

THE RUNDOWN

AN INITIATIVE OF THE CHENNAI RUNNERS

ISSUE #13 SEPTEMBER 2016

FRIENDS IN RECOVERY

RECOVERY AIDS THAT
EVERY RUNNER MUST
KNOW

RIO IN THE SPOTLIGHT

A ROUND-UP OF INDIAN DISTANCE
RUNNERS AT THE OLYMPIC
GAMES 2016

TO EACH, HIS OWN

RUNNERS SPEAK ABOUT
GETTING RACE-READY

“THINK ON YOUR FEET”

SAYS CHENNAI-BASED VETERAN
RUNNER, ARUN KRISHNAN



Pakka
Jodi of
Health
& Taste

THE RUNDOWN

AN INITIATIVE OF THE CHENNAI RUNNERS

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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.



Niranjana 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.)



Sandeep Bhandarkar

Sandeep Bhandarkar is a serial entrepreneur with a passion for distance running. He has run several marathons and has been coaching runners for the last few years, from beginners to those wanting to qualify for the prestigious Boston marathon or run the Comrades ultra. He writes extensively on technical aspects in running through his blog www.therun-way.com.



Lavanya Karthik

Lavanya Karthik writes, runs and parents in Mumbai. She also draws comics about her misadventures in writing, running and parenting, some of which you can read at <http://mayabizarre.tumblr.com/>.



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.



Harish Lakshman

Harish is currently the Managing Director of the Rane Group. Prior to joining Rane, he worked at TRW Inc in the USA for two years. His fitness journey started with swimming about six years ago. He started running about four years ago. He has also been a regular at Chennai-based The Quad for the last three years now.



Stan Rayan

Stan Rayan is a Senior Assistant Editor, Sports, at The Hindu. A former middle-distance runner and table tennis player, he is the newspaper's athletics correspondent and is based in Kochi. An alumnus of Loyola College, Chennai, Stan loves digging into sports history.



Arun Krishnan

Arun Krishnan is a veteran marathon runner, triathlete, swimmer and oarsman. Being the oldest Indian Ironman, he evangelizes the religion of physical fitness and wellbeing. A mechanical engineer by qualification, his day job is that of a director in his company.



Dear Runner,

In Chennai, everyone is happily suffering from The Wipro Chennai Marathon 2016 Fever! It's a good kind of fever... The only medication that may help cure it is perhaps, consistency in training. Two days ago, from across Chennai, runners gathered at a chosen spot to kickstart the official training runs leading up to the race. Starting now, until December, the city will witness a running euphoria of sorts that will culminate in a race that we hope will, as always, get bigger, and better, bringing into its fold, novice and veteran runners, enabling for one and all, the opportunity to experience the world of running and all things related to it.

And there are many! Strangely, as I sat down to pen this note, I thought of the keywords in this edition and I am convinced that this edition, in particular, is homage to the idea of endurance. Let me confess; we didn't intend for it to be that way and not that endurance is not a recurring motif in our scheme of things. Endurance and running are, in a sense, inseparable.

But this edition is special. It's about the people who take endurance very seriously and have gone on to craft for themselves full-fledged careers or stories that are worth writing about or emulating. Our cover story, a straightforward round-up of Indian distance runners at the Rio Olympic Games 2016, is more than merely the highs and lows of the Games. Read between the lines; picture the men

and women, from corners of India, who push the endurance envelope to make it to an international platform.

Sharing space with the distance runners at Rio is an interview with Bangalore-based endurance athlete, Anu Vaidyanathan, as she shares with us how she poured her time and energies, amidst a crazy work and life schedule, to realise and release her debut book, a memoir to be specific, a chronicling of her adventures in endurance, interestingly called Anywhere But Home. Taking time off from a busy day at work and her toddler, Anu shares her insights on why she keeps returning to it. "Sport is an ascetic pursuit, in a sense. The act of running is really the act of running," she says.

Delivering the Last Word on endurance is Chennai Runners' most revered veteran runner, Arun Krishnan, whose re-telling of his own running adventure at the Ironman Cairns in June this year, is a motivational story and a chapter in appreciating the idea of endurance. The story has all the elements of a typical sports film, where we sit on the edge of the seat, rooting for our favourite team to win, and just in the nick of time, they make it after all, allowing us a moment to jump off our seats, high-five our friends and family and understand the meaning of shared passion. Thank you, Mr Krishnan. And thank you, all you endurance athletes!

Best Akhila

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Editor
Akhila Krishnamurthy
Editorial Team
Preeti Aghalayam
Ashwin Prabhu
Niranjan Sankar
Design
Smrithi Amarendran
Published by
Chennai Runners Association
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Rathna Offset Printers, Chennai
For editorial feedback, write to
therundown2014@gmail.com



*Check out
form tips!
Pg 10*



Photo Courtesy: Internet

HEY JOANIE!

American long distance runner, Joan Benoit Samuelson's running journey is inextricably linked with the birth of women's running in the world... In a moving account, *Preeti Aghalayam* attempts to capture that story

This column throws light on the stories and lives of men and women who braved all odds, shed sweat, tears and blood over 42.195K to etch their names in the book of running history. The column will criss-cross time and space and go back and forth across the decades led by nostalgia and sentiment and not logic, and in that sense will not be a chronological retelling of running's greatest achievements

In preparation for the article, I open up my store of running literature, both online and offline. And then I have to take a break pretty soon as tears well up and then pour down. It has been many many years since these battles were won, some of these wars had been fought even before my birth (but not this one). These scars – are they really mine, I wonder, but not for long. If it burns, itches or has formed a scab, it's yours.

“Totally vacuous...jaw slack, mouth slightly open, and eyes glazed...Even the uniform, a blah gray, hangs limply,” says Kathrine Switzer in her book “Marathon Woman.” It is August 5, 1984, in Los Angeles. The Olympics. Most of the East Europeans are absent, in a boycott. Carl Lewis reigns supreme on the track with his four golds. Ed Moses. Daley Thomson. P T Usha. These are the names you remember...

