of our souls. With our souls’ blessings we can and will fulfill our earthly life.

“ To Ed, Suprabha, Georgs and Aleksander, my soul’s summit blessingful love, blessingful joy and blessingful pride I am offering unreservedly and unconditionally. Whenever I passed by you running, you reminded me of our souls’ eternal, birthless and deathless journey and you reminded me of Eternity’s choice runners.”

Sri Chinmoy, at the awards ceremony, 2 August, 1997



Sri Chinmoy 3100 Mile Race June 12 - August 1, 1997 5 starters
 .5488 mile loop (883.2079 meters) paved sidewalk, certified
 12:05am - 6:05 am curfew (Actual start: 6:05:00 am. EDT)

1. Edward Kelley, 39, Long Beach, CA. USA 3100 miles: 47 days + 15:19:56



1000 miles: 15 + 01:24:30
 2000 km: 19 + 01:47:43
 1300 miles: 19 + 17:24:27
 1500 miles: 23 + 00:40:23
 3000 km: 28 + 14:16:14
 2000 miles: 30 + 14:50:19
 4000 km: 38 + 08:23:57
 2500 miles: 38 + 13:18:29
 2700 miles: 41 + 13:50:41
 3000 miles: 46 + 06:15:59
 5000 km: 47 + 17:06:07

2. Suprabha Beckjord, 41, Washington, DC USA 3100 miles: 50 days + 02:09:56



1000 miles: 15 + 15:19:50
 2000 km: 19 + 14:23:44
 1300 miles: 20 + 13:46:55
 1500 miles: 24 + 01:57:37
 3000 km: 30 + 01:03:19
 2000 miles: 32 + 03:46:38
 4000 km: 40 + 02:58:55
 2500 miles: 40 + 06:35:23
 2700 miles: 43 + 11:49:42
 3000 miles: 48 + 09:13:25

3. Georgs Jermolajevs, 54, Riga, Latvia 2717 miles = 49 days + 13:15:26



1000 miles: 15 + 16:51:13
 2000 km: 20 + 07:15:30
 1300 miles: 21 + 08:24:55
 1500 miles: 25 + 00:24:51
 3000 km: 34 + 09:47:45
 2000 miles: 36 + 13:18:58
 4000 km: 44 + 13:48:35
 2500 miles: 44 + 17:12:29
 2700 miles: 49 + 04:06:06

Aleksandar Arsic, 32, Nis, Serbia

2700 miles = 50 days + 06:49:34



1000 miles: 18 + 14:10:24

2000 km: 23 + 10:12:23

1300 miles: 24 + 07:27:00

1500 miles: 28 + 04:39:24

3000 km: 35 + 02:16:55

2000 miles: 37 + 12:11:4

4000 km: 46 + 12:50:07

2500 miles: 46 + 16:28:23

Istvan Sipos, 37, Szeged, Hungary

582.27 miles = 11 days+00:59:05