

# THE RUNDOWN

AN INITIATIVE OF THE CHENNAI RUNNERS

ISSUE #11 MARCH 2016

## WHAT I DO WHEN I RUN FOR FUN

TWCM '15  
CHAMPION,  
SHAILJA  
SINGH SRIDHAR

## MATTERS OF THE HEART

THE CONNECTION  
BETWEEN HEART  
RATE AND RUNNING

## WRIST TO HEART

NOT GEEKY. NOT UNCOOL.  
MEET YOUR NEW  
RUNNING FRIEND



Pakka  
**Jodi of  
Health  
& Taste**

cardia  
Life

- ◆ Lowers Bad Cholesterol
- ◆ Helps Improve Immunity
- ◆ Enjoy Real Taste



# THE RUNDOWN

AN INITIATIVE OF THE CHENNAI RUNNERS



## NIRANJAN SANKAR

The author used to be a lazy couch potato who loved ice cream and beer. He started running five years ago, and quickly got hooked. Running has since been a life-changing experience in many ways. He still loves his ice cream and beer (but feels less guilty now about such indulgences thanks to all the running.)



## PREETI AGHALAYAM

Preeti Aghalayam is a Professor at IIT Madras. She is also the President of Chennai Runners currently. She enjoys the (as yet unverified) distinction of being the shortest President of a running club in India. Her favourite things to do are write, read, run, eat chocolate, and of course, give long lectures about molecules and things like that.



## ASHWIN PRABHU

Ashwin Prabhu discovered the joys of distance running several years back, roughly around the same time he got his first job. Over the years, running clearly has held his interest more than the Corporate world. Case in point, he doesn't hold a desk job anymore today, but still runs four times a week and considers himself a Chennai Runner for life.



## DURAI MURUGAN

Durai Murugan is a lawyer by profession and an outdoor enthusiast by passion. When he is not working he is found camping and trekking in the mountains. He firmly believes that nature is his deepest source of inspiration. He is also a core member in organising the Chennai Trail Marathon and the Jawadhu Hills Marathon.



## DR MADHU THOTTAPPILLIL

Dr Madhu Thottappillil has been practicing Sports Medicine in Chennai for over a decade and a half. He has been associated with various sports bodies in Tamil Nadu in his capacity as a specialist in Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation. He is the Official doctor to the Board of Cricket Control of India for South India.



*Dear Runner,*

It's a special year for us, the Chennai Runners. Exactly ten years ago, from a handful of runners, this motley frat has grown in size and scope. In March, this year, a big group of runners celebrated Chennai Runners' tenth anniversary with a short run, and a ton of fun. Yes, that's the best part about runners — they are serious about running, and having fun, while at it, and after as well.

Personally, for me, the event was the coming together of a group that doesn't merely run; by virtue of running together, day in and day out, and having made that a way of life, this group has fostered for itself, many precious relationships and friendships — I watched with a smile a couple that enjoys running together; colleagues who use the opportunity to catch up (and vent), women who share and promise to be there for each other, to answer, at the drop of a hat, concerns, both about running, and off it too; fathers and daughters... You get the picture, right? It was basically like watching one big family drama...

And perhaps it's a matter of sheer coincidence that in this edition, we (finally) profile the affable and gentle Ram Viswanathan, known in these circles as The Monk, one of the founders of the Chennai Runners, specifically in the context of him successfully completing the World Marathon Majors (WMM). It's an interview you definitely don't want to miss!

We at The Rundown, are meeting you in this edition, formally, after The Wipro Chennai Marathon '15, that was held in January this year (no points for guessing why!), which is exactly why a handful of stories here

are inspired from that event. In our It's a Wrap section, we capture the very spirit of the marathon this year; our cover girl, Shailja Singh Sridhar, who won the race in the women's category, speaks with Preeti Aghalayam and shares her first encounter with running and how she plans to nurture that relationship — her aim is to keep up the running till she is 70!

In our I am Legend section, Ashwin Prabhu celebrates the idea of power and raises a toast to Ethiopian runner, Haile Gebrselassie, tracing his journey from where it all began, and allowing us to appreciate both the runner, and the man, counted among the most famous men in his country. In an Experience piece, Ultra runner, Durai Murugan recounts why the Val Vil Ori Ultra, will remain etched in his memory.

Incidentally, the heart and its matters seem a recurring motif in this edition. Niranjn Sankar sheds light on how heart rate-based running can be a good way to step up training, and improve your running considerably; in addition, he chats with an expert, Ben Pulham, a Singapore-based running coach who answers technical questions on Heart Rate (HR) Training. In our Gizmosis section, Niranjn exposes us to what's in vogue in the world of HR monitors.

And after all that, don't miss reading Dr Madhu Thottappillil's column where he insists on using one's sense and sensibility in running. Oh, and Maami Thayir Saadam is back in her catty and cool avatar celebrating the Year of the Woman Runner! Okay, I cannot help but say, Three Cheers to that, Maami!

*Regards*  
*Akhila Krishnamurthy*



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# CHRONICLING THE SPIRIT

Looking back at TWCM '15, a race that paid homage to the spirit of a city that demonstrated strength and endurance in December, around the time that TWCM'15 was meant to be



TWCM is not a World Major Marathon. It is not a race organized by a commercial enterprise. The marathon route changes a little year upon year. And no, you cannot qualify for the Boston Marathon by running TWCM (yet). But in its four-year history, it has emerged as a well-loved race to which tens of thousands of runners throng every year. It has put Chennai up there on the India Marathons map. It has earned itself a reputation as a tough, small, but worthwhile race to run.

As the organizing team, the Chennai Runners, all involved in day-to-day lives in various professional enterprises unrelated to running and marathons, have worked to give life to the dream of a world-class marathon in Chennai. The support from sponsors, partners, volunteers, the city administration, and other well-wishers has consistently been phenomenal. Starting in the sheltered environs of the IIT Madras campus in 2012 with 5000 pairs of running feet, The Wipro Chennai Marathon easily sees three times that

number today, and has surely grown in both size and stature, immensely.

As 2015 dawned and the euphoria of TWCM 2014 died down, the team put noses to grindstones and started the good work of planning for TWCM 2015. With the usual increase in numbers year upon year, a target of 16000 total runners across the various categories was arrived at. And a flurry of training runs — for beginners and veterans alike, promotional events, social media engagements, and various outreach exercises were undertaken. The huge growth in the number of serious runners in India, particularly in Chennai, meant that before long registrations were closed with the target having been reached.

Those months were a time of great excitement, as stories of several runners training for their maiden marathon at Chennai were making the rounds, sponsors and partners were great at organizing hydration and other support for runners, and the weather was actually calm, pleasant and wonderful. But, clearly the euphoria was not meant to last!