But Switzer wasn't talking about any of these athletes, but of a “gray little mouse skittering out of a hole”. The 1984 LA Olympics is famous for a most remarkable development! That the women's marathon was “approved” and conducted for the first time at the Olympics so very recently, in 1984, is a scar that is yet mine, and of all of us who call ourselves ‘runners’. And the star line-up at this iconic event was being described for TV by Switzer, one of the generals in the fight...

The first edition of the women's 42 was special indeed. The field was deep, with Norway's Grete Waitz and Ingrid Kristiansen among the favourites. But the first Olympic gold was won by the ‘glazed eyed’ Joan Benoit of the host nation (and her mother accused her of look-

ing like that gray mouse). “Joanie” as she was called, took it away in 2:24:52 – breaking away right at the first water spot (‘I felt hemmed in,’ she said later). She is reputed to have acknowledged the roaring crowd in the Coliseum with a brief, modest wave of her “over-sized white hat”.

And just like that, with that wave, the world of women's running changed forever. The New York City Marathon officially accepted women in 1970, the Boston Marathon in 1972. Global circuits of women's races had already been nucleated, and the women's marathon included in the European championships in 1982. But although women had proved time and again that they could run the 26.2 without ‘their uterus falling out’ (even today someone on the road will stop and warn you of that), it was the '84 Olympics that really finally put it up there in bold letters, for the world to see. And the heroine of this dramatic saga was Joan Benoit Samuelson.

Joan Benoit Samuelson is a wispy, fit, tiny (1.57m), graceful 59-year-old woman today who works as a consultant for a leading sportswear brand. All those years ago, as she crossed the tunnel into the stadium in 1984, she decided to dedicate her life to running, and has fulfilled her dream many times over, giving motivational talks, setting up running clubs, conducting fitness clinics, and organising memorable races.

So how did it all begin for Joanie? The story goes that she broke her leg in a skiing accident as a teenager, and started running once she was back on her feet, in an attempt to recover, and discovered her love for it. Up in Maine,

her beloved New England state, Benoit joined her high school track team, and then on to Bowdoin College. In college, in her senior year, Benoit entered the 1979 Boston Marathon, and set the American Women's record there of 2:35:15.

“**Joan Benoit Samuelson is a wispy, fit, tiny (1.57m), graceful 59-year-old woman today who works as a consultant for a leading sportswear brand. All those years ago, as she crossed the tunnel into the stadium in 1984, she decided to dedicate her life to running, and has fulfilled her dream many times over ...**”

Her career as a long distance runner was just beginning in 1979 however, and the record books reflect her many achievements in the succeeding years. A world record at the Boston Marathon in 1983 (2:22:43). A Chicago Marathon win in 1985 with an American record of 2:21:21. Several American records in 10K, half marathon, 10 mile and other distances. And more recently? At age 50, a 2:50 finish at the Olympic trials in Boston in 2008. Another sub 2:50 finish in 2009 at the New York City Marathon (to coincide with the 25th anniversary of her historic win at LA!). And who knows what the future holds for this living legend! ■



FORM'S THE WORD

In the second part of this three-part series, *Sandeep Bhandarkar* reinforces the importance of good running form and urges runners to sacrifice a bit of running time for two to three months to focus on improving their form...

I look back to my early running days with an involuntary shudder. Regular post-run stiffness, a couple of shin stress fractures and tortured finishes at every marathon. Friends would joke about when my next injury would crop up! Fast forward to the last couple of years: bye-bye stiffness, no injury and regular weekly mileage north of 60K, leading to a recent marathon time of a shade above 3:30. What changed? I dropped a few kilos of course; I wrote about how crucial bodyweight is in the first part of this series. But what made a real difference was a modification to my running form. It was almost magical when it happened; I feel like running all the time now.

Running has become a 'training' sport

Let us say you do not know how to swim. Or play tennis or a guitar. What do you do? Would you straightaway swim laps or play a set or strum a song? Of course not, simply because you will not be able to. You will first need to learn the technique, however rudimentary. And the poorer the technique, worse will be your performance. Now switch to distance running. Would you think the same? No, because of one crucial point: all of us have run at least a little when we were kids. And because of this, we think we know how to run and get into training right away when we pick up running much later in life; we believe that the more we run, the better we can become. So instead of examining our form at the outset, we keep running week in and week out, either getting into a performance rut or a cycle of debilitating injuries. No wonder distance running has been labelled a 'training' sport and not a 'technique' sport.

Why is it though that most runners

who take up this sport as adults do not have proper running form? The answer I have realised is astonishingly simple: we look at running as an extension of walking. And the key elements of walking, such as landing with a distinct heel strike with your foot ahead of your knee (see pic), kicking your lower leg out before landing, and using hip flexors and quadriceps more than glutes and hamstrings are all characteristics of poor running form!



What is good running form?

Simply put, good running form is about (a) how efficiently you utilize the energy in your body while running and (b) how injury free your running is.

Energy Efficiency: An efficient runner utilizes less energy running at the same pace compared with a less efficient runner. Conversely, if two runners with the same bodyweight are running at the same pace, a more efficient runner will be able to run a longer distance with the same energy than her less efficient counterpart. This is even more crucial in a marathon where the energy derived from carbohydrates is limited. That is why you will find many fast half marathoners struggle when they attempt a full

marathon; it is in no small measure due to their inefficient form.

Injuries: Good running form means that all the relevant muscles used for running are well co-ordinated; they have to be in 'equilibrium'. If this equilibrium is disturbed, imbalances occur which result in chronic muscle tightness and frustratingly frequent injuries. I believe that most of the running injuries are simply due to poor running form.

How do you analyse your form?

To analyse running form, it is useful to break up the running (or gait) cycle into four phases: landing, stance, take-off and flight phases.

