The Pacesetter

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Defying the odds

Ironman experience cements McKnight's competitive drive

By Dave Graves
Newsletter editor

Ryan McKnight emerges from Gray's Lake after finishing the swimming portion of the Des Moines Piedmontese Ironman June 22, 2022. Cramping twice during the 2.4-mile swim was just the start of the challenges he faced in completing his first Ironman.

The list of excuses could have been as long as a full Ironman — "I didn't know how to swim," "I'm built like an offensive lineman," "I didn't have specialized equipment," "it's a June event in the Midwest."

When it came time for former Jackrabbit offensive lineman Ryan McKnight to compete in the Des Moines Piedmontese Ironman on June 12, 2022, he could have added another list of excuses — he had never swam in open water before and cramped up twice during the 2.4-mile swim, it was 70 degrees and 98% humidity when the Ironman started at 6 a.m., and hundreds of other competitors were dropping out.

But McKnight, of Brookings, wasn't one of them; not that he was putting on a sparkling performance.

McKnight said he arrived confident and well trained. But what the two-time All-Missouri Valley Conference offensive lineman couldn't prepare for was the heat. The mercury rose steadily, even through the evening when it 86 degrees with a real feel of 95 degrees.

The heat got to him immediately. He had leg cramps one mile into the swim around Gray's Lake and another at 2 miles. Both times he was able tread water for about 45 seconds until the muscles relaxed and he could swim again.

As he was treading water, McKnight said he was thinking, "What if both legs cramp? I'll really be in trouble." But it was another "what if" question that kept McKnight moving ahead during 17 hours, 46 minutes and 33 seconds of struggle through the 141-mile course. The question was "What if I could?"

A life-shaping podcast

It was a question he heard during a 2019 podcast that prompted him to take up running again.

McKnight was 6-1, 295-pounds when he completed his SDSU career in 2010 as a consensus All-American. He took up running to lose some weight after his football career ended following a free-agent tryout with the Cincinnati Bengals. Those three-mile runs helped with the weight, but he switched to weightlifting when he went off to law school in 2012.

Fast forward to February 2019: McKnight is a lecturer in the Ness School of Management and Economics at South Dakota State University. McKnight, his wife Brittany, and their young daughters were on the way home from a trip to the Twin Cities. He decided it was a good time to listen to a Joe Rogan podcast that McKnights' then-neighbor Katie McNeary-Jones had posted on SnapChat.

Rogan's guest, David Goggins, talked about being driven and what if you could reach a goal that seemed out of your reach.

'What if I could finish a …'

Although McKnight hadn't run regularly in five years, he signed up for the Brookings Half Marathon three months away. He finished in 2:32:51 and hasn't stopped running since, logging a half dozen half marathons, a virtual Grandma's Marathon in June 2020 and a virtual half Ironman in October 2020.

The thought of competing in a full Ironman crossed his mind after completing the half Ironman.

In January he started training for the Des Moines Piedmontese Ironman, partnering with his best friend, Josh Cunningham, of Sioux Falls.

"We would do our long bike rides together in Sioux Falls and held each other accountable for long runs," McKnight said.

They traveled together to Des Moines and arrived the day before, finding a celebratory atmosphere.

Race day started at 4 a.m. However, the early alarm clock wasn't the only disturbing thing for McKnight, who arrived weighing 250 pounds.

After the swim, McKnight jumped on a borrowed bike for a hilly, 112-mile adventure with far more headwind than he had hoped for. That portion of the race was going well, particularly

See Ironman
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2023 RACE SCHEDULE

Arbor Day 5K ..... Friday, April 28	Predictor Mile ..... Wednesday, Aug. 2
Scotty Roberts 5K..... Friday, May 12	Oakwood Lakes Trail Run..... Saturday, Aug. 12
Brookings Marathon, Half & Relays ..... Saturday, May 13	Jack 15..... Saturday, Sept. 23
Harvey Mills Longest Day 10K..... Saturday, June 17	Bob Bartling Hobo Day 5K..... Saturday, Oct. 14
Beef and Eggs 5K..... Saturday, July 8	Turkey Day Run..... Thursday, Nov. 23

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Ironman

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when he could use his mass to generate competitor-passing speed going downhill. But at 70 miles, the heat kicked in. McKnight was cramping in the hips and had to walk the bike for a ways.

