



National Senior Games Association

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★ www.nsga.com



Personal Best "Class of 2013" Athlete

Howard Hall, 92

Frankfort, Kentucky

"I'm Better"

You have to watch out for Howard Hall, he'll sneak up on you. The retired Army veterinarian rediscovered his love of sports when he retired, and before long ole Howard was racking up the medals in local, state and national senior games. He's collected at least 600 to date, but he lost count. Besides, for Howard, it's the ongoing athletic journey, the people he meets at competitions and the places he gets to go that make for his personal best.

Ask him how he's doing and he replies "I'm better," hoping folks will ask if he's been sick. When they usually fall for his trap, he gleefully responds "No, I'm just getting better and better every day." He's also been better than a lot of his peers in several senior sports and has his eye on a trip to Cleveland for the 2013 National Senior Games Presented by Humana. Watch out, fellas, here he comes again!



History

Have you always been active?

My dad was a veterinarian, class of '16 at Ohio State University and was on a championship soccer team. My grandfather played baseball. So I did my share of sports. I was the 11th man on an 11 man basketball team at my high school in Waynesville, a little country town north of Cincinnati. The family moved to Columbus with a bigger school, and I changed to track to get onto a team. Nobody wanted a 5 foot 4, 120 pound boy on a basketball team. I was not a standout in track, but I learned the techniques for running and field events. That training stuck with me all of my life.

I did pick up swimming at 15 and was a lifeguard for 3 years during college. I graduated from Ohio State University class of '43 and joined the Army as a veterinarian working with large animals. I didn't do sports for a long time but I sure stayed physically active. It was sometimes strenuous, roping cattle and such. When you get between two cows turning into each other, there's not much room left. You have to move!

I retired after 37 years as a full Colonel in the Army Veterinary Corps. I didn't get near any of the war action but I tell people I spent a couple years stationed in three small islands in the Atlantic – Manhattan, Staten and Long Island. That's about as far as I got.

How did you get involved in Senior Games?

When I retired I was on a bowling team and that was about it. Then in the mid '80s my first wife died, and I went to the Kentucky Senior Games looking for something to do. I didn't really know how things went. I signed up for three track events and spent too much time sitting around waiting for my turn to come. The next year I signed up for 24 events and won 23.



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After that I just kept going to games whenever I could. I did swimming, track and field, bowling, table tennis, horseshoes, and some of the fun games like billiards that the local games offer. I didn't do tennis because I have an eye problem and can't see the serve anymore. We used to spend our winters in Florida, and there are many local games all over the state. I went around to all of those I could get to.

So I was picking up 40 medals or more a year and now I have over 600 in the 15 years I've been doing it! They only let you do two sports at the Nationals so I stick with track and field and swimming. I also noticed that many of these 'fossil athletes' as I call them would only compete strenuously when they first entered a new age group. Then they would back off as they got up to the last year or two of the bracket. I keep going.

In 2001, I got one gold and two other medals which were my first at the national games. I had gotten ribbons at the two national games before that – but I'm just as proud of one of them. It was for 6th place in the high jump but I'm five foot six and jumped against guys who were six feet tall. I thought I was quite accomplished for doing that well.

My brother once asked me if I was getting better or just running out of competition. Well, it's a little of both because my times did improve over a few years, and other fellas did drop out for whatever reasons. I'm getting a lot of medals now because I don't have that much competition. But there's a guy named Russ Witte ahead of me in the 95 up category in swimming who beats everyone in my age group. So I have my work cut out for me.

Senior Games are scattered all over the country so this has become a travelogue for us. Orlando, Baton Rouge, Hampton Roads, Louisville, San Francisco, Houston, and all of the regional events we can fit in. I've made a lot of friends, and it makes competition more fun. I know of three people who will beat me but I'll get my share too.

Motivation and Inspiration

Is competition important to motivate you?

Back in Palo Alto (2009) I pulled a calf in the 100 meter dash, but I got up and kept going. There were six of us in the race and I actually still recovered fast enough to win a bronze medal. I guess I'm motivated enough.



You obviously like to win medals. Is that your motivation for competing?

I never started out to collect medals and ribbons. My goal is not to win, just to beat somebody.

It's become a challenge to beat one of the younger fellas in whatever event I'm in. I also chase the older guys. When I started out in '87 my oldest competitor was a Native American named John Pino. At that time he was 102 and I was 76. The top age bracket is 100 plus. My goal was to compete against John one day. When he retired I picked the next oldest guy to go after. It's a bit



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facetious to expect people to still be out there at 110 but who knows?

Do you have a favorite expression about aging or keeping fit?

