

Runner Backs Into The Record Book

Seal Beach

Albert Freese didn't win the recent Long Beach Marathon, or, for that matter, come anywhere close.

But he did back into a listed world record, bettering the mark by more than 21 minutes.

Freese ran the 26-mile, 385-yard race earlier this month backwards.

"God's got a task for each of us, and you just have to do the best you can at it," said the 39-year-old Freese, an electrical technician at the Seal Beach Naval Weapons Station, before the race. "For me, right now, it just happens to be running a marathon backwards."

Freese, who prepared by running backward 75 miles a week barefoot along a smooth, mile-long stretch of sand near the foot of the Seal Beach Pier, was hoping for a time of 3 hours and 30 minutes.

He didn't come close, but his clocking of 3 hours, 59 minutes and 7 seconds was far better than the current mark listed by the Guinness Book of World Records, 4:20:36 by Donald Davis in the Honolulu Marathon on Dec. 12, 1982.

"When I first started, people would say, 'Hey buddy, why are

you running backwards?' " Freese said. "I'd just laugh and yell back, 'Who's saying I'm the one running backwards?' "

Freese took up running only five years ago, but has become a top area competitor in his age bracket. He spent six months running backwards in preparation for the Long Beach race.

"It's basically part of a desire to be myself," Freese said. "It's to let the world out there know I'm somebody, that I'm not just another face in the crowd."

"It just seems like people, little kids especially, just smile a lot when they see me run by them backwards. But I always get a lot more of a positive reaction from people than negative. I guess they figure someone running backwards can't be all bad."

Freese said the Long Beach marathon might have been the last time he races backwards. If that's the case, neighbors who have grown accustomed to the sight of a man running backwards on the beach might be disappointed.

"When I sometimes go out on the beach and run forward," he said, "people who know me look and say, 'Hey, you're running the wrong way.' "