

A turn from failure to a triumph - Herald-Times (Bloomington, IN) - August 25, 1989

August 25, 1989 | Herald-Times (Bloomington, IN) | Bob Hammel

Today's news is smothered by all things Pete Rose, as this year's baseball season has been. The pity of Thursday was that it wasn't an end at all but a start. It is heard frequently that the shame of this incident was that it got into the courts, rather than being handled within the sport by a commissioner. That is not the shame; commissioners need courts or they can become czars, as Landis did. Rather, the shame is that court time was spent in lawyers' pastimes without ever reaching the moment that could have given this mess an ending: Pete Rose testifying, under oath.

Instead, we are assured a babel of blather from Rose defenders and Rose bashers and Giamatti critics and Giamatti admirers and baseball protectors and sport attackers, till a year passes and Rose inevitably appeals and gets rejected and all starts anew. After things had dragged this far, a plea bargain was no bargain at all in denying America that one moment: Rose under legal compulsion to tell the truth, or rot in jail as a perjurer.

So, if you don't terribly mind, join me in turning from one man's failures to another's triumph. Dave Tanner won a bicycle race Wednesday night.

The standings in **Race Across America** say he finished 13th among men, 14th overall, but the 39-year-old Indiana University computer programmer wasn't racing against men or women but against his own limits. And he won.

This is the David Tanner who was a very good swimmer at IU, at a time when the greatest in the world had residence there, in abundance. Truly, he was there in the golden years, the middle four of the NCAA-record six championships Doc Counsilman teams strung from 1968 to '73. Tanner's name doesn't leap from the pages of those glory years, but he did finish fifth in the Big Ten championships in the 200-yard butterfly his senior year, which also happened to be the senior year of the fellow who finished first: Mark Spitz.

Time was when David Tanner thought a 200-yard butterfly was exhausting. ``Yeah, I did," he said Thursday night. ``My standards sure do change."

A 10-day, 7-hour, 53-minute, 2,900-mile bicycle ride will do that.

Tanner went into it lean and trim and fit and not at all sure he could do it, because it sounded so almost inconceivably agonizing. He reached the finish line in New York City late Wednesday night, rested a little, thought about it a while, and decided, ``It was harder than I thought it would be."

``Harder mentally," he amended himself. ``Physically I came through just fine - my hands are kinda beat, but I didn't lose a pound.

``It's amazing how fast you can get across the country if you don't want to sleep. We sat down (Thursday) and looked at the maps and tried to put days together. It's impossible for me to do. You mean we went from there to there in one day?'

``Mentally, some really strange things happened, mostly because of sleep deprivation. I mean, really strange.

``I had a low point in Illinois. My twin brother (Joe, who lives in Houston and joined Tanner's support crew in Albuquerque) pulled me through. He just wouldn't let me quit. Plus, all kinds of crazy things were going through my mind about how I would have to sell my house in Bloomington and move somewhere else if I didn't make it. Really. I thought of all those people back in Bloomington who had supported me, and I couldn't quit.

``Then I had another low point Wednesday morning. I didn't sleep the night before and I kind of slipped into a mental fog. There were times when they had to tell me when to shift gears."

He rode through the majestic Rockies and the California desert without a surprise. ``The West was kind of like I expected," he said. ``The East caught me completely by surprise. In the Appalachian mountains - the number and the steepness of the climbs really surprised me. In the Rockies you go up a long time and down a long time, but it's not so steep. And in the Cumberlands - you'd see a ridge and go up one and down one, then up one and down one, at night. It was like a twilight zone.

``Somebody would have to pay me to do it again."

He said that at least semi-grimly. But just a few minutes later, ``The sun always comes up again. You never know. But I'd have to have pretty good friends (to staff a crew again). I'll give them a couple of years to chill out."

So what is there to gain from a 10-day episode of exhaustion that had no financial prize at all?

``It sounds hokey, but I hope that because of the experience and the difficulty and the enormity of the undertaking, I'll be a better person. I've learned something about myself that most people will never get a chance to learn. It sounds silly to say that of a sporting event.

``But it really turned out to be much more of a mental challenge than physical. I was sure happy to finish."

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