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Moraga native and ultra marathoner Rod Farvard

By Jon Kingdon



Rod Farvard, right, runs through Foresthill, mile 62 of WSER, with his pacer and close friend Max Storms, who would go on to run the next 16 miles with Farvard. Photo provided

If Moraga native, Rod Farvard, asks you to come along with him for a little run, be forewarned that little can be a relative term. Know that the "Far" is Farvard is no misnomer.

Farvard began running cross country as a freshman at Campolindo. "I grew up playing a lot of sports," Farvard said. "When I started running, it was a positive experience. There are just so many great trails. Whenever I come back to visit my parents, it's just incredible. I definitely developed my love for running there. I was a varsity runner but on the very low end of it. I was above average, but definitely not fast enough to get recruited."

After entering UC Santa Barbara, Farvard moved on to marathons (26.2 miles) and then moved on to triathlons (swimming, bicycling and running-140.6 miles). Besides running marathons through his sophomore year, Farvard got a road bike and began biking tours. "Someone commented on my activities page that I should check out the Triathlon club," Farvard said. "I went to one of their practices and the atmosphere was amazing. I really missed having a team and a group setting as I had just been training on my own."

Longer distances had always been Farvard's area of expertise and when he ran his first marathon in San Francisco in 2013, he was pleased but not surprised at his performance. "I anticipated that I'd be pretty good at it and that race went incredibly well for myself."

At this point, the Boston Marathon became Farvard's target 'A' race, the race you build toward, making sure you are in peak condition. Farvard would run the Boston Marathon in 2014 and 2015 with a best time of 2 hours and 40 minutes.

Farvard majored in physiology, which was more plant-based physiology, and how it relates to ecology and evolution though his real interest was in human physiology and cell biology. Was this a way for Farvard to connect the human body and his running long distances? "One thousand percent," Farvard said. "That's what initially sparked my interest in understanding what happens in the body during these endurance events and how to bio-hack it more than anything. I'm incredibly interested in the science and the data behind these races, learning how do I get myself to go further? How do I sustain a faster pace and things like that? It just boils down to what you're putting in your body."

After graduating from Santa Barbara, starting his professional career training the necessary 30 hours a week for the triathlons was too much for Farvard who began working for Elation Health in San Francisco. "We are a health software company that works in small, independent, primary care practices helping these businesses have a tool for charting their telehealth for their billing. We're like a one-stop for an independent primary care provider."

In 2016 and 2017, Farvard had run the Ironman Vineman and Ironman Santa Rosa, 10- and 9-hour races along with bike rides for training and adventure rides with his friends. "I would ride for 8-10 hours and as much as 20 hours," Farvard said. "Having done this, I already knew what to expect to feel in an endurance event of that length in terms of that very low-glycogen feeling and potential sleep deprivation, so I was able to avoid getting to those low points by fueling correctly. Running was always my favorite discipline and at that point, I had gotten used to a 10-hour race."

For Farvard, it was a matter of pushing his limits in an environment of his choice. "I just love the outdoors and being outside for a long time," Farvard said. "I was always fascinated by what my body can do. In these events, the limiting factor isn't how naturally gifted or fast you are. It's how you are taking care of yourself with very input-output type of training - input is running more miles in training and output is being able to run farther at once in a race. There's always the mystery such as can I make it this far today or is this new formula which I'm putting in my body with my healing going to work for me? In my training, there's just so much time for things to go wrong that it's actually a little bit exciting. It's like, can I beat the clock today and push my body to outperform what I thought I could do."

In March 2020, Elation Health chose to operate remotely. Farvard and his girlfriend opted to move to

Mammoth Lakes, an environment that satisfied his aesthetic desires and was an ideal area, at an altitude of 8,000 feet, for his training. "I mostly moved out here for the mountains and the trail riding," Farvard said. "I also like climbing and peak bagging (attempting to reach a collection of summits published in the form of a list) and things like that. It's a really amazing area with a number of 14,000-foot peaks. I've always wanted to live in a high altitude and see what it would do for my running."