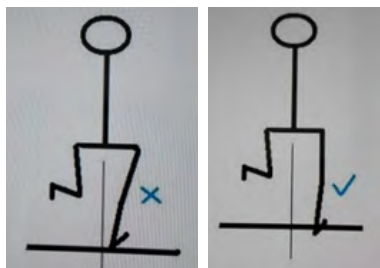


Key parts of lower body

Landing phase: Improper landing of the foot equals inefficient, and potentially dangerous, landing. Quite a few recreational runners tend to thrust their lower leg out by contracting the thigh muscles, similar to how we do leg extensions in the gym. Like walking, this causes the foot to land ahead of the knee with a prominent heel strike, not only fatiguing the thigh muscles because of the constant 'leg extensions' but also braking heavily with each stride because you are landing far ahead of your body. How do you know if you are landing poorly? If (a) your thighs and knees feel stiff after a hard or long run, and/or (b) you get shin pain regularly, you are not landing right.

Good form in this phase is to focus on driving the knee forward and let the lower leg simply unfold out instead of actively straightening it. Only the upper leg (hip to knee) is used to power you forward; the lower leg (knee to ankle) is just 'along for the ride' and used just for touchdown while landing. This is why even runners with prosthetics for their lower legs are able to run.

Stance phase: This phase is where most recreational runners lose the hip power so critical for the 'power generating' take-off phase which follows. What typically happens is that as soon as the foot lands on the ground, the glutes don't fire properly resulting in the hip sagging. This is highly inefficient and leads to a short stride length. And because the glutes 'switch off', the leg moves towards the midline of the body, i.e. the leg is not under the hip, it's a little inside (see pic). This causes the foot to over pronate, i.e. it rolls inward a lot more than desired. If you are prone to plantar fasciitis or shin pain, chances are that your leg is moving towards (or even crossing) the midline of the body. Focusing on landing under your hips will address this issue apart from helping you generate more power for the take-off phase.



Towards midline of body Leg under the hip

Take-off phase: I have found many recreational runners push off the ground with their toes. This means that they are using their calf muscles actively to take off. There

are two problems with this: first, the glutes and hamstrings (which are the real powering muscles) are underutilized when calves are actively used. Secondly, your calf muscles help you jump up, not propel you forward. So when calf muscles are used for taking off, you tend to run too erect and bounce up and down more, leading to a waste of energy. Good form in this phase is to use your glutes and hamstrings to launch you forward, with the foot quietly rising up. Those runners who have chronic calf muscle tightness are guilty of using their calves instead of glutes/hamstrings to propel themselves off the ground.

Flight phase: This is the phase when both feet are off the ground. A common mistake made during this phase is to let the trailing leg 'hang' at the back. This creates inefficiencies leading to unwanted loss of energy. As soon as the trailing leg starts lifting (end of Take off phase), the knee should be driven

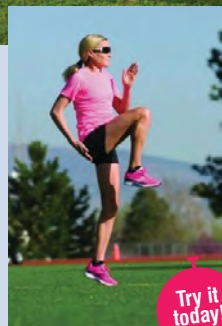
forward so that the lower leg (below the knee) rises quickly and moves ahead.

How do you correct your form?

To recap, the common issues on running form are as follows:

- The lower leg is actively straightened by the thigh (quadriceps) muscles while landing
- The leg on the ground is toward the midline of the body
- Calf muscles are used actively while taking off from the ground
- The trailing leg 'hangs back' after coming off the ground

I have discovered a simple fix to these issues — marching. If you observe closely, running is an extension of marching rather than walking. When you march, all the above points are addressed. The lower leg is just 'stamped down', not straightened out. The foot lands under the hip and does not float inward. The calf muscles are not used at all when the leg is lifted. Lastly, the leg does not trail back when you march.



Try it today!

The marching drill

All you need to do is start by marching in one place by driving your knees forward smartly (see pic). Swing your arms the way you would while running. Once you are comfortable doing this, start moving forward slowly, focusing on the marching action in your mind all the time. Increase your pace gradually till you start jogging, always with the mental picture of marching. This entire process should take you at least a month; don't rush it. You will be astounded how most of the form issues get taken care of with this simple, yet highly effective drill! Furthermore, your cadence automatically starts improving because you need to bring your foot down quickly.



I recommend doing this drill on a treadmill because you don't have to worry about moving ahead; the belt does that for you. All you need to focus on is to march smartly in one place and increase the treadmill speed gradually. Once you have begun running comfortably in this fashion, you can incorporate some useful form drills after your easy runs, maybe a couple of times a week. You can get them on youtube: some of the common ones are A-skips, high knees, butt kicks, straight legs and hops. Doing short sprints with high knees on an incline is another great form drill which also doubles up as a terrific functional strength training exercise.

A quick word on the upper body

The head and arms play an important supporting role to the lower body while running. There are usually two mistakes runners make here. First, a few runners tend to look down a lot. This reduces efficiency as the neck muscles are fatigued and the body is imbalanced. Looking ahead about 50m or so with a relaxed head is very important for good form. Secondly, some runners hold their arms too close to their body and thrust them forward with each stride (like a boxer sparring). This is fine when you are just jogging at a very slow pace (footballers do this when they

are jogging on the field). However, when you want to run at a good pace, you need to free your arms more with the forearm and upper arm having a 90 degree angle at all times. More importantly, the elbow should be thrust back with each stride and the arm should come forward with the momentum of the run; it should not be forcibly thrust ahead. A good drill to correct this is to swing your arms while standing in one place by thrusting your elbows back with each swing and ensuring your palms brush your upper hips during the swing.

Rhythmic breathing matters when you run hard

Most recreational runners, especially those in the middle and back of the pack, are unsure about how to breathe while running. I have a simple approach. While running easy (or not breathing hard), there is no need to focus on breathing because by definition, this is a conversational pace and when you talk, your breathing automatically gets erratic. This is fine because your body is still getting lots of oxygen at those easy paces. While running harder though (marathon pace and faster), it is necessary to have a rhythm while breathing so that your body receives enough oxygen to utilize energy efficiently. This is where elites score heavily over

most recreational runners; they have developed their breathing pattern which they synchronise to their stride. There is no one pattern which is the perfect one; runners use the one they are most comfortable at that pace. The most common pattern seems to be 2-2, i.e. breathe in for two steps and breathe out next two steps. For even harder runs, this can change to a 2-1 pattern, i.e. breathe in for 2 steps and breathe out for one step. You can experiment with various breathing patterns and see which ones suit you; the most important point to remember is that developing your breathing rhythm at faster paces will make you run more efficiently when you train and race at those paces.

