

“You have to discipline yourself. You have to just get out there and do it.”

— Al Kohli



▲ Al Kohli holds a certificate commemorating his completion of a marathon in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. To his right is a display of medals he has won in every state and a miniature statue of himself that was made after running in the 50th state.

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PHOTOS BY DOUG RAFLIK

# Lomira runner known as Marathon Man

## AL KOHLI ADEPT AT SETTING, ATTAINING HIS GOALS

LOMIRA — It's easy to set goals. It's another thing to accomplish them.

Lomira native Al Kohli hasn't had much of a problem with either.

Last December, Kohli reached goal No. 1. He ran the 90th marathon of his life at the Honolulu, Hawaii Marathon. Completing the rain-filled Hawaii marathon meant that

he had run a marathon in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

That wasn't enough. Kohli made a new goal and that was to reach 100 marathons. He accomplished his new goal on Sept. 21 in the Fox Cities Marathon in Appleton.

It wasn't a coincidence that he hit 100 close to his home.

"I picked that out for my 100th because I know a lot of people up there, and it was close enough for my family to celebrate with me," he said. "They run a great race up there."

The family he celebrated with was his wife Sharon, daughter Kris, son-in-law John Rigotti and his son Steve Kohli.

This was far from the first time they have seen him run, however. Kohli usually travels to marathons with Sharon, making the

running not just a competitive exercise, but also a way to see the country.

"They're both great," Kohli said of comparing his first and second goals. "One thing is I got to see all 50 states and if I hadn't gotten into the (50 state marathon) club I probably wouldn't have seen all the states."

The vacation aspect of it is part of why he's willing to spend as much money as he has going to all the races — he estimates a total cost of \$35,000 for all 100 marathons.



Kohli singled out two marathons as the most memorable. He said the Big Sur Marathon in California was the most beautiful. It runs from Big Sur to Monterey, with the Pacific Ocean to the left and Sequoias to the right.

The other one is the Boston Marathon, which he did in 1997.

"Running the Boston Marathon is every runner's dream — because you have to qualify and it is the oldest marathon run in the USA."

The competition may make Boston special, but for Kohli it's the opportunity to be around so many other runners that he enjoys.

Kohli said he prefers the smaller marathons because he can often run with people he knows, generally from the 50 State Club, and talk with them.

That's not a surprise to Fond du Lac Running Club President Brad Theyerl.

"He trains smart, he takes care of himself and he's having fun," Theyerl said of Kohli. "He's one of the more upbeat members."

"He's a talker; he's always got something to say."

While he often seems to be out just to have fun, Kohli, who's known as "the marathon man" by fellow runners, takes his training seriously, often running up to 20 miles in training sessions between marathons.

"It's the training you have to do," he said. "If you don't do the training, you're going to cramp up your body. I've also been fortunate, I haven't had any injuries."

But it's the goals that set the tone for everything a distance runner like Kohli does.

"You have to have goals. You have to know why you're doing it," Theyerl said.

"If that's what you want, that's why you put yourself through punishment. For distance runners it's important to know what you want to do and how you can do it."

#### Late start

As unusual as it is to see someone in their 60s running 10 marathons in a year, let alone one. Kohli's beginnings in distance running are just as unique.

It started as a friendly challenge when he was already 42 years old.

"I tell you I was playing baseball in Campbellsport with John Pesch, a dentist, and

he said he had a run in Brownsville (the Brownville Lions Run), and he said, 'You're so damn good in baseball and golf why don't you do the run?'" Kohli recalled. "I ran in it the next year and I just had a beat-up pair of tennis shoes. It took me about 25 minutes to do 2 miles."

"I figured I better get going. The way I was huffing and puffing I didn't know if I was going to be around much longer."

It didn't take long for him to improve his health. He went from being 235 pounds at the Lions Run to 160 pounds the next year when he ran his first marathon in Hurley, the Paavo Nurmi Marathon, which he finished in 3:48:13.

He had put in plenty of work before going to Hurley, but he didn't enjoy the physical toll of that first run.

"When I did my first marathon, it was so hot," Kohli said. "I was really in shape and I did a 3:48. I said I would never do another marathon."

#### No end in sight

His attitude after No. 100 is quite different from his attitude after No. 1.

Kohli said he isn't quite sure what his next goal will be, but he's giving thought to trying a second trip of all 50 states.

"I might go around a second time. I want to go to Canada," he said. "And with my running, I don't take the pounding."

"My body really feels good. Today (the day after the Fox Cities Marathon) I don't even feel sore. There's others that look like they're ready to die. But once you do a lot of marathons your mind knows you can't push it."

Theyerl has no doubt that Kohli can keep going.

"If he keeps doing what he's doing, there's no telling how long he can go," Theyerl said. "It helps if you're having fun and Al seems like he's enjoying himself."

That would be great news for the Running Club.

Kohli has been an important part of the organization for more than 20 years, and he provides plenty of motivation for the club's members.

We have weekly runs during the summer, and Al's at just about all of them," Theyerl said. "The people that see him say, 'That's

nuts; how does he do that?'" So it's definitely an inspiration to have someone like that. People really feed off his energy.

"There's so many things he does as a silent example. You don't realize how much you impact people." ■



▲ Al Kohli poses next to a bed that features a quilt consisting of T-shirts from more than 30 of the races, of various lengths, he has run over the years. The bed and quilt are in a "racing room" where he has most of his racing memorabilia.

## Al Kohli's marathons

- ★ **First marathon:** Paavo Nurmi Marathon, Hurley, Wis., Aug. 10, 1985
- ★ **100th marathon:** Fox Cities Marathon, Appleton, Wis., Sept. 21, 2008
- ★ **Most marathons in a single year:** 14 in 2006 and 2007
- ★ **Fastest marathon:** 3:35:07 at Milwaukee's Lakefront Marathon, Oct. 9, 1988
- ★ **Best result:** 67th at Eagle River's Journeys Marathon, May 10, 1997
- ★ **Most marathons at a single place:** Nine at Duluth's Grandma's Marathon



▲ Al Kohli is shown running Sept. 28 along Highway 28, southeast of Lomira. Kohli was wearing the shirt he wore at the Fox Cities Marathon, which was his 100th marathon.

**Name:** Al Kohli

**Age:** 66

**Home community:** Lomira

**Number of years in community:** 44

**Occupation:** Retired; worked for J.F. Ahern Co.

**Reaction to being nominated for a Success Section story:** "I think it's a pretty nice privilege to have that done."

**To what or to whom do you attribute your success?**

"My success is probably because of the training and motivation to keep going. You have to discipline yourself. You have to just get out there and do it."