Ed Sandifer: A Running Mathematician and Mathematical Runner

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Ed Sandifer was a close friend of mine in two ways, as a runner and as a mathematician. His legacy as a historian of mathematics will live on through his books, articles and in the careers of the many people he collaborated with. (A nice overview of this work appears in [1].) His career as a runner is similarly impressive but perhaps less well chronicled, so I thank the editors of *Euleriana* for a chance to note some of his athletic accomplishments. I note these here with an emphasis on the ways in which they parallel his success in mathematics.

First and most importantly:

Ed was extraordinarily good at what he did! As others will report, Ed's work describing the mathematics of Euler was influential in popularizing the history of mathematics generally and Euler's work particularly. He was a caring and dedicated teacher, and similarly devoted to his running. Ed completed the Boston marathon 37 consecutive times from 1973 to 2009, with an average time of three hours and eight minutes, and most of these races well under three hours. Even more remarkably, he ran at least a mile every day during that long streak. Ed won dozens of shorter local races, and as he got older was a threat to win his age group in any local or regional race. Ed was an unusual combination of welcoming and competitive, as he loved to have his friends with him at races, and he especially loved being done to watch them finish! Because Ed and I were about the same age and speed, we usually finished close together though he beat me about two thirds of the time. In the 26 Boston marathons we each did, he beat me in 17 and then enjoyed spending the next year referring to me as "Fat Ricky" while expecting me to call him "Fast Eddie." When I beat him, we reversed the adjectives. Back in the pre-internet days, math friends would approach us at a meeting and say, "Who's the fast one this year?"

Ed was a great recruiter. Just as in his math career, where Ed encouraged students and junior colleagues, Ed was wonderful at including people in the running community. When I met Ed in the fall of 1978, I was just starting as a graduate student in the Mathematics Department at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and he was in the process of writing up his dissertation. He immediately made me feel welcome and convinced me to join the department running group, which consisted of Ed and three other graduate students (Mark Elmer, Gove Effinger, Bobby Fisher) who were training hard and doing well in local road races and marathons. I had run cross-country and track in college, but I can't say for sure that I would have continued as an adult without Ed being so welcoming.

Ed would always step up to help out. When living in Amherst, Ed was very active in the local running club, the Sugarloaf Mountain AC. Later he held various positions for the Greater Springfield Harriers, and then in Connecticut he was a long-time organizer of a wonderful series of races in the little town of Roxbury. Information about these races, including the June 10, 2023 race held in Ed's memory can be seen at [2]. As a mathematician, Ed also did more than his share to make sure that others could participate. In the Northeastern section of the MAA, Ed held several jobs including section chair (1993-1995), and as a program committee member for several meetings. He was a gracious host as local arrangements chair for meetings at both Western New England and Western Connecticut State. And he always made sure that some of us got up early enough to go for a run before those Saturday meetings!

Ed made sure that working and running were fun. One of Ed's gifts was his quick wit and ability to say things in clever ways that were non-standard but still comprehensible with a moment's thought. In talking about one of our faculty members at UMass, Ed called him "a foot solider in the war on finite groups." In racing, he provided information that was almost helpful to opponents. Once while visiting Ed, I went with him to one of his Roxbury races and somewhat surprisingly, I took the lead. The downside of this was that all the other runners were locals who knew all the turns, but I wasn't sure where to go. Ed was in second position, about 30 meters behind me when I heard him say, "Ricky! Turn right at the pink house!" To realize how funny this was, you need to know that Ed was colorblind, and that I knew he was colorblind, and he knew that I knew that he was colorblind. I could hear the merriment in his voice when he gave this instruction! This is where my long friendship with Ed paid off, as I knew him so well that I was able to guess which house he would call pink. I made the proper turn and held off his late rally.

All of us who knew Ed as runner or as a mathematician have stories like mine. We all miss him but are grateful that the stories live on.

References

[1]   Bradley, Robert E. (2021). Ed Sandifer: An Eulerian Marathoner, *Euleriana* 1(2), pp. 165–167. DOI: https://doi.org/10.56031/2693-9908.1022

[2]   Roxbury Race Series (2023). Roxbury Road Runners. http://www.roxburyraces.net/