He ended up averaging a very respectable 15 mph on the bike, but based on his training, McKnight was hoping to average 20 mph.

No energy and a marathon to go

Only a marathon to go. 🙂

"The run was the worst. I had spent all my energy and it was hot, hot, hot. I was still on pace to do it (complete the Ironman in the maximum 17 hours). But I cramped and had to walk 24 of the 26 miles because I couldn't run," McKnight said.

Opportunities to quit came long before the run. "People on the swim were quitting. At every aid station there were people quitting. There were sagwagon volunteers who said, 'Hey, do you want to hop in?' They made the excuses. 'It's so hot.'" And there were people at aid stations passed out from heat exhaustion, which did cause McKnight to ponder.

But his main focus was "If I signed up for it, if I paid money for it, I'm going to do it. I'm not going to quit when I'm this far."

Muscles tire, mind stays strong

Because he had to walk for most of the marathon, he realized he wouldn't be able to complete the course in the 17 hours required to gain Ironman status. The marathon portion was a three-loop course through downtown Des Moines. When he completed his second loop there was a large gathering with people celebrating their finish.

Ryan McKnight tools along in the 112-mile portion of the Des Moines Piedmontese Ironman June 22, 2022. The most challenging part, the 26.2 run, was next up.

When McKnight finished his third loop, volunteers were stacking chairs, the finish zone was vacant, and the stroke of midnight was approaching.

For the last six miles, he partnered with another competitor to will their way through. He hit 23.1 miles at 17 hours. So for the last 3.1 miles, the aid stations had closed down and McKnight continued to battle cramps. Nonetheless, "Quitting was never an option. 'Even if I'm not going to make the time, I'm going to do the distance,'" McKnight told himself.

The next day didn't get any better. "I was shaking the next day on the drive home. I went to the doctor the next day (Monday) when I started violently shaking." It turns out his kidneys and were liver failing. McKnight was sent to the emergency room, where he was given two bags of saline solution and quickly recovered.

"I've never had my body completely fail like that," said McKnight, who consumed 18 Gu gel packs and large volumes of Gatorade Endurance during the Ironman.

Next challenges

The "what if I could" question continues to challenge him. "I'm motivated by having a goal that is a challenge to meet. If you think that it's going to be pretty hard, well it's probably worth doing. You can do some pretty amazing things if you just put in the effort. With a lot of effort and a good attitude and if just don't quit, you can do a lot of cool things."

So McKnight's next challenges are the Brookings Marathon on May 13 and the Glacier Hills 50K Ultra in Newton Hills in October with another full Ironman in Phoenix scheduled for fall 2024 or 2025.

"I am excited to get back and try to do it on time, which is kind of funny when it almost killed you."

PROOF

Life members

Life membership is available for a minimum gift of $100. With the addition of 10 life members in 2022, life membership now stands at 122.

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**New in 2022*

Strande named 2022 Friend of Running

By Dave Graves
Newsletter editor

Russ Strande, a long-time Brookings High School coach and charter member of Prairie Striders Running Club, was named the 2022 Friend of Running Saturday in a ceremony held after the Prairie Striders Indoor 5K.

Strande is the 16th recipient of the Harvey Mills Friend of Running Award presented by Prairie Striders. Strande received the award from Jacob Mills, grandson of Harvey Mills, who was a longtime club member, an accomplished runner and major contributor to the club's 2018-19 scholarship drive.

Strande was among 12 guys who gathered in the basement of the Barn on the SDSU campus Sept. 12, 1969, to begin the running club. He served as the club's second president in 1971. He was an active competitor in Prairie Striders races, area races and national races. He completed the Brookings Marathon four times and the Jack 15 ten times. The 10- and 20-mile Sunday morning training runs in the 1970s -1990s started at his home.