The 'A' race for Farvard at this point was The Western States 100-mile endurance run, the world's oldest 100-mile trail race starting in Olympic Valley, California, and finishing 100.2 miles later in Auburn, California.

Farvard first ran in a shorter ultramarathon race in San Diego where he qualified for the Western States ultramarathon. "I was absolutely hooked on the community and the way the event was run," Farvard said. "It was an out-of-body racing experience that I didn't get in the triathlons. It was a very unique, captivating experience."

Farvard finished in 58th out of the 380 entrants in the Western Open with a time of 22 hours and 48 minutes. Farvard's goal was to finish in the top 10 and for 80% of the race, things went as planned. "I'm essentially running the whole time averaging eight-to-nine-minute miles," Farvard said.

"Where this race went south was around mile 80 when I couldn't stomach anything, so I basically had to walk in the last 15 or so miles which resulted in a very slow time and a very bad position."

The races have proven to be a constant learning experience in both mind and body for Farvard: "Self-belief is huge. The person that's not telling themselves they're going to do well is not going to do well. You have to be mentally strong and able to convince yourself that you can do this thing versus pain in the mind and body, but if your goal is just to finish this race, it's absolutely all mind."

Runners can hit the wall where the mind wants to quit but for Farvard it was in his training where he learned to break through that symbolic wall. "Every day in training is a mental battle," Farvard said. "It's a matter of not letting anything bother you. I want to hit that wall because it teaches me how to get out of it and how to prevent getting there during a race. I focus on running with the same rhythm and cadence that I want during the race."

Every runner will have their own technique in handling the distances in what is going on in their heads. "I try to stay as present as possible, monitoring for myself," Farvard said. "I don't like getting distracted and I try stay in the present, focusing on my breath, my steps, and my surroundings. I'm always thinking about what is happening and imposing my moment in that race."

In many ways, Farvard has come to understand himself better through these challenges: "I learned about my weaknesses more than anything. I'm not a very patient person and that's something I'm really trying to work on. I've also learned that I'm extremely competitive and how much I've really enjoyed the races and how it really matters to me."

In his preparations, Farvard learned not to overtrain and to plan in how to run each race. "It's incredibly easy to go overboard," Farvard said. "I will feel I need to train super long but that's a great road track to injury. It's easy to go out hard because you want to win the race, but you can really be suffering in the back half of the race. I've gotten a bit more strategic in my racing and have been pacing things better but it's a really fine line."

Farvard has sponsors for shoes, apparel, backpacks and bottles. He will compete in ultramarathons about every two months and, as a rule, training everyday, going through about 15 pairs of shoes each year.

Most of Farvard's races are in the United States but he is currently planning on going to Chamonix, France for the Ultra Trail du Mont Blanc Ultramarathon at the end of August. It is 106 miles long with an elevation gain of 33,000 feet. Even with strict qualifications, the race will have 2,500 starters with a history of 35-40% of the racers unable to finish the race.

Farvard has a support staff at each of the ultramarathons. "I get most of my aid from my crew because they will have more of the stuff I've been practicing using. For the race in France, my parents are going to come along with my girlfriend. I have a lot of friends who will also be competing. There are multiple races and it's like a festival so when we're not racing, we're helping each other," Farvard said.

Not afraid to take on any challenge, Farvard took it upon himself to run the 210-mile John Muir trail in the Sierra Nevada mountain range last summer and, as in all his races, was careful to avoid injuries. "It took a little over three days and it was just non-stop moving so I had a lot of caffeine though I would take an hour nap here and there," Farvard said. "A lot can happen in these runs so I'm definitely on the better side of technical running. You have to be conscious but it's not like it occupies my mind at any point. I can see myself racing 200-mile races at some point competitively."

In the end, it has to take more than just a drive to run these daunting distances for Farvard: "I run every day. Obviously, I'm training for races and stuff like that. But even when I don't have a race on the calendar, I still run every day because I absolutely love it."



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