By mid-November, too many long training runs had been organized in pouring rain, and the slightest rumble heard in the wee hours of the morning caused dread.

Conditions were hardly favourable for running as the city faced an unprecedented and an almost continuous bout of rainy days. But the community plodded on; rain is what we pray for every year after all, and it very rarely rains that late in the year anyhow. Everything came crashing to the ground however, on December 1st, as the rains lashed the city and the overflowing water bodies cut us all off completely from normal life as we knew it. With no mobile networks or internet connectivity, in fact, no power in many homes, and basic amenities being hard to come by, the entire city went into survival mode, as did the runners. Several individuals and groups involved themselves in relief activities — cooking food, packing essentials, distributing relief materials in the worse-hit areas, arranging medical assistance, and doing whatever could be done as humans-to-humans as our beloved city came to a grinding halt.





Tears well up even today at the memory of the devastation and havoc that ensued. Despite the remarkable manner in which Chennai bounced back to normalcy, it hardly seemed appropriate that our little road race should be held a mere two weeks after the loss of so many lives and livelihoods. Holding the happiness of 16000 runners who had put their faith in us front and center, the team postponed the event. On the original date of TWCM2015, runners gathered from far and near and worked alongside the Chennai City Corporation, Chennai Trekking Club, Caterpillar Inc., and United Way of Chennai on a massive city-wide cleaning effort. Many have appreciated these efforts — the sincere attitude and the hard work put in on that day has not gone unnoticed! December 13th, 2015 has been etched in the history books of our city, though not for the originally intended reason!

As the new year dawned, it brought hope. The immensely positive spirit demonstrated by the citizens of Chennai meant that for

large parts of the day one could almost put behind the thought of #ChennaiFloods and lead normal lives. Although getting back on track and organizing the race involved huge extra efforts, the team, under the leadership of Race Director Harishankar, and Joint Race Director, Deepa Bharathkumar, was galvanized into action with one thought — to applaud the Spirit of Chennai.

The Spirit of Chennai Run was held in the city on a gloomy Sunday in January — on January 31st, to be precise. The full marathon was flagged off at 4am, and it is a testament to the hardiness of the marathoners who slogged it out and finished several hours later with smiles on their faces. The half marathon kicked off at 4:30am and saw really huge numbers, and was probably the most enjoyable event from the runners' perspective. The Run For Fun for kids with special needs was flagged off at 7am and the joy was as usual evident on the children's faces!

The biggest component of

TWCM was the 10Km run, which was flagged off at 7am at Napier's bridge. The number of participants registered for this event touched 10000 this year, and the never ending stream of runners crossing the start line was indeed an amazing sight to behold! The enthusiasm was amazing, and ably encouraged by the radio jockey Ajay and foot-tapping music in the background by local live bands, the runners danced, hooted, jumped around and really went crazy as they plunged headlong into the race.

The runners enjoyed the on-course arrangements, with smiling volunteers manning aid stations offering water, Gatorade, bananas and oranges; enthusiastic pacer teams for various finish times; live entertainment including several forms of local music; and of course, several citizens out on the streets encouraging the slaving runners. The finish area had massage tents, a hot South Indian breakfast, a special runner's lounge for podium finishers, several selfie stations, and was jam packed with finishers and their families for much of the morning!



Before long the Central Polytechnic ground was cleared of all the marathon paraphernalia (including an incredible volume of waste); runners were reunited with their families, and the en-route signages and other evidences of TWCM

swept away as the city went back to regular programming. By evening, it felt like just another Sunday in the city, but then memories don't fade that easily, and this Spirit of Chennai Run will live on in our minds for a long time to come! ■

*Photos' Courtesy — Ganesh Manian, Dinesh Photography, Weekend Studio, BMS Photography, Muthu Kumar, Hari Prasad, Prakash Chellamuthu*

# CHEERS TO POWER

*Ashwin Prabhu* raises a toast to the Ethiopian runner, Haile Gebrselassie, to the runner and the man for constantly re-inventing and re-imagining himself and refusing to fade away into the sunset



This is the fourth in a series of articles profiling distance running legends. This column will throw light on the stories and lives of men and women who braved all odds, shed sweat, tears and blood over 42.195kms to etch their names forever in the book of running history. The column will criss-cross time and space and go back and forth across the decades led by pure emotion and sentiment and not logic, and in that sense will not be a chronological retelling of running's greatest achievements.

“Haile” means “power” or “my energy” in the Amharic, a native language of Ethiopia. To marathon lovers, it takes on many synonymous variants — winning, emperor, grace and domination. Haile Gebrselassie, the very name conjures up images of a pint-sized 5’ 5” compact runner with a winning smile punching far above his height and weight, on the track and on the road, in distances ranging from 1500m all the way up to the marathon.

A born showman, if ever there was one in the field of distance running, Haile has played and continues to play many roles — genial ambassador of the sport, national icon of Ethiopia, doting family man, savvy business magnate, film-star and a one-time prospective national leader. He is also, to use that tired phrase, arguably the greatest distance running athlete of all time. In a running career spanning an unbelievable 25 years, Haile won 2 Olympic Golds, 4 World Championship titles on the track, finished first in 4 consecutive Berlin marathons and reeled off 3 consecutive wins at the Dubai marathon. An inveterate record junkie, at retirement in 2015 and on final count, he had laid claim to 27 different world records during his career in events as mainstream as the 5000m, 10000m and the full marathon and as abstruse as the 2-mile run, one-hour run, 20000m run and the fastest 30 Km run.

It all started in 1989, when Haile, a 16-year greenhorn runner journeyed to Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital for the first time from Asella, a little-known town in Central Ethiopia. He was a man on a mission, to run his first full-marathon. 2 hours and 52 minutes later, Haile crumbled at the finish line