When people ask me how I'm doing I just say 'I'm better' and they usually look at me and ask if I've been sick. I reply 'No, I'm just getting better and better every day.'

What would you say to people who aren't staying active and taking care of themselves?

Unless you have actual pain or physical impairment, you should always try to do a little more than what you feel like you want to do.

Are you an inspiration for anyone around you?

I have two daughters, and both competed in diving and one in swimming in high school. I have a grandson who took up basketball. He was like me in high school, small but quick like Spud Weber. They were all inspired by my activity. I played mixed doubles tennis in a regional senior games with one daughter when she turned 50 because her kids were on their high school tennis team and she wanted to make them proud. We won a silver medal!

Training & Preparation for competition

How do you get ready for a competition?

I start to get ready several months ahead to be ready for July. I increase my routine and intensity, especially in swimming. But the medication I take for my heart slows down my heartbeat so I have limited endurance. 50 yard races



I have no problem; 100 yards starts to get difficult to complete. So I have dropped the longer events and have to listen to what my body tells me. I got a bad cold in November and laid up in bed for a week so I cut back on my morning walks while it's cold.

I have an 8 pound ball I swing around and do stretching with to strengthen up my back and legs for my track events - shot put, discus and javelin plus long jump and triple jump. I've cut out the high jump, it's just too hard on my legs anymore and my wife won't let me do pole vault. But I added hammer throw and triple jump so that got me back up on events. I'll do as many as I can. I get bored just sitting around, you know?

Does your wife also get involved with sports?

My wife Joyce taught swimming for 25 years and competed in the senior games up until the a couple years ago. She's had some problems with her rotator cuff and some other things. She's such a perfectionist that she doesn't get personal enjoyment out of the competition environment because she can't get the form and speed anymore. But she just tells people she doesn't like to go fast anymore.

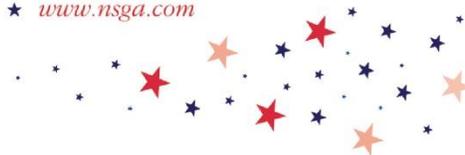
Our philosophy is to do what you can do as long as you can do it.



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Fitness & Nutrition

Do you work out regularly?

Yes, I do calisthenics in the morning. Pushups, ab crunches. Then I generally walk 2 miles every morning to get a newspaper. During the walk I will sprint 100 yards. I used to jog another 200 yards but I've had to give that up. And I try to go swim twice a week. I bowl and swim 2-3 times a week at the Y in winter time. Sometimes I have to cut out the walk.

How has Senior Games helped you to stay fit?

It's a means of making me do my exercises. I don't want to look foolish out there so it drives me to stay in good shape.

What are you doing to watch your nutrition?

I've cut out a lot of red meat but I like to get a hamburger every now and then. I eat five times a day. I get up with oatmeal and some fruit, a snack like an orange and a half glass of milk, then around noon I have a lunch meat sandwich, corn chips, celery and another half glass of milk. I have another orange or other fruit and some milk for afternoon snack and the supper. I like the frozen French bread pizzas, there's around 300 calories. I have a large salad with that. I avoid pastry but like to get a little sweet for dessert like a cookie. Maybe another one as a day snack, a little chocolate.

I discovered I had type 2 diabetes in 1996 and was able to get along without medication for five years. But since then I have had to increase that little by little and it might get worse. But I'm watching it.

Do you surprise your doctors?

Yes, when I was 80 I had a new general practitioner and I noticed he wrote on his exam sheet that I was 'a vigorous elderly man.' Well, I feel just as active and vigorous now as I was then. I tell people that the newspaper is more boring than it used to be because it puts me to sleep. That must be it.

Epilogue

Ole Howard, he proved once again he is a sneaky one. As luck would have it, Howard had track and swimming events that prevented him from coming to our July 24th Personal Best event. So we came up with a plan: NSGA CEO Marc T. Riker and Shellie Pfohl, executive director of the President's Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition, would go out to the track and field venue the following day and surprise Howard with his Personal Best award right after his 3 pm discus competition.

When the NSGA entourage arrived Howard was nowhere to be found. Then came a call from his daughter – Howard got tired of waiting around and scurried over to the swimming venue to compete in two events there and was on his way back to the track stadium for the 100 meter dash with a gold swimming medal in hand.



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In the end, we were able to prove we could be sneakier than Howard. As soon as he caught his breath from a silver medal 100 meter track performance we ambushed the Kentuckian on the track with his award while fans gathered along the fence cheered.



Good luck in 2015 Howard. We expect you to scoop up another armload of medals along the way!

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