

The Second Sri Chinmoy 3100 Mile Race: A Duel in the Hood June 13 – August 2, 1998

By Sahishnu Szczesiul

On a misty, overcast Saturday in June 1998, six runners with aspirations to run clear across the USA and then some, without ever leaving the neighborhood, let alone the next county, toed the line for the longest running race on the planet- the second Sri Chinmoy 3100 Mile Race.



The wait is over

The course confines were a concrete sidewalk a little over a half-mile long (883.2079 meters) that circumvented a playground, baseball field and the Thomas A Edison Vocational Technical High School in Jamaica, Queens, New York.

Sri Chinmoy himself had been upping the boundaries for long distance races with his Marathon Team since 1985, bringing the first certified 1000 Mile Race in the world to fruition that year, then later in the decade moving the goal to 1300 miles, and eventually the 90's the brass ring became 2700 miles in 1996. 1997 saw the first 3100 become a reality, as two stalwarts finished the race within 51 days out of a field of five.

The current champion, last year's winner **Edward Kelley**, 40, from Sacramento, CA was the odds on favorite to preside again. Some minor injuries and a little less training still did not dampen his confidence. He had four times run across the country in the Trans America Race, as well as having finished second in the only 2700 Mile Race from 1996. His victory in 1997 solidified his ability at high mileage, so that, in his mind the 3100 was not an impossible challenge. He felt that someone could average 70 miles a day if all things fell into place. He hoped it would be him.

Istvan Sipos, 38, from Szeged, Hungary was indeed a challenger to the 3100 crown. He had had a rise to prominence from the early 1990's, setting national records for 1000 miles (4 times) and six days (2 times). In 1993 he won the Sri Chinmoy 1300 Mile Race in record fashion, setting a 2000km world best en route. He won the 1994 Trans America Race, 64 stages-3000 miles, by nearly a day ahead of second place, in a blisteringly hot summer. The only blemish on his resume was a dnf in the 3100 miler in 1997 due to a leg muscle tear. He was healthy and trained for the race this time. His young son Atila was present for the first two weeks before the rest of the family arrived to help him. Istvan had won the 1998 Ten Day Race by one mile over 1996 2700 Mile Champion Georgs Jermolajevs of Latvia.

Suprabha Beckjord, 41, from Washington, DC was present to again test herself, having set women's world bests for all distances from 1400 miles, 2100 kms, and 20 days to 51 days the previous year, finishing 3100 miles in 50 days, 2 hours. Suprabha was known as a steady, focused, smooth running shuffle-style athlete. Her only goal was to do better than her previous efforts. She had been running multi-day races since 1986, and was a former world record holder for 1000 miles.

Newcomer **Manfred Leismann**, 51, from Leichlingen, Germany had high hopes of finishing the 3100 miles in 45 days or less. He felt that a steady diet of running 14 hours a day, at 5.5 miles an hour, would bring him to the finish line first. He showed his prowess in the 1995 Trans America race, the fastest of the quartet of cross-country races in the 90's, by reaching a top six placing. He had also run five multi-day races to bolster his resume

Another German runner entered the race. **Wolfgang Schwerk**, 42, from Solingen, Germany was the least experienced in multi-day events, but had an impressive ultra-marathon background. He was best known for having the second best 24-hour result all-time- 171 miles (276.21km) and second best 200km time: 16 hours 20 min., second only to the many superb totals from the Ultra legend Yiannis Kouros of Greece. Wolfgang had dreamed of this race and was eager to run his first multi-day. He had been training and living on a liquid diet for 10 months previously.

Lastly, **Aleksandar Arsic**, 32, from Nis, Serbia had trained a full year for this event. Last year he ran 2700 miles of the 3100 before time ran out. He worked as a train engineer in Nis when not running long distances from home to work. He hoped to at the very least do better than before.

Sri Chinmoy went into a high meditative state and focused on the runners to help them achieve their goals, if not exceed their expectations.



As the group of six runners left the line, the dream started to hit home. The runners are here, the race is real, the planning is behind us- it is on. As Chief Race Director Rupantar often says, 'Once the Race starts, it just seems to move along on its own.'

We watched up close, as the human drama and inner journey started. Ed Kelley wasted no time in running well, and stayed smooth right to the end the first day, reaching 83 miles. He surprised himself, he told us later. Manfred Leismann reached 79 miles hours before midnight, and basked about his total, stating, "I will run 120 kilometers every day, and finish early. It will be easy."



**“We are all pilgrims
Here on earth
And we are running together
Towards the Golden Shore”-
Sri Chinmoy**

Manfred had five good days out of six

Wolfgang Schwerk finished 70 miles after just 12 hours had elapsed, and then stopped, pleased with the first day effort. Suprabha made 73.5 miles and still had an hour left, but knew rest would be at a premium as the days unfolded. Aleksandar reached 77 miles just before midnight, and found a smile to end his first day. Istvan Sipos reached 65.8 miles, and also smiled. He was sixth overall, but the signs for his body after Day 1 were good. No problems, no aches or pains. All good. 50 more days were to follow.