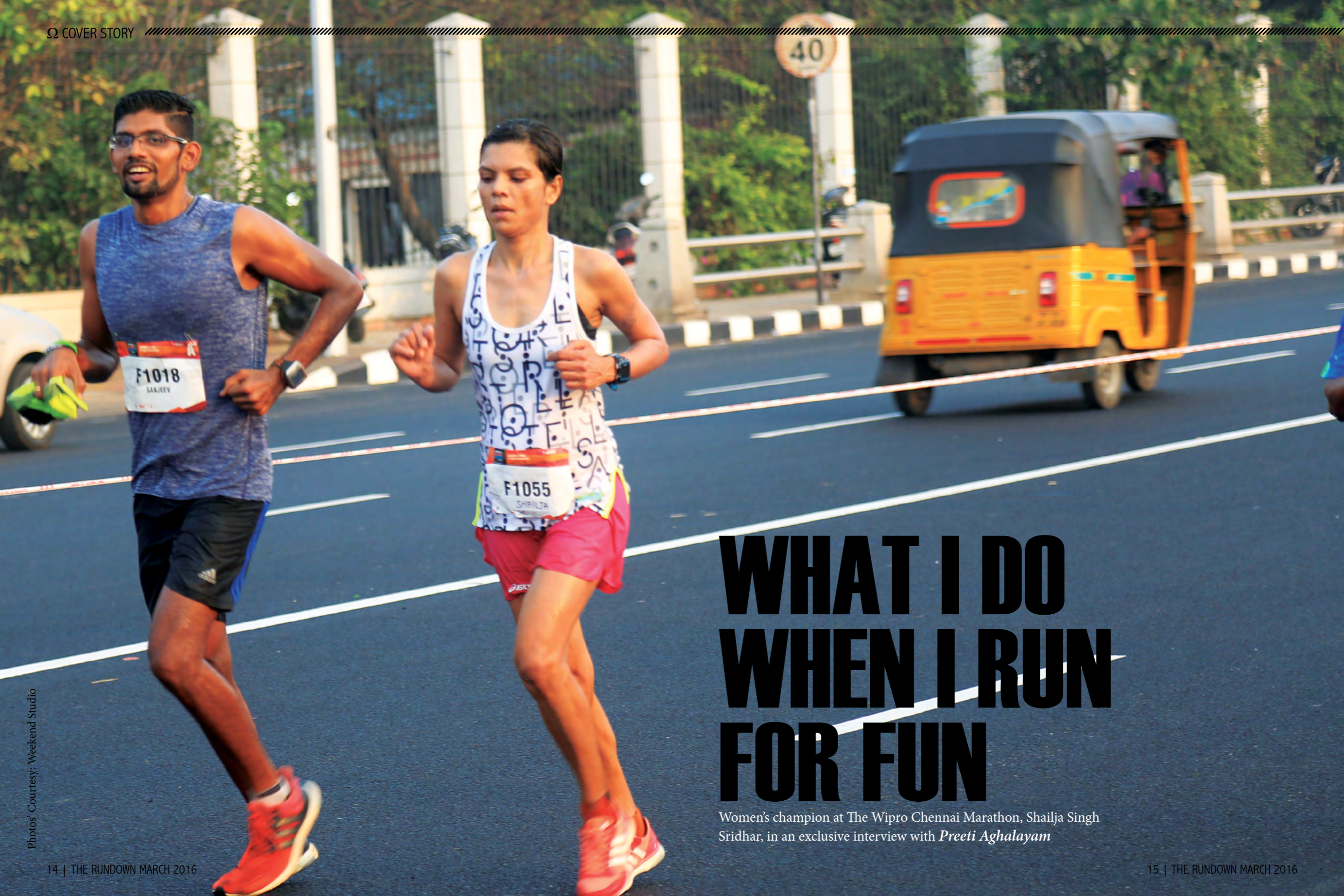
with bloody toes and a punctured ego. Yet, he was to keep his tryst with destiny just three years later when he won the 5000m and 10000m track events at the 1992 Junior World Championships in Seoul. Announcing his arrival on the world stage with what was to become a characteristic flourish, Haile went on to 4 consecutive World Championships (Senior) golds in his trademark event, the 10000m, in 1993, 1995, 1997 and 1999.

For those who are not necessarily statistically inclined, Haile has provided no dearth of magical imagery on the track. His career abounds with immortal visuals of him winning which speak far more eloquently than mere numbers. In what is routinely voted as one of the greatest races ever on the running track, Haile nipped Paul Tergat, the great Kenyan runner to the finish line in the 25-lap 10000m event at the 2000 Sydney Olympics by a margin of 0.09 seconds. You will understand how closely fought this race was when you consider that in the same Olympic games, the 100m event had a larger winning margin! Even as his track career slowly but surely approached its twilight, thanks in large part to another exemplary Ethiopian athlete, Kenenisa Bekele, Haile astutely started making the transition to road races starting with a win in the 2001 IAAF World Half Marathon event. Success didn’t come as easily to him on the road as it did on the track though, with quite a few mis-starts. He finally won the Amsterdam marathon in 2005 after which there was no looking back. He went on a four-year winning spree at Berlin starting 2006, setting marathon world records in both 2007 and 2008. The first man to run the 42.195 Km distance in less than 2

hours and 4 minutes, his 2008 Berlin finish time of 2:03:59, set when he was 35 years old, stood as the world record for three years before being broken, again in Berlin, in 2011 by Patrick Makau.

Yet, as with many great sportsmen before him, the end didn’t come as gracefully as one might have hoped for. He DNFed at the 2010 New York City marathon and tearfully announced his retirement to a shocked fan following, only to retract it soon after. He came back to his favourite hunting ground, Berlin in 2011 hoping for the magic to repeat itself, but had to drop out mid-course. Refusing to give up, he embarked on a campaign to qualify for the 2012 London Olympics marathon, only to finish a disappointing 4th in the 2012 Tokyo marathon and see his Olympic dream wither away. In the 2014 London marathon, he led a botched World Record setting attempt as a pacer, crashing out at the 13.1 mile mark. The Haile machine finally rolled to a stop in May, 2015 after an underwhelming 15th place finish in the Great Manchester 10K run, an event he had won 5 times in the past.

Today, apart from being the most famous man in Ethiopia, Haile is a very successful businessman and entrepreneur employing more than 1600 people in his various business interests ranging from hotels to coffee estates to property development. He is also the force behind the Great Ethiopian run, Africa’s largest running event which attracts more than 40,000 runners to Addis Ababa. Here’s wishing for more “Haile” (power) to the man for constantly re-inventing and re-imagining himself and refusing to fade away into the sunset. ■



# WHAT I DO WHEN I RUN FOR FUN

Women's champion at The Wipro Chennai Marathon, Shailja Singh Sridhar, in an exclusive interview with *Preeti Aghalayam*



She has hit the Indian amateur running scene with a bang. Shailja Singh Sridhar, a 36-year-old mother of two from Gurgaon, runs with a strong, graceful gait, usually with a big smile plastered on her face! To look at her and watch her run, you will not believe that she has been running marathons just for the past 3-4 years. She makes it all look so effortless! Truly, here is a recreational athlete who runs for fun, and while not even seeming to exert herself unduly, manages to outrun scores of other aspirants to emerge ahead!