Strande is a 1952 graduate of Volga High School where he was an all-around athlete and is a member of the 1,000-points basketball honorees.

He graduated from General Beadle (now Dakota State) and Northern State colleges. He taught and coached at Brookings High School for 27 years (1969-86). In addition to coaching football and basketball, Strande was head cross country coach for 24 years and head track and field coach for15 years.

South Dakota officially started girls cross country in 1975 with Strande as the sole coach for both boys and girls until his retirement in 1995.

His teams won the State AA Girls Cross Country Championships in 1980, 1981 and 1983 and State AA Girls Track and Field Championships in 1979 and 1980.

Strande coached Bobcat athletes in cross country and track and field that won 27 individual and 13 relay state championships and nine Eastern South Dakota championships. He was South Dakota Coach of the Year for Girls Track in 1978, Girls Cross Country in 1982 and the 1982 South Dakota Girls High School Coach. Strande also was nominated for National Coach of the Year three times. He is a member of the South Dakota High School Coaches Hall of Fame.

The Brookings High School Cross Country Invitational was started in 1980 and renamed as the Russ Strande Invitational in 2002.

Russ Strande, winner of the 2022 Harvey Mills Friend of Running Award presented by Prairie Striders Running Club, poses with family members after the presentation Jan. 21 following the Prairie Striders Indoor 5K at the Sanford-Jackrabbit Athletic Center. Pictured, from left, are Curt Strande, son; Russ Strande, Keith Strande, son; and Lloyd Strande, brother.

He was a longtime volunteer as a track umpire for SDSU. Strande and his brothers were known as valuable track umpires for decades at Brookings, major high school state meets and SDSU meets. In addition, he officiated high school football and basketball.

Strande served with the U.S. Army in the 1950s and is a retired member of the South Dakota Army National Guard who served in the 1991 Iraq Operation Desert Storm.

Strande and his late wife, Shirley (2017) had four children — Keith, Karlene, Curt and Kent.

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Thank you to the 90 people who donated beyond their $5 dues.

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Steinborn track dedicated at SDSU

Carolyn (Burnison) Steinborn and Miles Beacom pose in front of signage for the Mark Steinborn Memorial Track inside the Sanford-Jackrabbit Athletic Center Jan. 21.

The Jackrabbit Alumni Invitational was the occasion for the dedication. Steinborn died in a 2021 hunting accident. He and his future wife, Carolyn, were track teammates at SDSU and Beacom was Mark Steinborn's childhood friend. In August 2022, it was announced that Lisa and Myles Beacom would match up to $1 million to the Mark Steinborn Memorial Scholarship Fund, which will provide resources for the men's and women's track and field teams.

At its Nov. 1, 2022, meeting, Prairie Striders made a $1,000 donation to the fund. Several dozen alums attended the dedication, most wearing "Be the Spark" T-shirts in honor of Mark "Sparky" Steinborn.

Photo by Dave Eggen/Inertia Sports Media

Longtime loyal members

Defined as paying dues at least eight of the last 10 years or life member

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It's now the Harvey Mills Longest Day 10K

Following a $5,000 donation offer from Jacob Mills, the Prairie Striders board voted at its Dec. 6, 2022, meeting to rename the Longest Day 10K as the Harvey Mills Longest Day 10K.

Jacob Mills is the grandson of early club stalwart Harvey Mills. Naming rights were bestowed for 10 years. After which time, the Mills family could continue naming rights for an annual gift of $500 to $1,000. It is understood that if for any reason the race would be discontinued, the funds would be redirected to another club function.

Those present agreed that the race director should include a way to honor Harvey Mills as a part of the race, possibly in the form of a medal, a medallion or some imprinted item.

Harvey Mills was one of the club's charter members when it was formed in September 1969 and he continued to be a staunch volunteer and avid runner for many years.

