The Cliff Young Story

The year was 1983. In Australia, the long-distance foot race from Sydney to Melbourne was about to begin, covering 875 kilometers—more than 500 miles! About 150 world-class athletes had entered, for what was planned as a six-day event. So race officials were startled when a 61-year-old man approached and handed them his entry form.

His name was Cliff Young, and his "racing attire" included overalls and galoshes over his work boots.

At first, they refused to let him enter. So he explained that he'd grown up on a 2,000-acre farm, with thousands of sheep. His family could afford neither horses nor tractors so, when the storms came, his job was to round up the sheep. Sometimes, he said, it would take two or three days of running.

Finally, they let Cliff enter, and the race began. The others quickly left him way behind, shuffling along in his galoshes. But he didn't know the plan included stopping each night to rest, so he kept going.

By the fifth day, he had caught them all, won the race, and became a national hero. He continued to compete in long-distance races until well up in his seventies. He was an inspiration to millions and a great encourager of younger runners.

In his honor and memory, in 2004, the year after his death at age 81, the organizers of the race where he first gained fame permanently changed its name to the Cliff Young Australian Six Day Race.

What was the key to Cliff Young's success? It goes by various names: determination, perseverance, persistence, tenacity. It means keeping one's eye fixed steadfastly on a goal, and not stopping, no matter the difficulties or the obstacles, until that goal is achieved.