Day Four Ed Kelley and Istvan Sipos begin their dance

The first two weeks are a test of the runner's ability to adapt to the regimen of 14 to 17 hours per day of daily running. The first 1000 miles is like the buildup of both the body and the mind. The mind must listen to the body, and implement basic tasks. Refueling and taking proper nutrition is essential. Stretching and massages also help the runner to get through the early two weeks. The race is not necessarily won in the first two weeks, but it surely can be lost if mistakes are made. Blister management is also essential, as is the simple schedule of run, eat, sleep.

After the first week, Manfred had moved to the front with 498.85 miles (802.83km), followed by Ed Kelley with 454.4 miles (731.29km), and Wolfgang Schwerk with 447.8 miles (720km). Suprabha was a close fourth place overall, and Istvan fifth a few laps back of her.

Manfred's gamble of a fast start of 79, 79, 81 and 76 miles by Day 4 was to be proved almost fatal to his overall attempt at an early victory. By Day 7 and Day 8 he could only muster 50 miles a day, and his already worn out body could not acclimate to the intense mileage demand. After 14 days, he could not recover mentally from the workload. He respectfully declined from the race, then rented a car, and with his girlfriend, drove out to Las Vegas to try his luck at the roulette wheel.

The oval course of the 3100 had claimed it's first victim. It would not be the last, one could say, as the moral of the story is 'speed kills', when it comes to very long multi-days. But a runner on this course has to respect the hard surface, and find a way to lessen the impact that concrete can do to shins, knees, and lower extremities. The 10-day to two-week period of adaptation proved to be closer to reality than a crash-and-burn all out start of a long event.



Istvan and Wolfgang Day17

Meanwhile, the leaderboard started to show position changes as the runners continued the challenge. Ed had to pull back a little, as Istvan started his relentless move of consistency towards the top. Suprabha stayed focused throughout, and held third place. Wolfgang, after four days, started taking in solid food instead of just liquids, and although slower and riddled with blisters and some shin splints, kept moving along. Istvan reached 1000 miles in 15:10:00:35, over two hours ahead of Ed Kelley, who reached the kilo in 15:12:25:26. Suprabha checked that box in 15:13:54:26, and Wolfgang reached a day later in 16:15:04:52. Aleksandar was yet a day behind the German in 17:15:37:21.

The second difficulty of this race is that a runner has to almost be oblivious to ups and downs. Things will happen. There will be blisters, shin splints, nausea, headaches, and the like. A runner has to stay focused, take care of what he or she can, and don't worry about things you cannot control. Sri Chinmoy always told runners to be child-like. Be enthusiastic and playful, yet still focused on your task. The less you let the doubting mind take control, the better. Never get too down, or even too up. As the Buddhists would surmise ...' Moderation in all things'. We would tell the runners-"one day at a time, one hour at a time"

Except, there is one other thing that we have not mentioned yet- *competition*. That noun is the reason that these events exist. If these runners all ran by themselves at home, there would be a lot less fun, and no one would even care, or watch, or compare themselves to what someone else does. In running, competition matters, but as spiritual aspirants, we of the SCMT encourage people to compete- with themselves. That doesn't mean we don't like side-by-side- running- 'who gets to the picnic table first gets the pizza'. Competition in the highest sense means we compete with our best, and we appreciate our fellow competitors as they reach for their best. Our rivals being better makes us better.

This 1998 race had one of the greatest 'one on one' tests since running long started. There were many hot days during the race. If you were not taking fluids and salt you were in danger of crashing. If you went too far or too fast on a day, the result might be a disaster in the making.

With still five runners left, on Day 30, Istvan Sipos was 25 miles ahead of Ed Kelley, mostly due to every time the local workmen cut the grass lawns along the adjoining fields, Ed would have attacks in his sinus passages and allergic reactions, forcing him to slow down or stop for an hour or two. But, by Day 35, Istvan's lead was down to 4 laps- barely two miles! Day 38, Istvan had heat problems and had a poor day- most probably sun stroke. Ed was suddenly ahead by 25 miles. By Day 41, Ed's lead was again down to 3 laps- one and a half miles.

At the 2700 mile split on Day 42, Ed was only 50 seconds ahead at 41:03:20:59. Istvan reached it at 41:03:21:49. They stayed in view of each other on every lap for a few hours; cat and mouse was the name of the game. This lasted for several days. Ed's afflictions seemed a little worse. Ed was still trying as hard as possible to lead. He stated, "It ain't over yet'.

Istvan Sipos proved to be the stronger runner at the end of the race. He put up days of 71.89 miles and 74.63 miles on his last two days to take the mantle of world champion of 3100 miles. His time of **46:17:02:06** shaved 22 hours off the previous world best of Ed Kelley!



