

Visser authors new world record

77-year-old literally wrote the book on running

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Seventy-seven is only a number. Just ask Helly Visser.

The 77-year-old grandmother of two set a new Guinness World Record for women ages 75-79 when she finished the Athletics Alberta Masters women's mile (35-plus years) in a time of eight minutes, 5.93 seconds at the Edmonton Journal Indoor Games on Saturday.

Visser, who didn't start running until her 50s, finished the race in second place, 8.70 seconds back of Crystal Meister, and even though she didn't come away with gold, she smashed the previous record held by British Columbia's Louise Adams by nearly 21 seconds.

"I like running the mile and in a way it was an easy record for me to beat," Visser said from her home in Calgary.

For Visser it wasn't the first time she has raised the bar. In 2008, she teamed with three other women and they set a world record for the fastest 4x400-metre relay time for women ages 70-74.

Following that record, however, the retired kindergarten teacher said that her knees started bothering her. She had arthroscopic surgery on her left knee in 2009, and the same procedure was performed on her right knee in March 2010.

Despite the surgeries, Visser was able to continue running thanks to "natural posture running."

"With NPR you have to adapt, and it's the basis for everything I have done," she said.

Visser and her friend Roger Davies, 75, both run out of the Calgary Roadrunners Club and the two of them teamed up to write *The Guide to Natural Posture Running*.

The idea stemmed from a lecture given by Harvard University professor of human evolutionary biology Daniel E. Lieberman at the University of Calgary in 2005.

"We came out of the lecture and we talked about what makes it easier to be a runner and the most important parts to being a runner," Visser said.

"From that lecture we got the idea to write the book and it took us six months to write," Davies said.

The book was released on Oct. 2, 2010 and it focused on six principles Visser and Davies took from Lieberman's lecture: evolution, adaptation, habits of lifestyle, physics and gravity, selfawareness and core strength.

"She feels she got the record because of the six principles," Davies said.

Even before they knew about the six principles and began teaching a more intense version of their book at the club, Davies and Visser competed in World Master Athletic Championships.

Their first was in Buffalo in 1995 and Visser came away with a gold medal.

"I competed in the Seattle half-marathon in 1995 and I had a good result, so I thought I could do well in Buffalo," Visser said.

Aside from her third place finish in the 5-km track run and gold in the 1500m event, Visser remembers the heat.

"It was so hot. It was 94 degrees Fahrenheit (34 C) and I ended up in the hospital severely dehydrated," she said.

Although she has achieved so much in such a short time competing, Visser said her first experience at the Journal Indoor Games was fantastic.

"It was an amazing competition and it was so much fun to be there," she said. "I'm going to go back next year and see those kids run and have fun."

She also hopes her determination to remain fit influences others.

"My goal was to be active because I wanted to be an example of a successful active person."

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