To summarize, all you need to do to learn good form is to invest time in just two drills: marching and swinging arms! And of course, learn to breathe rhythmically while running harder. As I keep repeating to the runners I train, once you correct your form, it stays with you for life like cycling or driving. It thus makes so much sense to sacrifice a bit of running time for two to three months to focus on improving your form. If you want to become a better runner, begin by running better.

Happy marching! ■



RIO IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Stan Rayan of Sportstarlive.com rounds up the highs and lows of Indian distance runners at the Rio Olympic Games 2016



Thonakal Gopi



Kheta Ram



Nitendra Singh Rawat



O.P. Jaisha



Kavita Raut



Lalita Babar

As a youngster in Kerala's hilly Wayanad District, Thonakal Gopi frequently used to run up and down the hills. Even going to school at Sulthan Bathery, his hometown, involved a long walk.

That made him sturdy and strong and a good distance runner. He soon began winning medals in the 5000 and 10,000m. But in January, his athletics career took a long and wonderful turn.

At the Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon, Gopi was asked to run as the pace-setter for his Army teammate Nitendra Singh Rawat who had qualified for the Olympics earlier.

He was told to run with his senior teammate for about 30K but after he crossed that stage, Gopi, who was making his marathon debut, realised to his surprise that he was not tired.

So, he decided to carry on and finished with a time of 2:16.15 which was good enough to take the

28-year-old to the Rio Olympics.

That Mumbai Marathon turned out to be a joyous one for another 5000-10,000m runner from Rajasthan, Kheta Ram, who was desperately seeking to qualify for the Olympics in any event.

33-year-old Ram had taken up marathon running late last year in the hope of making it to the Olympics and in Mumbai, he booked his Rio berth.

THREE IN RIO

The Rio Olympics was the first time since 1960 when three Indian men's marathon runners — the maximum allowed — had qualified for the Olympics. Gopi (2:15.25s) and Ram (2:15.26) performed creditably, finishing 25th and 26th respectively, with personal bests too, though the established runner Nitendra could only end up 84th after suffering a hamstring pull.

Marathoners, who often train in high-altitude centres, are rarely in the limelight in the country. Unlike the quartermilers, relay runners

and throwers, their performances are not followed closely at meets.

NEW GOAL

But the three Army marathoners who went to Rio now want the country to sit up and take notice of the event and they feel it will happen if they break Olympian Shivnath Singh's National record of 2:12.00s, clocked in Jalandhar in 1978. That is their new goal.

While the men raised the bar nicely, the performances of the two women marathon runners at Rio, national record holder O P Jaisha and Kavita Raut, were a disappointment, finishing 89th and 120th.

CONTROVERSY

There was much controversy too after the versatile Kerala runner Jaisha, a double Asian Games bronze medallist in the 5000m (2006) and 1500m (2014) earlier, claimed that she had water for the first time in the Rio marathon only after the 8K mark and that the Indian officials had not provided personalised water or refreshments to her during the course of the 42K race.

Jaisha, who had finished 18th at last year's World Championship in Beijing with a national record (Sudha Singh was 19th with a personal best but she ran the 3000m steeple chase in Rio), had fainted after the Rio marathon and had to be hospitalised. She later claimed that she had almost died after the event in Brazil.

Her coach, Nikolai Snesev however clarified that Jaisha had not wanted personalised drinks or refreshments and had said that she would use whatever the Rio organisers had arranged, that is water after every 5K starting with 2.5K. There is a possibility

that Jaisha could have missed the first drinks table at the 2.5k mark and had water only after the 7.5k mark. Her teammate Kavita did not appear to have any problems during the event and had said that she did not want personalised drinks during the Rio marathon.

The men's fine performances and Jaisha's woes in Rio have certainly brought the focus on the marathon in the country and it should do a world of good for distance runners.

LALITA, THE BEST

The most impressive performance among Indians in athletics also came from a distance runner,

though in the women's 3000m steeplechase through Maharashtra's Lalita Babar who finished 10th in 9:22.74s in the final.

Babar had finished eighth in 9:29.64s at the Beijing World Championships last year and in the heats in Rio, she bettered her own national record by nearly seven seconds while clocking 9:19.76.

Sudha Singh, the other Indian in the fray, failed to qualify for the final after clocking a poor 9:43.29 in the heats.

Indians did not figure in other long distance events at Rio Olympics. ■



Men and Women's marathon at the Rio Olympics 2016

HOW TO TRAIN YOUR INNER DRAGON

TO EACH, HIS OWN

In the second column, *Preeti Aghalayam* shifts gears a little and talks to runners about cross training, weight management and seasonal variations in training, with a brief foray into aging, and what it means to a runner!



Meet *Gokul Prasad*, an enthusiastic ex-Indian Navy guy based in Chennai, who has been running long distances as a recreational runner for the past couple of years. *Senthilanand (aka Painter)* talks to us all the way from Palo Alto, California, and has a different kind of weight management in mind. *Nikhil Pednekar* is from Mumbai and comes to us with years of running experience, plus a recent Comrades marathon finish. We presented the same set of questions to all three of them, and had a most interesting set of conversations. Read on!

PA: How do you maintain your weight and fitness during the “off season” when you are not training for or participating in events?

Painter: I have been under-weight for my height, for a long time now. Being underweight hasn’t however, been a problem with my running so far. I think multiple



reasons have contributed in keeping my weight low at any rate — I run 2-3 times a week even during the so-called off-season, I am reasonably conscious of what I eat, and I am a vegetarian and teetotaler. These “good habits” mean that I have managed my weight pretty well all these years! Of course I also probably hit the parent lottery jackpot on weight, so I am sure that contributes strongly as well.