Under the humid and hot conditions of Chennai, the 3:49:36 that won for her the title of women's champion at The Wipro Chennai Marathon, on January 31st, 2016, is remarkable indeed. But such laurels rest lightly on the shoulders of this charming young lady. With a mere four full marathon races under her belt, Shailja already has a Boston Qualification, multiple podium finishes, and some astonishing personal bests to her credit.

We have a free-wheeling conversation with her with traffic and other noises in the backdrop, about running, kids, strength training, and life in general. "Yes, life is busy. No, I don't over analyse my running speeds or splits or what not. Absolutely, the kids are big into my running, evening park time is also lunges and squats time," says Shailja, as we get a peek into the life of this quirky and fun-loving runner.

**How did it all start, and when?** "Lots of my friends were running the Airtel Delhi Half Marathon in 2012 so I decided to sign up to see if I can manage the distance. "Break a leg", I told myself and was happy to run my maiden half marathon in 2:11". A very respectable time for a

maiden event, but something she has left far behind now — having recently run the same Half Marathon event in 2015 in 1:38:57! Having always been a fit person, training for or scaling up from 10K to Half Marathons to Full Marathons were not a source of much trouble for Shailja. In her previous avatar, she was a cyclist, a swimmer, a badminton player, and much more, and do we detect a note of wistfulness in her voice as she admits that those things have taken a back seat to running now?

Participating in the Berlin Marathon in 2014, as her first exposure to the Full Marathon distance, Shailja finished in 3:51. "I was satisfied, as I was training for a sub-4 hour finish" says she, and our eyes pop out as we have seen women train for years and years to finally achieve that holy grail. Shailja says she spent about four months training for the World Major Marathon, and remembers running strong and feeling so happy to be amidst such a large number of fit women runners! It comes as no surprise that this talented lady has gone from strength to strength in her subsequent appearances, qualifying for the Boston Marathon in August 2015 with a 3:31:49 and placing 9th in her age group, at the Santa Rosa marathon in California.

**“Shailja says she spent about four months training for the World Major Marathon, and remembers running strong and feeling so happy to be amidst such a large number of fit women runners!”**

**What has been your most memorable running experience, we ask her.**

And no, we are not fishing! Shailja admits that running that strong race in Chennai, and winning in the heat and humidity here, has helped her overcome reservations about running in tough conditions, and that she feels ready for anything now! From that, we gather that she is now ready to run more races in India, and we feel encouraged at the thought of following her progress close to home, in the various up and coming races in our country!

Which segues well into a very quick discussion about her training and her philosophy of running. "I do not like to train hard unless I have a big target race (I enjoy living the good life, so to say). Usually, I run 2-3 times, do some strength training at the gym and try and fit in one High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) session in a week. I also enjoy cycling and like to do that (30-40Kms) at least once a week. While training for a specific race, sessions at the gym, HIIT and cycling are sacrificed and the runs become more frequent," says Shailja. And yes, her aim is to keep up the running till she is 70 years old, at least!

The joy is palpable in her voice as she talks about the weekly training, and the maturity is evident when she tells us about how she trains hard but sets realistic targets for herself for a race. "That way I avoid disappointments," she admits. She also feels that the hard work she has put in beforehand, having an attainable target, and the underlying urge to really have fun during the run more than anything else, give her a psychological advantage in a race. If the conditions are taxing or she is not feeling up to things, Shailja has



no big qualms about adjusting her target and going with the flow!

Ice-cream fans will be happy to hear that, while the champion is a healthy eater, she is not averse to the occasional treat! She eats anything and everything in moderation — sticking to a lot of fruits and vegetables for the sake of the micro-nutrients, and generally completely avoiding refined sugar. It is interesting to hear her talk about her protein/carbohydrate intake. Shailja says she times them according to her workout schedule — which depends on various factors including managing the kids, work and the

household. The goal is to recover well, admits Shailja.

We are very curious about what she does year round for fitness — not that India really has a 'running season' per se, but we ask her anything about the 'off season' — when she is not training for a race. There is no magic formula, apparently. Shailja does a combination of workouts, and continues to eat healthy. Of course, the entire family is into fitness and running, she says. Her 11-year-old runs in school fairly regularly, and her 5-year-old races mom up the several flights of stairs up to their home, on a daily basis

(after running around and jumping and lunging and what not in the park, that too!), and her husband is often to be found at the gym. It is so wonderful to hear Shailja speak of all this, so much of that pure joy of running and fitness in her voice wafts across the airwaves.

"I will plan my running calendar for this season and will definitely consider coming back to Chennai to defend my title," she says and our hearts fill with hope, and Chennai surely looks forward to seeing her again in action on December 11, 2016 at the fifth edition of The Wipro Chennai Marathon. ■



# RUNNING AND THE ART OF BEING

Ultra-runner *Durai Murugan* shares his experience running amidst the pristine Kolli Hills



I have had the opportunity to experience the sheer bliss of running and trekking on the beautiful and unexplored trails of Kolli hills a few times earlier. However, my experience of running the Val Vil Ori Ultra was unique, distinctive and very humbling.

During the run I often stood to gaze at the starlit sky, I walked along streams, I ran cherishing views of breath-taking waterfalls, I admired the peaks piercing into the clouds, I was refreshed by the melody of tweeting birds, I was energised by the sight of green paddy fields, and the pleasantness of the mountain breeze kept me on my feet. Not even for a moment did nature leave me alone in the entire course; I was completely engaged and overwhelmed.

## IN THE LIGHT OF A BILLION STARS:

The run was flagged off at 4am with the mountains, glittering stars, a new moon, a nippy breeze and many trees standing witness. Slowly my legs started trotting but my heart was filled with the wonderful sight of the starlit sky — a beauty which our cities have lost to light pollution. During my solitary run I crossed a few villages, hair-pin bends, paddy fields, thick forest patches — the calmness found in the mountain, the chillness in the breeze, and the gorgeous valleys lit by stars conspired together to fill my heart and soul. I realised that nature was going to be my partner for the run, and it was never going to let me down.

## MOUNTAIN VILLAGES, FRIENDLY PEOPLE, BARKING DOGS - THE

## COURSE:

The 26K course is stitched between calm and beautiful villages in the mountain, which are welcomed by green paddy fields — and occasional barking dogs which kept me on my toes. At times the kids of the village greeted me, an old lady from a village offered me water to drink, but most of them had one question : Why am I running here? The question was very fundamental and basic, but I could not give a fitting reply and I left them with a smile. It was a delight to meet the local residents and pass through these peaceful villages and happy villagers.

