

RUNNING SHORTS

The marathon experience is something to remember

By Ken Johnson

While many runners aspire to run a marathon (26.2 miles), very few (about 1%) ever achieve that goal. The name, “marathon”, comes from the legend of Pheidippides, a Greek soldier, who in 490 B.C. ran from the town of Marathon to Athens to announce that the Persians had been defeated in the Battle of Marathon. The distance he ran is thought to be 21.4 miles. In any case, shortly after making his announcement, he died from exhaustion. The distance of 26 miles and 385 yards (26.2) was not established until the 1908 Olympic Games in London. This was the exact distance from Windsor Castle to the Royal Viewing Box at the White City Stadium.

Running a marathon represents a significant investment in time and determination. You pay your entry fee (usually \$60 to \$85), train for months building your distance, hopefully up to at least 20 miles. You will be spending many hours on the road when you would probably rather be doing something else. That’s where determination comes in. Nothing significant comes easy.

The day before the race, you attend the race expo to pickup your race packet and visit the many booths giving out free stuff and selling running supplies. Cap off the day with a high carbohydrate dinner at an Italian restaurant.

It all comes together on race day. You line up early in the morning at a starting line with hundreds if not thousands of other runners. Many others are like you, apprehensive, if not terrified, of what they are about to do. What is surprising, though, is that they do not look like the elite runners in the lead pack of the Boston Marathon. They are a diverse group, in terms of age, gender, weight and apparent physical condition. The common factor goes back to determination – they all trained and they are all determined to finish the marathon.

You listen to the mayor’s speech and the Star Spangled Banner. Then, the gun goes off. The first few miles are easy. Crowds of people are lining the route and cheering you on. Many runners put their names and other messages on their T-shirt and the spectators call them by name and offer encouragement. You take on water and electrolyte drinks at the aid stations every mile or so to stay hydrated. Vaseline is usually provided; put it between your thighs to prevent chaffing. The miles are marked with signs and you finally get into double digits. As you get into the teens, you start to tire. Then, you hit the “wall” at around 20 miles. Your body can only store up enough carbohydrates to run about 20 miles. After that, you are burning up your body and each step becomes more difficult. You start counting down the miles. Nowadays, they sell packets of concentrated carbohydrates in gel form. Examples are Gu and Power Gel. Carry some of these and take them during the last half of the marathon; this will help eliminate the wall.

At about mile 25, you realize that you are going to finish the marathon. Your emotions start to take over. You see that finish line and the crowds are cheering you on. Crossing that finish line at a marathon represents one of that great accomplishments and thrills of your life. It makes all the effort worthwhile. A volunteer puts the finisher medal around your neck and you pick up your finisher T-shirt and whatever else might be awarded to finishers. You will always cherish the experience.

Angie Burns, Assistant Director of Student Activities at SHSU, ran her first marathon in New York City in 2004. She says that, "life is too short to not take chances and experience everything that you possibly can." She reports that she especially enjoyed running through all five boroughs of the city and the thousands of people along the course cheering you on.

Christopher Wilson, Professor of Psychology at SHSU, has completed 11 marathons. He says that at the end of his first marathon, he stood at the finish line for a second. His wife was screaming for him from the bleachers. He heard nothing. He looked up into the sky and felt tears starting to well up again. It was incredible; there is no feeling like it in the world.

There are about a dozen marathons held in Texas each year, to include a new one in Groveton next April. If this column entices you in to running your first marathon, feel free to contact the Seven Hills Running Club at 1941runner@sbcglobal.net for more information.

The next race in Huntsville is the Heat Wave 5K (3.1 miles) on Saturday, August 25. The 29th Annual Huntsville Half Marathon & 5K Run/Walk is scheduled for Saturday, October 13. The Seven Hills Running Club maintains a very active training run schedule, to include training runs starting and finishing at the Bandera Grill on the first and third Tuesday of each month. See the club web site, <http://www.7hills.us>, for more information about the races and training runs.

Race Results:

Congratulations to the following runners and walkers, who completed the Dog Days 5K in Huntsville on July 28, 2007:

Curtis Barton	24:47
Josh Holden	24:55
Robert Duncan	24:56
Alex Mascall	28:01
Hans Jaeger	28:02
Lavonne Zaiontz	31:19
Thomas Mascall	32:59
Rachel Mescall	33:06
Ruth Mescall	34:00
Ron Davis	35:14
Mary Ann Davis	56:47

Ken Johnson is president of the Seven Hills Running Club.