

For Duluth area ultra runner Michael Koppy, age is irrelevant

Michael Koppy, 74, of Hermantown, Minn., is aiming to become the oldest runner to ever complete the Arrowhead Ultra 135, a grueling race across northern Minnesota. Here he is pictured before a training run on a snowmobile trail outside Duluth on Jan. 3.



Michael Koppy's journey to becoming one of the country's fastest ultra-runners — at an age when many people are lounging on La-Z-Boys — began nearly 60 years ago, when he noticed a plaque for a "Thousand Mile Club" at Coon Rapids High School.

There was one name on the plaque. He wanted to be the second. To do it, he needed to log 1,000 miles the summer between his junior and senior years. He did the math. It meant running 13 miles, the equivalent of a half-marathon, every day. Despite severe shin splints and having to run a full marathon on some days after missing a day, Koppy reached his goal.

But in the decades since he got his name on that plaque, he's never stopped running.

His next challenge is the Arrowhead 135, [billed as one of the toughest cold-weather endurance tests](#) on the planet. It covers a distance equivalent to more than five marathons. Runners travel alone, through the night, across a frigid, isolated landscape.

"I have to say, Arrowhead scares me," Koppy admits. "It's out of my comfort zone. I've trained hard for it and tried to be in different

situations, but I know I'm going to learn a bunch of stuff out there, and some of them the hard way."

"If there's one thing that's really true in these long ultras, is whatever's happening is going to change, and so you have to be very flexible with what's happening," he said. "And if you have to have a little pity party, go ahead and do it for five minutes, but then you gotta just let it go and move on."

For Koppy, age is irrelevant. He just thinks about whether he can do something. Or at least try something, to see if he can do it.

It also keeps him active. "I have friends that are around my age, and they've become less active. It's a downward spiral, and I don't want to get on that," he said.

The Arrowhead Ultra 135 the oldest, most prestigious ultra in the country, Koppy said. If he finishes, he'll be the oldest runner to finish.

"You certainly don't have to do extreme things like I'm doing, but those motivate me," he said. "Whatever it is that's going to motivate you," he said, what's important is simply to get out there, and do it."