**“The run was flagged off at 4am with the mountains, glittering stars, a new moon, a nippy breeze and many trees standing witness. Slowly my legs started trotting but my heart was filled with the wonderful sight of the starlit sky — a beauty which our cities have lost to light pollution”**

## STEEP UPS AND DOWNS, THE SUN - MAJOR CHALLENGES:

It was about 9am, with the sun peeping out of the clouds, and I started feeling a little drained. But I still kept running alone at my own pace and my mind quickly realised that by this time my brother lawyer (often charged with accusations of

rash running) would have flown across the 52K course. It turned out that a unique feature of the 52K run was that the first and last finishers were both lawyers.

Although it was a gently rolling course, it had a few kilometres of steep ups and downs, which made my heart pound faster and constrained my leg movements. Indeed, without these challenges the run wouldn't have been challenging and memorable.

## THE LAST TWO KILOMETRES:

Hitherto, in the 17 full marathons that I have run in different parts of India, I have never had the opportunity to meet the organizers in person. I was pleased and surprised to see the mastermind behind this event himself waiting for me at the 50k mark. Not content with handing me refreshments, he chose to run the final leg with me. My completely exhausted legs slowly started to canter. It was a great honour for me to have completed the last 2K along with him, and being garlanded with a lovely medal.

I hope I now stand justified in taking eight hours to complete the 52K distance! ■

*The Val Vil Ori Ultra, a 52K run in the Kolli hills near Namakkal, is founded and organized by seasoned runner Krishna Kumar Rangachari, ex-President of Chennai Runners. It is one of an increasing number of 'boutique', off-the-beaten-track events driven fully by runners and volunteers. It has a small but avid following, which is growing in number every year*

# CONQUERING THE WORLD

The World Marathon Majors (WMMs) are a series of 6 marathons in Boston, New York, Chicago, London, Berlin and Tokyo. Think of them as the Grand Slams of the marathon world. While they attract the best runners in the world with their jaw-dropping prize money, they are also a magnet for recreational runners the world over who flock to them in large numbers. There is significant badge value in running all 6 of these races and very few runners in India can lay claim to that achievement. Ram Viswanathan, one of the founders of Chennai Runners and a veteran marathoner recently completed all 6 WMMs. *Ashwin Prabhu* in an interview with the ever genial Ram Viswanathan





Berlin 2009



Chicago 2010



Boston 2012



London 2013



Tokyo 2014



NYC 2015

**R**am, not only does it defy human imagination that you have run close to 60 full marathons but also hidden in there is the fact that you recently finished all 6 WMMs. Can you tell us a little about when your marathon journey started and did you seriously think you would run so many?

Well, it's all about the journey right! You start off by running one marathon at a time and at my age, things add up over a period of time. I have been running full marathons for more than ten years now and I am just thankful to be able to run consistently without serious injury-related setbacks.

When I started running in 2005 or so, I definitely did not have a set goal to run all the WMMs or even so many marathons. Things just happened. I genuinely enjoy running and so, I just signed up for events whenever I traveled on work and little by little, things started falling in place.

Thinking about it now, I am definitely not in any number game. I just want to be able to run. No pressure of times, events, medals,

brag value or anything. Just Run.

*The WMMs are to distance running what the Grand Slams are to Tennis. When did you first hear about the WMMs and which was the first WMM you ran?*

My first WMM was Berlin in 2009. Honestly, I didn't even have a clue about what a WMM was at that time. I simply wanted to see Berlin, after having heard so much about the divided city and its place in world history. I first realized what a WMM was when I ran Chicago in 2010 (The 10-10-10 race!). There, I saw huge banners about the WMMs and I got curious, but not curious enough to go after it, which finally happened in 2012, when I decided to run Boston.

*After you ran your first WMM, did you decide right away that you are going to make it your goal to run all of them or did the desire to do them gradually grow on you?*

Definitely not after Berlin in 2009. As I said before, I became aware of this WMM lure only when I ran Chicago in 2010. Even then, I hadn't seriously thought about doing all 5 (there were only 5 at that time), so much so that I did not

run any WMM in 2011. But after running Boston in 2012, I started thinking why not try to do all 5. That's how this feeling grew on me.

*When you started running the WMMs, there were only 5 of them. Tokyo got added in 2012. How many had you finished by then and what did you think about an Asia marathon being a WMM?*

Right, when Tokyo was announced in 2013, I had already done 3 of the WMMs and London was already on the cards with NYC being the last man standing for me. The race in the Big Apple was elusive because I had wanted to go the 'lottery' route and just hadn't been lucky for three years in row. Thanks to my running friend Harish, I finally got to run NYC in November 2015 and that wrapped up my WMM series.

**Thinking about it now, I am definitely not in any number game. I just want to be able to run. No pressure of times, events, medals, brag value or anything. Just Run.**

*As a recreational long distance runner, you have stayed away from the trap of getting into the pace game and wanting to go faster in each race. Instead, you prefer soaking in the sights and sounds of the course, interact with other runners and spectators, clicking photographs. Would you be able to talk about two-three memorable local experiences you have had in the WMMs.*

I believe running is always better with company and I tend to enjoy my running better if I don't put any kind of pressure on myself. As I look back and reflect, I have run most of the WMMs with my running buddies from Chennai, except in Boston. The social angle allows me to just hang out, explore the city and soak in the unique experience.

Yes, my camera is a constant companion on all my runs and I take lot of clicks. One thing that is

common across all of the WMMs is the fantastic crowd support. Since all of these are city marathons, you get cheered by thousands of spectators lining the entire raceroute. I find this tremendously motivating.

*You chose to run the Boston and London marathons for charity. Which charities did you choose and can you share your views with us about running and how it can be used as a vehicle for charity?*

Yes, I ran Boston and London for charity mainly because that 'guaranteed' me a running slot. I ran Boston for UMASS ALS Champion Fund and London for Cheshire homes. I chose the Cheshire charity based on recommendation from my running buddy and its India connect. UMASS ALS was mere happenstance due to a friend of mine working for the University.

Beyond that, I think running is a

great way to literally sweat for a cause close to my heart. I am working on a mechanism to channelize all my running activities for charity. It's been 'cooking' for a while and I am looking forward to launching it in the next few months.