Harvey and Midge Mills

Larsen honored by Entringer Scholarship Classic

Jay Larsen, treasurer and longtime member of Prairie Striders, was inducted into the Entringer Hall of Fame at the 29th annual Michael J. Entringer Scholarship Classic Dec. 31 at Brookings High School.

Larsen, who has volunteered at the event since it started, has been a certified basketball and football referee since 1970. In 1977, he moved from Minnesota to Brookings and continued officiating high school football and basketball. In 2013, after retiring from SDSU, where he was financial aid director, Larsen resumed officiating track and field, cross country and baseball.

In 2019, he received the Doug Koester Award from the South Dakota High School Activities Association for officiating excellence and community involvement.

Larsen also received the 2021 Harvey Mills Friend of Running Award from Prairie Striders. The five-time Boston Marathon qualifier also co-directs the Prairie Striders Indoor 5K and is an automatic timing specialist.

Out-of-towners do well at Indoor 5K

After five years of running with the leaders, Trevor Hinderaker was the leader — from start to finish — in the 8th annual Prairie Striders Indoor 5K Jan. 21.

In five previous Indoor 5Ks, Hinderaker, 25, of Astoria, was runner-up in 2019, twice finished third and had a fourth- and fifth-place finished. This year no one challenged him with a time of 18:29.40. The second-place runner was Joseph Barnes, also 25, of Spearfish, with a time of 19:09.10.

Third-place finisher Corinne Braun, 17, of Canton, was the first-place female. Her time of 19:31.50 is the fastest among females in the eight year history of the race.

There were 57 entries with 47 finishers, the most since 55 in the second year of the race in 2016. The majority were from outside of Brookings. There were 22 from Brookings plus another six from the Brookings area.

The field included the youngest ever participant — Augustus Messler, of Yankton, who was a month away from turning 7.

Charter Strider member Morrill passes

PROOF

Keith Morrill, a charter member of Prairie Striders when it formed Sept. 12, 1969, died Sept. 2, 2022, of natural causes at Castle Pines, Colorado.

In a July 2016 interview, Morrill said, "I started running when living in Sioux Falls to lose some weight in the early 1960s and moved to Brookings in 1968. I met Bob Bartling, who took me on a 'jog' down I-29, which was under construction (gravel) at the time. My life has never been the same since."

He had 13 Jack 15 finishes between 1969 and 1984 with a best time of 1:46:30. The 13 finishes rank ninth in the 60-year history of the race. He had two Longest Day Marathon finishes (1971, 1978) with a best time of 3:35:01.

Despite his running accomplishments, which includes twice qualifying to run the Boston Marathon, he said in a 2016 interview that he was disappointed he never attained his running goal—"to beat Lorne 'Bones' Bartling. (I) never ended up doing it even though he was 20 years older than me."

Also in that interview, he said, "I look back with nostalgia on being a founding member of the Prairie Striders, being an officer, measuring and marking the miles for the first few Longest Days Marathons, the hundreds of road races I participated in, the thousands of miles run over the years.

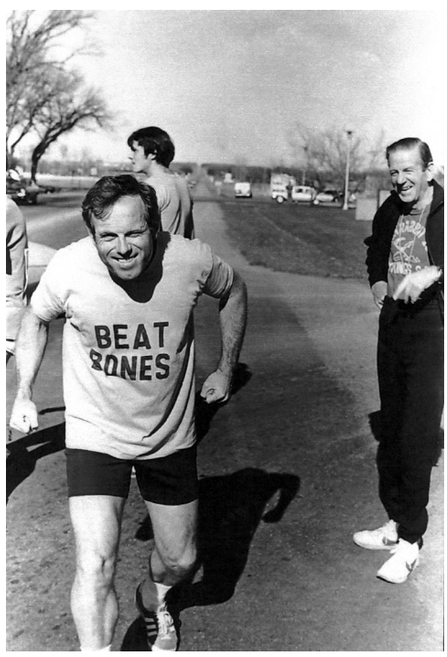
"But mostly I look back on the enjoyment of 'running with the gang.'"

