



Show that game face and smile

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Ladies, you listen to your guy's stories. Again and again.

About how he dominated Little League.

Or that touchdown he scored in high school.

Or that buzzer-beater in college. Intramurals, of course.

You should have seen him then. Maybe you did.

Maybe he waxes on about his latest softball game, broken down to the at-bat.

You listen as you knot your running shorts, perhaps before tying back your hair.

Golf stories, of course, can be the best or worst, depending on length and your capacity to evince sympathy. An aside: Accord yourself special status in relationshipdom if you've never responded "If it frustrates you so much, why don't you just give up the game?"

You nod and listen and smile and frown as you lace up your running shoes, rising with a slight bounce on the balls of your feet. Your mind is now focused, and certainly elsewhere. You stretch.

"Well, going for a run now," you say, bounding out the door. He says something about taking a nap.

You run your route, log your miles, check your watch. Maybe you're thrilled, or merely satisfied, or just tired.

You might get a "How was your run?" when you get back.

Fine, you'd say. Nothing more is needed.

You do this for you. Not for any glory. Not for the stories.

You may also do this for this Saturday.

When the Freihofer's Run for Women steps off Saturday in front of New York State Museum in Albany, more than 3,000 or so women and girls will begin jogging in place, then take off as the starting pack thins.

If you're a runner -- and the mere act of running makes you one -- then this race very well could be highlighted on your calendar.

You won't win, of course, unless you're one of the elite 20 or so women runners from around the world who compete in this 5k race that winds in and around Washington Park. That's OK; you know the deal. You also know you're running among the best there is, not just the best in the league/club/town.

Your guys, the jocks, will never be able to say that. They'll never compete against the best in the world, at least in sports, certainly not now. Sorry, the dude at the Y who averaged double figures at a D-II college 20 years ago may dominate his middle-aged brethren, but it just doesn't compare.

But that's not what this is about. And, of course, you won't lay down any smack. Guys are a fragile bunch who grow more fragile with age, complaining about knees and shoulders and things they can no longer do.

They are jocks. Ex-jocks, to be exact.

You, on the other hand, are an athlete. As he watches the game, you tie your running shoes.

You probably won't even see those elite runners at the front. If you're running, you'll likely be somewhere deep in the pack, shouldered with state workers and stay-at-home moms and lawyers and grandmas and kids and others.

You will have your game face on. You will be smiling.

Then you will check your watch. After all, this is a competition.

Amid the thousands, you are competing against yourself.

You are an athlete.

When you think about it, it makes for a hell of a story.

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