*The obvious question, what next?*

This is such a fundamental yet 'tough' question. These are a few things on my mind —

- a) I want to finish my unfinished business with Comrades after two failed attempts (either in 2017 or 2018)
- b) Visit and run in entirely new places, including running in all the continents (South America and Antarctica, here I come)
- c) Be the only one to have run all 10 Auroville marathons since its inception by 2017
- d) Run from Kashmir to Kanyakumari (Don't know when this is going to happen) ■



# MATTERS OF THE HEART

*Niranjan Sankar* de-mystifies the connection between one's heart rate and running, and how measuring your heart rate can be a great way to improve your training, especially for new runners keen to run long distances

Photos' Courtesy: Internet

More often than not, runners tend to get carried away and go faster than they should be going. Sometimes you are trying to maintain a tough pace, sometimes you get carried away running with other, faster, runners, sometimes you just like pushing yourself. This puts extra stress on your body, which can make training less effective and often lead to injuries. Alternately, one could be going too slow, which can also reduce the effectiveness of your training.

At one time, heart rate monitoring used to be the domain of geeks, researchers and elites. That is no longer the case. Heart Rate monitors have become ubiquitous and cheap, and a lot more comfortable and unobtrusive (see next article).

## HR BASED TRAINING: HOW TO START

There are various training plans. The simple plan presented here is based on Phil Maffetone's ([www.philmaffetone.com](http://www.philmaffetone.com)) plan, which has been modified by Ben Pulham

(refer next page for some more tips from Ben). The premise is that to develop endurance, you need to work at a lower (aerobic) heart rate.

The first step is to establish your aerobic training heart rate, which is calculated as follows :

1. Subtract your age from 190.
2. Modify this number as follows :
  - a) Subtract 10 from this number if you are recovering from a major illness, surgery, hospital stay, or if you are on any regular medication.
  - b) Subtract another 5 if you are injured, have allergies or asthma, if you have been inconsistent or are just getting back into training, or if you get more than two colds or bouts of flu every year.
  - c) If you have been training consistently for upto two years without any of the above problems, keep the number the same.
  - d) If you have been training for more than two years without any of these problems, and are progressing without injury, add 5.

If you are 35 years old and have been training regularly without injuries for 1 to 2 years, then your aerobic heart rate is  $190-35 = 155$ . Based on this, the recommended training zones are:

**EASY ZONE** (Long runs and Recovery runs): less than your aerobic HR (< 155 in this case)

**STEADY ZONE** (Endurance Training): Aerobic HR + 15 (156 to 170)

**MODERATELY HARD (TEMPO RUNS)**: Steady + 10 (171 to 180)  
These zones are approximate but are a useful guide for most runners.

Beginners should try to be in the easy zone for most of their runs. This will help you improve endurance and fitness, while avoiding injury. Going out too fast will tire you out, affect recovery, and eventually hamper your performance on race day.

So, do consider investing in a heart rate monitor — it can help you be a better, and fitter, runner.



# HEART-TO-HEART

A tete-a-tete with New Zealand born, Singapore-based *Ben Pulham*, who has helped 'ordinary' professional and novice athletes achieve extraordinary things through his coaching. *Niranjan Sankar* brings us excerpts

*A lot of us like to run by 'feel', and don't want to complicate our runs too much by adding gadgets and metrics. How can HR training help runners, especially beginners, improve their training?*

**Ben:** HR is an objective measure of how hard your body is actually working, while running by feel is a subjective measure of perceived exertion. What I consistently see in our lab, is that these two measures are often misaligned. This happens because most recreational runners don't run frequently enough to truly "dial in" how hard they're working. A lot of people also associate easy and slow. Just because you are running slow doesn't mean you are running easy. By running with a HR monitor and cross checking it with how you feel, you will get much better at "dialling in" how hard you are actually working and over time will become less reliant on the HR monitor.

*Based on your experience, what are some of the mistakes beginner runners make that could be corrected with a HR based training plan?*

**Ben:** Most beginner runners have a very warped sense of how hard they are actually working. HR monitors provide a vital measure for how hard you are working and ensure you only ever work as hard as you need to in order to achieve the desired outcome. The intensity you train at plays the major role in the benefit you get from training because it determines whether you are running aerobically or anaerobically, burning fat or carbohydrate, learning to clear or tolerate lactate etc. If you are getting your intensity wrong, you could be working very hard for little return on the time invested.

*What would be your recommended HR zones for :*

- a) Easy/recovery runs
- b) Long runs
- c) Tempo runs
- d) Intervals and
- e) Race Day

**Ben:** This depends on how you define each of these terms as well as the background, current fitness and goals of the runner. For the most part, long / recovery runs should be done in the easy zone. Tempo runs should be done moderately hard and intervals / race day really depend on the specific distance, course, conditions etc. The bulk of endurance training though, should be done in zone 2 - steady. The key

to training smart is to be specific in what you show your body.

*How does one determine their heart rate training zones?*

**Ben:** Lactate testing is the best way to determine heart rate training zones so you should definitely invest in this if you have the opportunity. In our Coached online training program, we use a modified version of Phil Maffetone's 180 formula. We essentially use the same formula as Phil's but use 190 as the base number because we have found this to be more consistent with lactate results in our lab. We tested many formulas and this was the most accurate we could find.



*Some coaches/experts say that HR can vary a lot based on various external factors like weather conditions, time of day, sleep (or lack of it), caffeine intake, dehydration, stress levels, race day excitement, etc. Hence, having target heart rates for a run is somewhat futile. What is your opinion on this? Should a runner try to normalize for these factors, or stick to the HR zones irrespective?*

**Ben:** Yes HR can vary for all of these reasons and that's the specific reason I like it. Unless you are a professional runner, it's likely you're balancing a myriad of things besides training such as work, family and social lives. Having a measure that varies based on outside factors helps to ensure you work as hard as you need to without overdoing it.

If you have had a stressful day at work for example, your body will respond by producing more cortisol — the stress hormone. Elevated levels of cortisol raise HR but they also decrease fat burning and slow recovery. By running a little slower to keep your effort in line with your HR zone, you help to facilitate fat burning, decrease the cortisol levels and improve your recovery rate from the training session.

The same is true for most of the above. If you are dehydrated, your HR will elevate as your body has to work harder in it's dehydrated state. If you were to ignore your HR and push on, you further dehydrate yourself, burn your glycogen stores and increase your recovery time which can effect training consistency and future quality of training.

If you train by pace and you go to race in a cooler or hotter climate, how do you know which pace will

be the optimal pace to run? You don't really. If you train by HR, you'll either be running slower (hotter conditions) or faster (cooler conditions) at the same HR and this will ensure you are running at the optimal pace for the conditions and your current fitness.

The list goes on but you get the idea.

*Some coaches say that one should run based on pace, and not worry about HR. How does HR based training fit in with pace based training plans, which advocate specific paces for each run?*

**Ben:** Pace is fixed (in these plans). You could be running comfortably in zone 1 when a wind picks up and to maintain that same pace you go from running easy in zone 1 to hard in zone 4. When this happens, you completely change the benefit of the session and increase your recovery time, therefore affecting your training consistency — one of the most important measures in training. If you were training by HR in this situation, your HR would increase and you would slow down. You may think slowing down is a bad thing but it's not because you are training your physiology in an optimal way in this instance.