He said his favorite workouts were "the 5 a.m. runs and the Sunday runs starting at Russ Strande's house on Third Street."

Morrill moved to Brookings to teach in the biology department at South Dakota State University. He graduated from Sioux Falls Washington in 1954 and from South Dakota State College with a zoology degree in 1959. He then taught biology at Washington High School before joining his alma mater, where he taught until 1995 (?).

Morrill also worked as a smokejumper for the U.S. Forest Service. He enjoyed this experience so much he took up skydiving in 1962 and made more than 500 jumps before quitting in 1974.

In the 1970s, he became well known for his "hangnail" jewelry made from horseshoe nails. He also was a woodcarver for most of his adult life and was artist-in-residence for more than 20 years at the National Woodcarving Museum in Custer, where he moved after retiring.



Keith Morrill sports a "Beat Bones" T-shirt in this photo taken at the Jack 15 in the late 1970s. At right is Lorne "Bones" Bartling.

Survivors include a son, Mike, of Highlands Ranch, Colorado; a daughter, Deb Morrill, of St. Paul, Minnesota; and ex-wife Ruth (Hammer) Morrill, of Excelsior, Minnesota.

Discount offered for Mickelson Trail Marathon

Organizers of the Deadwood Mickelson Trail Marathon and Half Marathon June 4 is offering a $10 discount to members of Prairie Striders Running Club. When registering, use code 23RunDwd.

For more information, go to www.deadwoodmickelsontrailmarathon.com or contact Emily Schulz-Wheeler at emily@runcrazyhorse.com or 605.390.6137.

SDSU men off to record-breaking start

As the old saying goes, records are meant to be broken, no matter how long or how short they may last.

On Jan. 27, over the span of a few hours, two South Dakota State University track and field records were broken in Colorado. Reid Pierzinski, a senior, broke a nearly four-decade old record in the indoor 400 meters. Pierzinski ran 47.09—well head of the 47.29 mark run by Jeff Tiefenthaler in 1985, which was the longest standing regularly contested indoor track record at SDSU.

Tiefenthaler still holds the school marks in the 300- and 500-meter runs.

About 30 minutes earlier, Pierre Lear, a junior, broke one of the shortest standing records in the books. Lear's 7.89 in the 60-meter hurdles bested his own school record from just a few weeks ago.

The duo traveled to the University of Colorado, Boulder to capitalize on CU's fast 300-meter indoor track. Situated at 5,430 feet, the track's altitude makes it optimal for the sprinting events and the Jackrabbits took full advantage.

As of Jan. 30, Pierzinski's time places him 54th on the NCAA Division 1 qualifying list. Lear's time puts him at 46th. The top 16 times in each event will qualify for the national championships in March.

A week earlier at the Jim Emmerich Invitational, the pair were part of the school record-setting 4x4 team. In the final event of the Brookings meet, Thailan Hallman, Lear, Reggie Slaba and Pierzinski teamed up to win the 4x400-meter relay in 3:14.40, edging the previous mark of 3:14.87 set in 2011 by Brandon Priebe, Jake Schneller, Jared Foote and Luke Leischner.

Reid Pierzinski, left, and Pierre Lear. Photos courtesy of SDSU Track and Field.

In the Jan. 21 relay, Pierzinski took the handoff with about a two-stride lead and stepped on the accelerator, turning the race into a battle between Pierzinski and the clock. Pierzinski's 46.7-split gave the team a victory over the clock

In February, SDSU will host two home meets before traveling south to Vermillion for the Summit League Indoor Track and Field Championships. The SDSU Indoor Classic will take place Feb. 10–11 with the SDSU Last Chance meet Feb. 18.

2022 — A year full of highlights

By Dave Graves
Newsletter editor

Looking back on Prairie Striders' 53rd year of promoting running for fun, fitness and fellowship, it was a year filled with enough noteworthy acts and events to fill this newsletter.

Some have already been reported in previous newsletters or are included in this newsletter. So we will move at 800-meter speed in this review.

