

Budd Bailey's Running column: 'Girls' race at UB sees some role reversal

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Last Sunday morning at the University at Buffalo's Amherst campus, about 2,500 people lined up by the starting line for the "Girls on the Run" 5-kilometer race. There were so many people there that it took a few minutes for everyone just to move past the starting point and begin the journey.

About 1,000 of the runners were girls between the ages of 8 and 13, and about 1,000 of them were their adult coaches. However, the combination of 12-year-old Tima Abdellatif and 40-year-old Lori Randles had the order mixed up.

"She is my teacher in running," said Randles, a seventh-grade teacher at Veronica Connor Middle School in Grand Island. "She inspired me to become a runner. She's a great kid, and I'm so happy to run with her."

"Girls on the Run" is an impressive success story. Only three years ago, Katie Joyce of Buffalo heard about the program and decided to bring it to Western New York. Its lessons about teaching 8- to 13-year-old girls lessons about life and self-esteem, culminating with the completion of a 5K race, needed little time to strike a chord here. Joyce and other volunteers started with just three schools, and since then the program has quickly expanded through the region.

The roots needed little time to take hold at Veronica Connor.

"It's a really popular program at our school," Randles said. "It's very popular with teachers and students.

"It's a great opportunity to know the students more personally. I work with 130 kids as a teacher but just one as a running partner, so it was an opportunity for me to get really close to a student ... and get some exercise."

Abdellatif, whose poise is remarkable by 12-year-old standards, loved the idea of taking part in GOTR for different reasons.

"My dad actually ran a marathon," she said. "Those are my genes so I started running. I guess I've become a runner. I did the Lindsay's Legacy race last year. Next year, I'm going to do track."

The girls and coaches often train together. The middle school has workouts scheduled for Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:30 to 4 p.m. Still, that wasn't enough for Coach Tima.

"We decided we should train on Fridays too," she said. "We get together and we train."

Randles added, "She was in charge of the conversation. I was in charge of the breathing."

They even teamed to compile a motivational playlist of songs for inspiration during the training runs.

"We had a song, 'To Go the Distance.' We had 'Eye of the Tiger,' " Abdellatif said.

"We put some Selena Gomez on it, because that's Tima's favorite singer," Randles interjected.

All of that training paid off last Sunday when Abdellatif and Randles joined the 2,000 other GOTR participants and about 500 other runners for the race. Randles had never run a 5-kilometer race before and had no running experience before joining the program, but the two of them finished the distance in about 37 minutes.

“The first two miles were great, and the last mile was difficult, which is what I’m sure everyone would say,” said Randles as she sipped her third bottle of water after the race. “It was nice at the end with all of the parents and supporters that pushed me through.”

Now that Randles has been guided to a personal record in the 5K run, is Abdellatif ready to continue participating in the program?

“Oh yeah, absolutely,” she said with authority.