Pace should be used as a secondary measure to gauge improvements in fitness. If you run today at 150bpm for example and can run at 6min / km at this effort and in 3 months you run at the same HR at 5:30min /km, your training is working. It's that simple. Trying to increase pace in each run without monitoring effort (HR) is of limited value and you will plateau very quickly and increase your risk of injury / burnout.

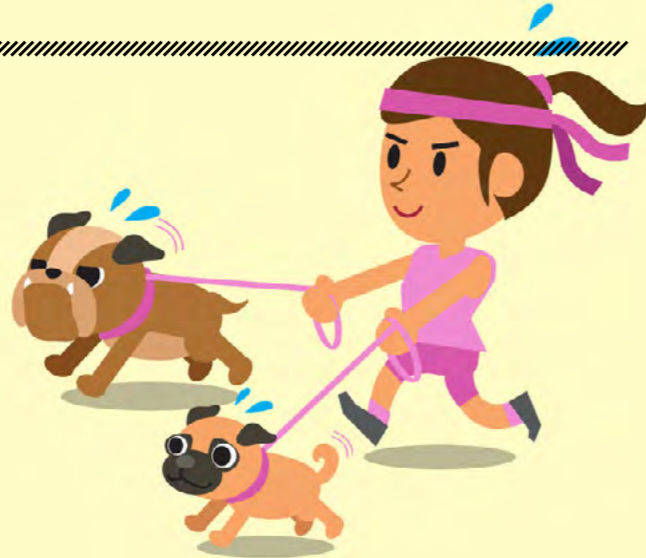
*What other HR based training suggestions/warnings do you have for runners just starting out on this?*

**Ben:** HR is a tool and is not perfect — there are definitely pros and cons. That said, I believe it is a great tool that will help all runners to "dial in" their effort and optimise their training. When used in conjunction with pace, it is a fantastic way to gain a true picture of how you're responding to training. If you can, get a lactate test done to ensure the HR zones are as accurate as possible. ■



*Ben is as a professional triathlete. He represented New Zealand and was world ranked for a number of years. His final professional race before getting sick and retiring was the Beijing Olympic Trials in Beijing. Since then he founded Coached (www.coached.fitness), and has helped thousands of athletes optimise their training and racing*

# YOTWR



Join *Maami Thayir Saadam* in celebrating the “Year of the woman runner”

Maami Thayir Saadam (MTS, we mean) returns to The Rundown to celebrate the “Year of the woman runner” (YOTWR). She invokes the spirits of many accomplished women, famous for athletic abilities, to address issues of concern for the lycra-clad.

**Dear MTS** – Last month I ran a 5K marathon in Bondivilli Local Tamil Association Park, organized to celebrate the YOTWR. I had prepared very well for it, including purchasing the new shoes everyone is raving about. However, due to issues with the satellite connection in my GRMN 765xp GPS watch, my run did not get recorded. Please tell me MTS, did I run that marathon, really?

**-Distraught Athlete & Consumer Extraordinaire**

**Dear Customer, err Consumer** – Let me tell you a story. Don’t we all love stories? Once upon a time in a land far away, a woman (cough Xena, the Warrior Princess cough) chased an antelope. She chased it to the ends of the known world. Then she killed it, drank its blood to hydrate, and brought the meat back for her family. However, this is not recorded in the annals of history because she had forgotten to wear

her GPS enabled watch, in fact the exact same model as yours. To cut a long story short, no, you did not run that “marathon”; and also, parenthetically, the tree that fell in the forest did not make a noise, and the egg reached before the chicken (via UPS). You are welcome.

**Dear MTS** – I have been regularly ‘Carbo Loading’ for my Long Runs (which I run on Fridays, by the by). However, I still feel tired when I run, and also after my run. Should I eat more? Also, please give me tips on weight loss.

**-Growing Pains**

**Dear GP** -

The best way to lose weight is to drink Green Tea with honey first thing in the morning, as all creatures on this planet, and a handful in the neighboring planets, know. Also, you must practice Yoga. Tired is a state of mind and unrelated to running, eating, green tea, beetroots, pastries, sleep, age, etc. Remember, Tired, is just Tried with an intentional typo right in there. This is the YEAR OF THE WOMAN RUNNER. This is ABOUT YOU. Throw CAUTION TO THE WINDS. Go FORTH AND CONQUER. Ms. TRUNCHBULL FTW !!!

**Dear MTS** – I have chafing. Please advise.

**-Frictional Heroine**

**Oh dear FH**-

If you think about it, who doesn’t? Piggy Chops had it. The Charlie’s Angels, surely did. Chafing is your wet, sweaty, stinky running clothes (or leather pants) proclaiming their love. It’s like a kiss — like the roses in 1980s Doordarshan. Do you hear them complaining? (If they did they would be replaced by Gulmohars, surely). There is nothing to be ashamed of. Be one with the pain. Own it. Embrace it. And please, for heaven’s sake don’t ask any authentic sources about Vaseline, proper fitting clothes that can wick away moisture, or simple home remedies involving coconut oil.

**Dear Whoever-The-Heck-You-Are**

We don’t like you and want our hero Mundoliferrous, the Iron-hearted, back.

**-Irate Fan Club**

**Dear IFC**-

Yeah well, sucks to be you, doesn’t it? In the YOTWR, can a man ever be heard? Will he ever be heard henceforth? Ponder that, my pretties. ■



# WRIST TO HEART

Heart Rate monitors can be geeky, even distinctly ‘uncool’ for some. But, as discussed before, they can be a great tool to improve your running, especially if you are a beginner, says *Niranjan Sankar*

**HRM VARIATIONS**

Traditional heart rate monitors use a chest strap, which detects electrical signals from your heart and uses them to measure your heart rate. This data is transmitted immediately to a wristwatch or some other gadget, like a smartphone, which can then display it or process it further.

However, these chest straps can get a tad uncomfortable for some — they could cause chafing, or may be too loose/tight. It's easy to lose either the strap or the transmitter which clips on to it. Plus, that's yet another device you have to remember to pack when you travel, along with your running shoes, GPS watch, music player, headphones, running tees and shorts, cap, suntan lotion, etc. However, this was considered the only way to perform reliable heart rate measurements in real time.

Enter the world of the wrist-based Heart Rate Monitor. These monitors use light to measure tiny changes in your blood flow and determine your heart rate. There are various technical challenges with this approach, and these devices are still evolving. In general, these are still not as accurate as the chest strap monitors.

