

## Haru-urara

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Today was a slower day for me at work, which means that I actually have a few minutes to cruise around on the Internet looking for reading material that is more riveting than the *Handbook of Walkthroughs, Inspections and Technical Reviews – Evaluating Programs, Projects and Products*. As engrossing as I was finding that little tome (in its third edition, imagine that), the blue glow of my monitor beckoned and, before I knew it, I was off surfing cnn.com, which is one of my favorite time wasters because, in many cases, I can explain my presence there to any passing co-worker as “professional research.”

Well, today I was “researching” **Haru-urara** on cnn.com. *Haru-urara* means “Gentle Spring” in Japanese, and her name and story seem particularly appropriate for this time of year – Spring – and for what runners do in the Spring, which is race. You see, Haru-urara is a racehorse from southern Japan. But she is not just any racehorse. No, since her debut in 1998, Haru-urara has lost every single one of her 106 races, and she currently holds the record for most losses for any racehorse in Japan. In all of her years of racing, she has earned her owners less than \$10,000 in purses – barely enough to keep her in oats.

Wearing her shocking pink reins and “Hello Kitty” hood (I kid you not, you ought to see this thing), this puny chestnut travels to racetracks around Japan...only to lose yet another race. She loses on her home track in Kochi Prefecture, she loses on the big racetracks in Tokyo. She loses with bad jockeys, mediocre jockeys and, in her 106<sup>th</sup> race, came in 10<sup>th</sup> out of 11 with Japan’s very best jockey in the stirrups.

Yet Haru-urara is a national icon in Japan, and thousands of fans turn up to watch her lose. Why? Because Haru-urara doesn’t just lose. She loses while trying, she loses while running her heart out, she loses but runs as if she is trying for the gold. Her determination and willingness to try again, and again, and again – tens of times over – inspires a kind of awe. With each and every race, her indefatigable spirit infects and enthuses crowds. For her 100<sup>th</sup> race, her home racetrack held the “*Never Give Up, Haru-urara 100th Commemorative Race*.” She lost it, naturally, but lost it while obviously trying her best...while giving her utmost in a sport at which she obviously will never excel.

And therein, of course, lies the lesson. What runner can’t relate to the story of Haru-urara? We wear our equivalent of the “Hello Kitty” sports gear, we trot out optimistically onto that race course, and we give it our all. Our determination and willingness may lead to yet another defeat, even when we are only racing against that clock, but we still sign up for that next race, lace on those running shoes, and try, try again.

The Reuters essayist made much of how Haru-urara is beloved by the Japanese because of their difficult economic times, but I thought that was a singularly narrow-minded view. Who *can't* relate to the story of a creature who tries her utmost in every instance? Who "gives her all" to the race ahead, heedless of the past failures and the unlikelihood of future winnings?

I may be anthropomorphizing but, in the final analysis, I don't think it really matters what is truly going on deep within Haru-urara's furry skull. What matters is that she is a symbol for determination, for trying, for getting up yet again and giving it our all despite our past record. And in this season of rebirth and road races, as we look in the mirrors and abhor the winter pounds that have crept on, and sigh at the tight belts and snug jeans, we should remember Haru-urara.

Don't be afraid to race. Get up. Get out. Do your best. Give your utmost in the present, without regard to any past outcomes.

And above all -- try, try again.