• **Jan. 23 —** Longtime club member, volunteer extraordinaire and current treasurer Jay Larsen was named Friend of Running.
• **March —** Membership renewals began arriving. During 2022, ten new life members were added. Kudos to this year's additions: Bruce Allen, Becki Bartling-Bray, Dick Bartling, Jay Bender, Jerry Brown, Kelly Evans-Hullinger, Lyle Koistinen, Adrienne McEntee, Ron Tesch and Kim Zilverberg-Hatloy.
• **May 12 —** A derecho packing 90 mph south winds tore through Brookings two days before the running of the 53rd Brookings Marathon. The windstorm downed numerous trees at Pioneer Park, the race's start, finish and staging grounds, as well as leaving the town without power. The race was postponed to Oct. 22 and went off without a hitch.
• **July 6 —** Run 4 Fun Brookings, a simplified youth track meet, kicked off July 6 and was held each Wednesday evening in July at Brookings High School. A total of 240 kids participated with a peak night of 130 on July 27. Kati Merkley lead the effort with support from Brookings Health Systems and Fellowship of Christian Athletes.
• **Sept. 23 —** The 60th running of the Jack 15, the oldest road race in the Midwest, drew 202 participants. The race was preceded by anniversary program that featured course record holder Dick Beardsley as speaker. Also recognized were seven members of the 1963 SDSU cross country team that ran the first Jack 15 and their two coaches.
• **Oct. 29 —** Otto Gruenhagen became the first rider in the club's Hoyt All-Around Running Chair. He was pushed by his dad, Chris Gruenhagen, in the Hobo Day 5K Oct. 29. It is the same style of chair that was used by Dick Hoyt to push his disabled son in more than 1,000 races including marathons, triathlons and six Ironman races.
The chair is available for public use during the 2023 racing season. It was purchased with funds from the Reed Hart Estate with the intent of making running a more inclusive activity.
• **Dec. 6 —** Prairie Striders directors voted to rename the Longest Day 10K as the Harvey Mills Longest Day 10K to honor the early club leader. See separate story for details.

PROOF

What's ahead for 2023?

Another great season of racing from one mile (or shorter if you count Run 4 Fun Brookings) to the marathon. We welcome your suggestions. (It was because of a member's suggestion that we bought the Hoyt running chair.) If you didn't receive e-newsletters through the year, be sure to note that in your membership renewal.

Mettler publishes parenting book

Prairie Strider Miles Mettler, who directed the Jack 15 from 1988 through 1992 while serving as SDSU Wellness Center director, has published a new book — "52 Parenting Principles, How to Bring out the Best in Your Kids."

According to MilesMettler.com, "the principles in *52 Parenting Principles* are the perfect answer to help parents create a positive home environment where kids will grow in character and leave home with relational and life skills to excel in the real world."

Mettler, who earned his bachelor's and master's degrees at State, directed the Wellness Center for eight years before attending Arizona State University to earn his doctorate in exercise/wellness and behavior change. He now is an ambassador for Focus on the Family, a global Christian ministry based in Colorado Springs.

Mettler and his wife, Christy (Young), female winner of the 1992 Jack 15 and an SDSU standout, have four children and live in Colorado Springs.

Race numbers in 2022

A total of 1,010 racers competed in nine different races staged by Prairie Striders Running Club in 2022. (Participants in the Predictor Mile and community Thanksgiving run not included.) This compares with 1,040 in 2021, when the Thanksgiving run was a competitive race.

Most people were single-entry racers. There were 69 people who ran multiple races in 2021 and 103 in 2022.

Five people entered four races: Michelle Buffalo Knuppe, Abbi Davelaar, Susan Holt, Lisa Raetz and Andrea Schmidt. Tevis Holzer ran five races. Running six races and earning free entry into a 2023 Prairie Striders race were Amy Diedrich, Tim Fryer and Heidi Hopewell. Running seven races and earning free entry into a 2023 Prairie Striders race were Danielle Bohn, Chuck Harming and Trevor Hinderaker.

Kudos to Andy Carlson for tabulating the entries.