Gokul: As a runner I feel there’s no such thing as an “off-season”. A seasoned runner, I feel, looks to run all year long. I hold three mantras close to my heart; the first is – for a balanced BMI (Body Mass Index), be regular, whether it be running or strength training. The second is, eat right and at the correct time. Personally, I avoid maida. The third is, to sleep well; this is critical as inadequate sleep can surely throw your fitness gains off completely.



For example, I am comfortable skipping my workout session if I don’t sleep well during the night. I strictly follow these principles, and find that things just fall in place as far as fitness and weight are concerned.

Nikhil: I run two full marathons a year, so there isn’t an off-season any longer in my life. My coach generally advises a month of recovery after a full marathon. I feel that my fitness levels drop off really quickly though. So even if there is no race to train for, I try to run a minimum of 2-3 times a week, including a 10-15K run. That helps me stay in low simmer mode from which I can confidently ramp up when needed. Personally my weight doesn’t fluctuate much, and I don’t track it obsessively or anything.

PA: Do you cross-train? How important do you think it is?

Painter: Of late, my cross-training has only been limited to three weekly 30-minute sessions of yoga, sandwiched between my three weekly runs. It's a combination of the following stretches/poses: Surya Namaskar, Warrior 1 (Virabhadrasana), Chair Pose (Utkatasana), Tree Pose, Donkey kicks, Donkey side kicks, Planks, Bridge with alternate kicks, Trikonasana (Triangle pose), and Pigeon pose for stretching the hip flexors. Over a period of time, I have sensed that I have weak glute and hip flexor muscles, so these are a must for me to stay away from injuries. I think it's a good idea to figure out your weak spots and stretch and strengthen them on a regular basis, to pre-empt injuries! In fact, all this, along with reducing running pace, has helped me in the last few years to stay away from injuries while still maintaining a weekly mileage of 40-50 kms/week!

Gokul: Right now, I go to the gym thrice a week, and work on strengthening. I find this is quite helpful and augments my running very well. I used to play basketball and football earlier and I am

considering taking them up again for the cross-training benefits.

Nikhil: I haven't cross-trained for the most part. In the lead-up to my Comrades ultramarathon earlier this year, I did do some core training — twice a week for about 5-6 months — free weights, 1 hour circuit of plank variations, swiss-ball roll-in roll-out, variations of crunches, push-ups and so on. I can't comment specifically on whether it helped in conventional metrics like pace. For sure, I didn't have any lower back pain during the run or significant post-run soreness, and that probably was because of the core training. I'd think it can only help. I however wouldn't recommend it at the cost of recovery time or being fatigued and risking injury.

PA: *As you grow older, are there specific aspects around running that you focus more attention on? Why?*

Nikhil: Definitely, injury prevention. I want to run for another 20 years. As running has become popular, it is being distilled down to distances and PBs. I am not an

athlete, and however well I do, there will be tons of people far better than me. I'd rather run conservatively and stay healthy, than hurt myself in aggressive pursuit of a personal best. So my main focus will be on staying injury-free and running as long as possible!

Painter: I think one needs to be in tune with the changes in one's body and alter goals and running regimens accordingly — that's what I plan to do in the future!

Gokul: I think I'm still too young to answer this question.

PA: *What are your running goals for the near term?*

Nikhil: To get a bit stronger so that I can finish runs with a bit more juice left in the tank, though not necessarily faster. Struggling at the finish and ending on fumes isn't very enjoyable!

Gokul: I'm currently training for TWCM 2016 half marathon (December 11). I hope to get a better timing than my previous HM. However my primary goal is to continue running for the rest of my life.

Painter: I am more in the maintenance mode now trying to maintain my running form and fitness level, and not concentrating too much on increasing pace. The phase of life that I am in now, with my two kids needing more time and attention, makes this a sensible goal for me. I try to run anywhere between 35-40 kms/week, having some low mileage weeks in between to recover and a really long distance run once a month. Hilly runs are also sprinkled twice or thrice a month to build strength.

PA: *Let's talk about your personal running story!*

Gokul: I first started running in 2003, when I was planning to join the Armed Forces. I joined the Indian Navy as a Short Service Commissioned officer in 2004. I quit service in 2014 and joined the Chennai Runners Tower Twisters chapter in November 2015, and am currently training to run long distances. My personal best of 37mins for a 10K was while in service in 2004. This was my high point and I was at the peak of my fitness! Right now, my 10K PB stands at 54 mins — at any rate my

current goal is to be fit. I also have a Half Marathon Personal Best of 2 hours 24 mins, earlier this year.

Nikhil: I did my first half marathon in 2000 and my first full marathon in 2005. For the past five years, I have been a regular runner, with the Striders running group in Mumbai.

“ I am not an athlete, and however well I do, there will be tons of people far better than me. I'd rather run conservatively and stay healthy, than hurt myself in aggressive pursuit of a personal best. So my main focus will be on staying injury-free and running as long as possible! ”

- Nikhil

My personal best in the FM distance is 4:27, and I have run

the Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon five times so far. I also ran the New York City Marathon in 2014, and the Berlin Marathon in 2015. I recently finished the Comrades Ultramarathon (89Kms) in 11:50. The last was a wonderful running experience, and I highly recommend it to all of you — looking at the sheer number of people who attempt it, and running into people who have done it 10-20-30 times already is just amazing! I think it is doable for anybody who has been running regularly for 2-3 years, and can run a full marathon comfortably in 4:30-4:45!

Painter: I started running in 2008 trying my first half marathon on my own. But the running bug really caught me when I was with the Chennai Runners between the years 2010-2013. I was very fortunate to have started my running journey with such a wonderful bunch of runners and friends. My personal best in the full marathon distance was in 2014 at the California International Marathon (3:24) and half marathon in 2014 at the End of Summer Half Marathon in San Jose (1:31). ■



PURSUIT OF ENDURANCE

In the backdrop of her debut book, *Anywhere But Home*, *Akhila Krishnamurthy* attempts to discover what excites Anu Vaidyanathan, Bangalore-based endurance athlete, to, time and again, step out of her comfort zone, to explore and discover her own relationship with strength, and endurance...