The next morning, Ed surpassed his own former world best by 9 hours 30 minutes, finishing second overall in **47:05:39:58**



In the last 15 days of the race, we realized later, that between Istvan and Ed, they had set 27 new mile, km, or day records as the race reached an apex of extreme proportions. These were world bests on a certified course, and they were writing history as the hours and days flowed by.



Third place overall was garnered by the irrepressible Suprabha Beckjord. She finished 3100 miles in **49 days+14:30:54**, which was over 11 hours faster than her previous best women's time. She had set women's world best marks that lasted 17 to 19 years later before being broken. And her American records for the 3100-mile distance and the various splits still stand to this day (2021)!



Two World-Class Runners

The fourth and final finisher, and definitely not least, was the indomitable Wolfgang Schwerk. With his lack of multi-day experience, he had to endure more pain, and more setbacks. Yet, we sensed that he had more capacity, and absolutely, more resolve, to conquer any barriers. Ultimately, he would prove that assumption to be correct. His story of greatness was still to be written. It would be a matter of a few years. His finish time in 1998 was 50 Days+08:29:24. Remember, this was his first episode over one day of continuous running- diving into the deepest end of a big pool. And since we found out that his given spiritual name from his late spiritual teacher in Germany was Madhupran, we started calling him that name. It means Powerful Essence of the Life-Energy



Aleksandar Arsic reached 2831 miles (4556.46km) the furthest he had ever run in a race. He was very close to finishing this epic event. It would only be a matter of time.



Today's Runners:
 Brave you are,
 Daring you are,
 Weather-defying you are,
 God-loving you are,
 God-fulfilling you are.
 Spirituality braves all obstacles
 And then it receives
 The Victory-Garland from God.
 Sri Chinmoy

Sri Chinmoy always wanted the races to keep to a standard of excellence, no matter how small or large the field. He always tried to inspire the runners to exceed their potential, and taste true satisfaction. His 'Self-Transcendence' mantra was in bloom in this race, 1998. More would follow.



Five of the greats of the super-long distance world. Istvan receives thunderous applause from Sri Chinmoy

The Second Sri Chinmoy 3100 Mile Race Final Results

June 13- August 2, 1998 6 starters

.5488 mile loop (883.2079 meters) paved sidewalk, certified

1. Istvan Sipos, 38, Szeged, Hungary 3100 miles: 46

days+17:02:06 WR



09+13:07:23
 15+10:00:35
 19+16:57:12
 30+00:46:28
 28+01:43:44
 37+14:51:54

1000 km =
 1000 mile =
 1300 mile =
 2000 mile =
 3000 km =
 4000 km =
 2500 mile =
 2700 mile =
 3000 mile =
 5000 km =

38+04:52:54
 41+03:21:49
 45+12:20:32 WR
 46+18:38:48 WR

USA 3100 miles: 47 days+05:39:58 NR



2000 mile = 30+06:35:30 NR
 3000 km = 28+09:02:51 NR
 4000 km = 37+08:57:13 WR
 2500 mile = 37+13:25:36 WR
 2700 mile = 41+03:20:59 NR
 3000 mile = 45+16:52:36 NR
 5000 km = 47+07:31:35 NR

2. Edward Kelley, 39, Long Beach, CA

1000 km = 09+09:00:11

1000 mile = 15+12:25:26

1300 mile = 20+02:04:21

3. Suprabha Beckjord, 41, Washington, DC USA 3100 Miles: 49 days+14:30:54 WWR

1000 km = 09+13:15:42

1000 mile = 15+13:54:26

1300 mile = 20+10:06:49

3000 km = 29+11:01:39 WR

= 32+14:19:26

= 39+12:59:30 WR

= 39+16:54:47

= 43 +05:15:38

3000 mile = 48 +04:03:14 WR

5000 km = 49 +16:50:45 WR

Solingen, Germany 3100 miles: 50days+08:29:24 NR

1000 km = 10+00:36:26

16+15:04:52

21+10:19:01

31+05:18:09 NR

33+03:19:43 NR

41+00:06:25 NR

41+02:23:02

2700 mile = 44+10:21:36

3000 mile = 49+02:57:41 NR

5000 km = 50+10:18:33 NR



4. Wolfgang Schwerk, 42,

1000 mile =

1300 mile =

3000 km =

2000 mile =

4000 km =

2500 mile =

Aleksandar Arsic, 33, Nis, Yugoslavia (Serbia) 2831.2592 miles/ 4556.4697km

1000 km = 10+16:28:26

= 17+15:37:21 PB

35+12:04:45 NR

33+06:08:45 NR

44+13:15:28 NR

48+09:06:50

1000 mile

2000 mile =

3000 km =

4000 km =

2700 mile =



Manfred Leismann, 51, Leichlingen, Germany 844.6032 miles/ 1359.257km

1000km = 09:08:53:42



Extra photos