However, many of the new crop of devices in the market are dependable enough for normal users. Most of these can be used as an everyday watch as well, so you can have them on 24/7 with little discomfort. Another bonus is that these can measure your resting heart rate, which is considered by many to be an excellent measure of your overall health and fitness level.

The most popular gadget with a wrist based HRM is probably the

Apple Watch. Millions of people use this every day. However, as seen in an earlier review in The Rundown, the Apple Watch is not best suited for running. Happily, there are now many 'proper' running watches with a wrist HRM. Some of the popular models :



*Garmin Forerunner 235 and Fenix 3 HR*

Garmin is considered the leading maker of GPS watches for runners, though competition is increasing in this field. With solid products, a great website to track and monitor your runs, and various social features to share and comment on your friends' workouts, you really can't go too wrong buying a Garmin. The Forerunner 235 is a very good option.

If you've won the lottery, or if you can convince IDBI bank to loan you \$600+, go for the Garmin Fenix 3 HR, which is a really solid looking multisport watch. You will look like a business tycoon, even if you can't pay the bank back.



*Tomtom Spark Cardio + Music:*

One of the few running watches with an integrated music player. If you like to groove while you run, carrying one less gadget while doing so, then you should look at this.



*Fitbit Surge*

Fitbit has been a little late to the GPS game, but they are well-known for their activity trackers and this device combines the best of both. If you are looking for a great 24/7 activity tracker with decent HR monitoring to boot, consider this one.



*Mio Alpha 2*

Mio is not a well-known firm, but they are one of the pioneers in Optical HR measurement. Till recently, Garmin and other popular brands used Mio's technology in their offerings. However, this unit lacks GPS and relies on an accelerometer to track your run pace, which isn't as accurate. So, unless your main goal is HR accuracy, you should consider one of the other watches.







# RUNNING SENSE & SENSIBILITY...

Writes *Dr Madhu Thottappillil*, in the hope that runners, new and old, will take a few, small precautions to enjoy hours of running without coming running back clutching parts in agony

Photos courtesy: Madhu Thottappillil

I watched with a combination of awe, envy and consternation a whole lot of people I know taking to the roads caught by the marathon bug. Awe, that fitness and endurance and stamina were the new mantras to embark upon a grueling exercise schedule. Envy, that I could only watch and never hope to summon that kind of courage, confidence or self-discipline. Worry, because a whole bunch of them had just started to run because they could or because someone else was, without understanding the mechanics of it. Some in fact were running in fancy shoes and my eyes popped out of their sockets!

Half a dozen of them came back clutching their various parts, from their hamstrings to their posteriors, while one did not connect the pain he was feeling in his toe to his sudden running. Many said they had been athletes when they were in school and hence had it in them to run. While it's good to believe one can, it's better to be sensible about it. One ought not to tumble on to the marathon bandwagon just because everybody is doing it or it is the in thing to do or they believe they can. It needs its due in terms of careful ministrations.

Running involves constant, close

co-ordination amongst groups of muscles. However, certain muscles and muscle groups are more equal than others.

I have tried to highlight the three main muscles that, though extremely crucial in runners, often tend to be overlooked by a vast majority of the runners. Every muscle is involved in the running stride and failure to adequately strengthen these puts the runner at risk of biomechanical issues and injuries. The muscles along with some exercises to increase their specific strength include the following:



## GLUTEI

Running engages a group of muscles known as the posterior chain. Posterior chain basically includes the muscles of the back — hamstrings, glutei and the calf. Most runners end up spending hours strengthening the quadriceps at the expense of the posterior chain resulting in muscular imbalances. The prime driver of the posterior chain is the gluteus maximus. This is the muscle that initiates the extension of the hip which is the ba-

sic essence of running. In addition to the gluteus maximus, the gluteus minimus and gluteus medius also get into the action while running, with the medius acting as the hip stabilizer while running.

In my practice I encounter many runners suffering from weak or inactive glutei. This can be attributed to prolonged sitting (which leads to prolonged period of inactive glutei) This prolonged inactive glutei has a negative impact on the running as the prime muscles that drive

the posterior chain aren't firing adequately.

## EXERCISES - DONKEY KICKS:

Strengthens and activates the glutei. Keeping your back straight, while getting on your hands and knees, squeeze the glutei to move one leg back and slightly to the side (like a donkey kicking). (Care should be taken to ensure that the movement should be initiated from the glutei (butt) and not the lower back). Do 2-3 sets of 8-12 repetitions.



### DEEP ABDOMINALS

Transversus Abdominus (TA) is the deep abdominal muscle which is responsible for maintaining a good posture for effective running. This muscle is a core stabilizer. It lies underneath the rectus “six pack” abdominus. The TA provides the sta-

bility component to ensure that the posterior chain muscles can work more effectively. Prolonged sitting without adequate strengthening is the main reason for TA weakness.

### EXERCISES

Planks are the simplest and most

effective exercise to strengthen and activate your deep abdominals. Lie in a face down position with your elbows under your shoulders. Squeeze the quadriceps and then the glutei to raise your body into a plank. Keep the back flat without sinking. Hold for 30 seconds or up to three minutes.



### BIG TOE

This particular area is a surprise inclusion into this short list of mine. Though far removed from the core, the big toe plays an important role in running. During forward motion, the first toe carries twice the load of the other toes. The first toe can carry up to 60 percent of the body weight during forward motion and the forces increase two fold while running. During the stance and propulsion phase of the running stride, the big toe rapidly flexes upward under great stress. Any factor that affects this motion tends to alter the gait.

The flexor hallucis brevis, bends the big toe and acts as the stabilizer

of the foot during each foot plant. Shoes with a narrow and elevated toe box place the big toe in a hyperextended position and prevent the toes from spreading while running, that can lead to imbalances that can lead to common running injuries from shin splints to plantar fasciitis. Choosing the right shoe is the key to prevent issues around the big toe.

### EXERCISES

While barefoot keep your feet flat on the ground. Raise the big toe while keeping the other four toes on the ground. Return your big toe to the ground; and then raise your other four toes. Repeat this several times throughout the day.

Hamstring is also a very vital part of the posterior chain and hamstring strengthening is a key component of effective running. I haven't mentioned it in detail as I have noticed that a majority of the runners do adequate Hamstring strengthening at the cost of the muscle groups mentioned above.

To ensure effective and injury free running, sustained focus on improving the strength of the above mentioned muscles is the need of the hour. These exercises are simple to follow and sustain. A small precaution to enjoy hours of running without coming running back clutching parts in agony, I'd say. ■

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