Photo Courtesy: Anu Vaidyanathan

I meet her on Skype; she calls me at the dot of 5.30pm on a Wednesday evening and even though we are scheduled to speak only for 45 minutes, we end up chatting for an hour. "I am not married to the clock, anymore," confesses Bangalore-based award-winning athlete, Anu Vaidyanathan, who is in the news for her debut book, a memoir, an honest sharing of her highs and lows in the world of endurance...

When she is not running, cycling or swimming, this new mother of a toddler, is busy growing PatNMarks, an Intellectual Property Consulting firm, or travelling to speak and address distinguished gatherings on subjects that range from sport, entrepreneurship, innovation and leadership. She also cooks on a daily basis; meets and engages with writers, editors, people with varied points of view; loves being a mother and tries her best in keeping a pot of roses, alive... For those who don't already know, Anu is the first Asian, male or female, to have competed in Ultraman Canada triathlon having a 10K swim, 420K bike and an 84.4K run, placing 6th and becoming the youngest finisher that year, and backing it up with Ironman Canada, three weeks later.

Firstly, Anu, Congratulations on your first book! I'm particularly curious about what inspired this very fascinating title – Anywhere but Home and its tagline, Adventures in Endurance? Did that title in a way dictate the course of the book itself?

I think the title for the book stemmed from my own notion of comfort; of going outside what home might mean to you at different points of time. The tagline of the book also helped me discover the world in a very non-intrusive way.

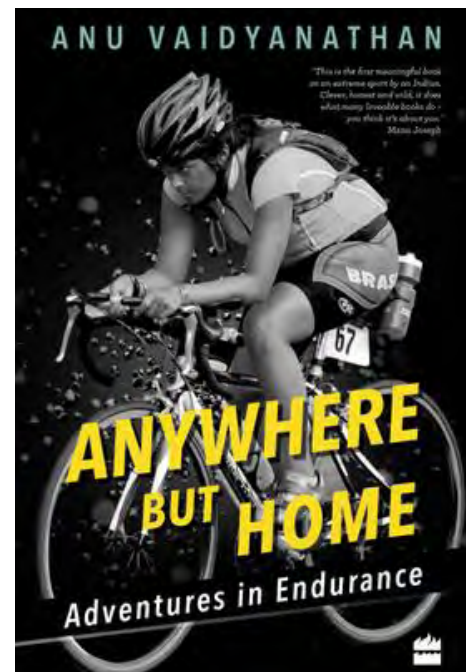
The book honestly is neither an intellectual take on adventure nor is it meant to be a training manual. In it, I play the part of an effective storyteller – telling it like it is. It's a personal account of my own journeys in adventure, drawing upon anecdotes, facts and focussing on things that I like to focus on. It's a memoir in the truest sense of that word!

What prompted your decision to share your story/stories in endurance in the form of a book; when did you decide to do it and let us into the process that went into writing it?

For a long time now, a lot of people have been nudging me to chronicle my adventures in the form of a book. You do know that I blog a lot and I'm also an avid reader. But the reason it took me this long to actually write a book is because it took me a while to find the right publisher; an editor I was comfortable with. As destiny would have it, two-and-a-half years ago, I met an editor who was not only fantastic with her job but also someone who didn't try to, at any point, change my voice. I think that inspired me a lot and even though I took two years to actually see it through and that the final draft looks nothing like the first, I must admit that it has been an amazing experience.

With regard to the process, I must say that discipline is perhaps an integral factor. But I think discipline, as a value/virtue, cannot be disconnected or isolated from who we are and what we do and therefore as an ethic, we end up practising it across all that we do. We are, after all, a sum of our values.

But you must know that the book also coincided with my pregnancy.



I also realised that to write, I also needed a different kind of an outlet for my mind. It is at that time that I started walking a great deal. Walking helped me understand and accumulate my thoughts in a way that running and biking never can, or will. Walking is, in a sense, diametrically opposite to those activities. As I walked, I recollected and reminisced; sieved through and consolidated my own life course, and derived deeper and more nuanced insights into my journeys in adventure. So, really, walking set the stage for my writing process.

I had/have a full-time job and of course that was a bit of a bummer so I must confess that unlike some writers, I didn't actually write 500 words per day or some such. I'd write when I'd have the right ideas and then I'd switch off, and then revisit it again. Editorially speaking, the big changes/edits came in only after the first draft was fully done. And it wasn't easy because unlike a blog or a column, people are not obligated to read what you write when you write a book. Writing taught me how to write to engage with the reader in the best possible

Book: Anywhere But Home... Adventures in Endurance
Author: Anu Vaidyanathan
Publisher: Harper Sport
Price: Rs350

YOU GO GIRL!

Niranjana Sankar spends a Sunday afternoon with Anu Vaidyanathan's debut book, *Anywhere But Home*, and confirms the book is as honest and engaging as its writer...

An Ironman consists of a swim of 3.8K, followed by a bicycle ride of 180K, and then a 42.2K run, all to be completed within 17 hours. That's as tough as it sounds, and is considered the ultimate achievement in fitness and endurance sport. The Ultraman Canada, which is over twice that distance is, to the normal person, near impossible.

Fortunately, during all of her comprehensive education, someone forgot to tell Anu Vaidyanathan what 'impossible' meant. Anywhere but Home is a story of passion, determination, and accomplishment. It is a travelogue and a personal diary. The engaging and fast-paced book traces the life of the peripatetic Anu Vaidyanathan, as she moves from continent to continent, and achievement to achievement, from half-marathon to half-ironman to ironman to Ultraman.

It is partly about the challenges and frustrations faced by a single woman at study, at work, and at training. But more than that, it is about following your heart and your dreams, and how physical and material limitations are nothing

in the path of resolve, a positive attitude and a steadfast work ethic.

Anu fights against all kinds of odds in building up a fantastic education. Her persistence gets her into the undergraduate programme at Purdue from where she graduates with an insane workload while working part-time. One of her flatmates introduces her to running and, in a sign of things to come, Anu finds a way to fit running into her already overflowing schedule.

