

Death shows again that we're all mortal

By Charles Clines



The tragic death of Lyndon Laseman of Henrietta after the relatively young 49-year-old completed the 20-mile run at the Fort Worth Marathon on Nov. 8 brought home again our mortality.

I know of no details of his health or background, but it should serve as a reminder that runners should, as everyone, undergo annual exams. There could be some underlying problems that only a doctor can discover. And, as in my case, you should take it further if you know that your body isn't responding the way it should during training.

As I've written before, I was experiencing the same symptoms during my training as a runner who eventually didn't survive bypass surgery. Because I was experiencing the same symptoms during training, I saw a cardiologist and he discovered that I had 75 percent blockage in three arteries. That was three years and three stents ago. Most of that blockage probably was the result of some family genes and also a very suspect diet when I was younger. I didn't reject any kind of food (except liver) and loved (and still do) desserts. When I turned 40, though, I changed my lifestyle by starting a running regimen and committing myself to healthier eating. When you have a father who died at 51, you start thinking about those things when you realize you aren't bullet-proof.

And that brings me to the wrong and troublesome thinking I have noticed among some runners. They believe that just because they run, they can eat anything. I either read or heard a runner say that the reason he runs is because it allows him to gorge on ice cream. Hmmm. I don't believe that's the way running works. Running might burn some of the calories from the ice cream, but it won't negate all the fat that helps clog arteries. Running and exercise are just two parts of staying healthy. A balanced, sensible diet also is essential. Burgers, fries, pizza and ice cream can be eaten, but should be only in moderation. My annual sausage intake, for example, usually is saved for the Germanfest in Muenster. And sometimes I even skip the sausage. When you have blocked arteries, you definitely examine your diet a lot closer.

One thing that many runners don't realize is that just because you are in good condition, you might not be healthy. In other words, you can have heart problems even though you're able to finish a marathon.

I always refer to Jim Fixx, whose book "The Complete Book of Running" helped inspire me to change my lifestyle. Even though he died while jogging at the age of 52, it's my belief that he prolonged his life by several years when he abandoned his sedentary life (that included smoking) and took up running. His dad died when reached 43 and his

family history was not one of longevity. Of course, critics of running will say that running isn't good for you because Fixx died so young. My argument is that he lived longer than he would have, and I definitely believe running and a change of diet has helped prolong my life. Besides my father dying at age 51, one of his brothers died at 48. Both smoked. My father led a fairly active life, but ignored heart problem symptoms and continued to smoke. Smoking, in my opinion, is worse than a bad diet. A bad diet and smoking surely is a deadly combination.

Anyway, the message of this soapbox dialogue is that running is good for you, but it's only one factor in staying healthy. Even if it doesn't prolong your life, it gives you a better lifestyle. Be sure to undergo physical exams every year. Runners know their bodies. If something is amiss, ask for further tests. It could save your life.