

P U S H I N G T H E L I M I T

BY TERESA THOMPSON



November 7, 2010, Justin Gimelstob, 33, crosses finish line wearing the hat and white jersey that his deceased friend Jeff Wernick wore during the 1980 NYC marathon.

Photo courtesy: Brightroom and NYRR

HE HATED RUNNING, CALLING IT MUNDANE, PAINFUL AND AN ACTIVITY THAT LACKS OUTSIDE STIMULUS. Yet, Justin Gimelstob, a former tennis pro who has a bad back and feet, pounded the pavement with a vengeance. Week after week, despising every stride of every mile, Justin's pedometer clicked, clicked, clicked past benchmarks. Gimelstob remained focused and visualized the ultimate goal, completing the New York Marathon in less than 4 hours 45 minutes. Pride was a motivating force.

"I've never beat him at anything," said Gimelstob, speaking of Andy Roddick. "He's better than me at everything. This one, I want to win."

A friendship born from competition, last summer the mischievous Roddick bet Gimelstob \$10,000 that he wouldn't finish the New York Marathon. The loser would donate the money to the winner's charity, the Justin Gimelstob Children's Fund for children with cancer and blood diseases, or the Andy Roddick Foundation for education.

On paper, odds stacked against a Gimelstob victory. He stands 6-foot-5, better suited for basketball than distance running; and, if one were to compare his weight to the supreme Ethiopian endurance runners, Gimelstob would be

considered fat. In addition to his big frame, his body is susceptible to injuries and, that alone, could seriously hamper his success.

"I have never run a race," admitted Gimelstob. "I'm prone to getting hurt and cramping, but I will do everything in my power to finish. I'll keep telling myself to put one foot in front of the other."

So he dedicated himself to training, boned up on motivational books and monitored his nutrition. Along the way, he says, his relationship with the sport changed.

"The more I ran, the more I appreciated it for its singularity. I'm a multi-tasker and running has forced me to spend time with myself, to get in touch with myself without outside stimulus. I like it. I can now say that I'm a runner."

A cramping Gimelstob crossed the finish line at 4:09:58 with 30 minutes to spare. He finally beat Roddick, and his charity is the beneficiary.

"Well done, Sir. Send me wiring instructions," texted a defeated Roddick after the race. Later, cantankerous Andy Tweeted, "Justin beat Oprah's time by 20 minutes. Not bad for a professional athlete."

Gimelstob need not reply. His feet already did. **T**