She then moves to Raleigh for her Master's degree, and, finding it too slow, doubles up on her course load and graduates in a year, getting accepted to the Ph.D programme at the University of Wisconsin. Frustrated with the male-dominated and sexist research and work environment at Wisconsin, she gets more immersed in physical activity. She eventually drops out and comes back 'home' to Bangalore, to set up a company called PatNMarks out of her garage along with her brother.

Yet, training never takes a backseat. Finding running and biking in Bangalore's traffic difficult, a treadmill is set up in the garage to share space with her office. For her rides, she comes to Chennai every weekend for a long jaunt along the East Coast Road. Fed up with 'women-only timings' in Bangalore's public pools, she sneaks into apartment complexes to use their pools. She tackles difficulties with aplomb, and has little time for whining or self-pity.

Reading about how she works and studies and spends time with family and friends and boyfriends and the road and the bike and the pool, you wonder where she gets all the

hours from. Rest seems alien, and sleep an option. Anu seems to do all this matter-of-factly, completing runs and swims and triathlons almost casually, like Muhammad Ali swatting hapless opponents aside. Only in her ultimate achievement, the Ultraman, do we see some self-doubt and pain creep in, and her training pays off as she drags herself to the finish line, hand in hand with a helpful volunteer.

Amidst everything life throws at her — the pain of going away from loved ones, gaining and losing relationships, seeing a close friend pass away, and finding the perfect guy and then having a baby and 'settling down' (for all of 6 weeks!), her family and her training seem to anchor her and keep her sanity and cheer intact.

Her pursuits won't make sense easily to a casual reader, and Anu doesn't seem to have figured it out either. This is something familiar to most runners. Why we get up well before sunrise, cutting back on sleep and friends and work, to somehow fit in that run, is something most of us have tried (and failed) to make sense of. But somehow, amidst the conversations with trees and the dialogues in her own head, amidst the arguments with boyfriends who can't understand why someone would prefer a run to a movie, it all seems to make just a little sense.

Anu doesn't get into the details of her training or nutrition plans (she seems to survive on Subway sandwiches and peanut butter), and doesn't proffer advice to others. But she puts her heart and soul into her goals, and where can success go in the face of determination and work ethic? ■



way. And I think those were the disciplines I imbibed as a result of the writing...

Talking of challenge, it would be lovely to know what that word means in your world, considering you are an endurance athlete?

Honestly, keeping a pot of roses alive for two months is a huge challenge for me. My professional life is extremely complicated; I travel a lot and now I have come to accept it. To me, the challenge has never been the way people think of that word or of the things people have come to associate with it. Over the years, I've been striving to develop the patience to accept changing phases in my own life and priorities and I know that as a woman, it is near impossible for me to escape the cross-roads of my life. I'm constantly landing at cross-roads and I think therefore that my challenges are more in the realm of

how to be grateful in the face of a life context where I am allowed to be the woman I want to be; to be able to live upto and fulfil my sense of freedom.

People who know you probably know this already but would you be able to crystallise for us what about endurance really keeps you going and how do you keep returning to it, to keep competing and get better?

You see, I'm lucky to be an engineer who loves engineering; it's what I always wanted to do. I'm lucky to be an athlete; I'm lucky to be a writer. When I think about the word endurance, I also believe firmly that women from the generations gone by have already demonstrated that quality with so much grace and elan. I think for me, endurance manifests itself in our lives when the going gets tough. I'm more fascinated with the notion of

endurance because I feel that way we engage with it. Look at sport; it's an ascetic pursuit, in a sense. The act of running is really the act of running; it doesn't matter if you have the latest heart rate monitor or the slickest pair of shoes. At the end of the day, it is about being good at any job you have. I really believe that your life can be very pure in its pursuit and sports is the fun-dest playground you'll find!

When you are not training for a particular race/endurance event, what is your day like, pre and post-training?

In the current scheme of things, I must make an honest admission and I think I'm proud of that — I don't give myself s*** if I don't workout. In a given week, if I'm not injured, I clock in a workout four times a week. I have a couple of friends I ride and swim with and depending on their travels and

and schedules, we plan and get together. For quite a few years now, I have clocked about 12-15 hours of training every week. Of course, if there is a race, that figure could significantly peak.

I also cook a lot. I am an early riser and the first three to four hours of the day usually set the tone for the day. It can either uplift me or leave me feeling sapped. I also read a lot and now because of the book, I also have a social circle of people who read, write, edit, review, etc.

You are also a new mother; how has that changed your life? How old is your baby?

My son will be two, soon. Motherhood I must say has made me a lot cooler. It has helped me realise and recognise the fact that there is a universe that neither my hard work nor my exceptionally well-made hair or my discipline can control. If I still believed in that, I'd be a fool. It has also made me empathetic. We all, in a sense, want to be uber mothers and life throws me a landslide every now and then, and I think as a result I've become a bit more forgiving — about others and about myself too. Of course,

I'm as ambitious as I always was and I love being a mother. Sport-wise too, I'm starting to see my base-line in fitness now; so it's all good right now.

When you compete in a race, are you competing with someone or with your own self? Break that down for us...

This has changed since my first Ironman — from can I finish it to can I ace the guy next to me? Of course, if you are in a race, you are competing with the person next to you. But through all my races, the focus has not been about beating anybody. It has always been about doing what is the best that I can do. I have seldom externalised the view of a race or a competition. It's not abnormal to set goals but it is imperative that you have those goals in your own head. This sport does not lend itself to one-upmanship. For me, it has always been about what is it that you can prove to yourself about yourself that you didn't already know!

Talk to us about time management...

I typically like to keep my appointments. And if I actually feel like

I'm enjoying a conversation, I don't let the clock rule my life. Over the years, and post-motherhood, I've also become a lot more patient. I really value people a lot more now and understand the idea of gratitude better. The clock is very important but I'm no longer married to it. I freak out just like a regular person but I recognise that we have 50 productive years and if you are a little ambitious you've got to be level-headed about it.

“**It's not abnormal to set goals but it is imperative that you have those goals in your own head.**”

You are truly an inspiration, especially for women; what would your shout-out to women, especially those that juggle many roles, be?

Balance is bull-s***; don't fall for this retail dream. Just let your hair down. It's okay to be a complete mess as long as you are not a total jerk. The pursuit of balance is highly over-rated, so go ahead and give yourself a break! ■

FRIENDS IN RECOVERY

Dr Madhu Thottapillil lists down a bunch of recovery aids that every runner must either know of or own...



Running is a good exercise, no doubt about it. I am happy to see more and more people embracing it in a bid to keep fit. Getting through the runs while keeping oneself injury-free and improving on one's timings and set goals, requires adequate preparation not only for an upcoming run but also enough time for recovery from previous runs.

It is here that recovery aids and strategies play a very important role. In this column, I have listed out some of the essential recovery aids that I feel that a runner should possess.

FOAM ROLLERS

Foam roller is a recovery aid which is extremely useful for runners. Foam rollers work by aiding myofascial release around muscles and can also target specific 'trigger

points'. Using a roller in the pre-run period can aid mobility, and recovery in the post-run period by reducing pain and soreness too.

The muscle groups that are the most amenable to foam rollers are Quadriceps, Hamstrings, Calf Muscles and the Ilio-tibial band.

General tips on using a foam roller: •You should roll the targeted area back and forth across for 30 to 60 seconds



foam rollers

- Using the foam roller over bony prominences should be strictly avoided

- A mild discomfort while rolling is acceptable; extreme pain is not good and it is a signal that you should STOP the rolling

- Do NOT foam roll over painful muscles or tendons as it is only likely to aggravate the pain

- Ensure that a session with a foam roller is followed up with a light stretching session

RESISTANCE BANDS

They are popularly called 'Therabands'. They come in different colours and resistances. They are an essential aid in strength training and rehabilitation of runners and other sportspersons. Strength training is an essential part of any runners' training routine to ensure that the runner is injury-free. Their size and portability make them extremely handy for travel and ensure that there are no gaps in strength training and rehabilitation.

Therabands can be used to strengthen nearly every muscle group in the body.

TENNIS BALL & GOLF BALL

These are other aids that I usually recommend that a lot of runners usually possess. They are extremely useful for rolling and stretching the underside of the feet targeting the plantar fascia. In addition, a tennis



therabands



tennis and golf balls



ice bags

ball can be used as a roller for the back too in case of an emergency if a foam roller is not available.

ICE BAGS

Ice bags are one of the most over

looked aids that I recommend every runner must possess. Icing is the first step towards rehabilitating any injured or sore area. Having an Ice bag rather than the gel packs is more convenient to apply and Ice bags can also be securely fastened to the injured area while still maintaining mobility. ■

NO, SERIOUSLY

MAAMI THAYIR SAADAM, MTS, for short, implores you to look beyond medals, nations, and winning!



Olympics fever has bitten MTS very badly, dear readers. She welcomes your queries and promises to do her best as an arm-chair critic with no particular expertise to boast of. After all, it is the world's biggest sporting extravaganza, and running is such a big part of it...

Dear MTS, who was the best Indian athlete of the Rio Olympics?
-Rabble rouser

MTS cannot make any jokes or snide remarks about all the young men and women who represented our country at the games. In fact, she will honestly admit to crying with a mixture of happiness and sadness pretty much every day. Hockey matches and muffed penalty shoot outs, rock steady archers, their fear hidden behind sunglasses, that young lady on the golf course, a wrestler and a badminton star both laid low by knee injuries, that feisty young man fighting tooth and nail for points on the badminton court, that bubbly guy sometimes in red sometimes in blue who gave us a lot of hope in the boxing rounds, everything, but everything, induced tears. How can one choose? All of them were fantastic, not the least, our medal winners and finalists, specially the women!!

Dear MTS, our runners all failed at the Olympics. We have no potential; all this about running in India picking up very well is all nonsense. Please don't disagree with me.

-Negative Ninny
Oh well. Not to disagree and all,

but our boys Thonnakkal Gopi and Kheta Ram were in the 25th and 26th position in the marathon, just ~7 mins behind the winner, champion Kenyan runner Eliud Kipchoge. Lalita Babar entered the 3000m steeplechase finals and stood a historic 10th in a very tough field, and set a national record. Dutee Chand fought a major legal battle to get a reversal on her suspension. A battle that has divided the world of women's sports, and is going to rear its ugly head again soon. Sure, we didn't have the Jamaican show on the track or the Kenyan domination in the longer distance events. But MTS is hopeful, and of course she disagrees with you! As always!

Dear MTS, a question for you that is doing the rounds on social media. Would you accept it if your child's ambition were to be a professional sportsperson?

-Genuinely Concerned Indian
Ah well! Olympians, barring a handful of stalwarts, are young people. Young people have to listen to their parents. Young people are dreamers. Parents are dream quashers. Well played, indeed, MTS has no answer to this question.

After many decades, MTS had the opportunity to really follow the Olympics, it was really thrilling to note down the line-up of events for the day. There were so many lovely athletes to watch for, Indian or not. Most of all, the run-

ners, so very economical and fluid in their movements, every one of them. Winning medals and earning points and accolades for your country is always a great thing, but the spirit of the Olympics and Olympians was always meant to go beyond that. The refugee team, with their heart-breaking tales of overcoming loss; that lone woman, Sarah Attar, from Saudi Arabia in the marathon; Abbey D'Agostino who limped to the finish line with a broken ankle after helping a fellow athlete in the 5000m heats; Vinish Phogat who had to be stretchered out after that horrifying knee injury – these are the stories – the ones that display the strength of human character – more than the world records or gold medals – that stay in MTS' memory.

These are the stories we must tell our children... Sure, it's only fitting that one succumbs to the mass hysteria caused by Sakshi, Sindhu and Dipa, with their scintillating performances at the world stage. The grit, determination, and yes, that lost quality, grace, that these young girls demonstrated at Rio was spectacular to watch. Not to mention Bombayla, Atanu, Krishan, Srikanth and others who brought hope to our hearts and tears in our eyes whenever we saw the tricolour on their uniforms. But MTS implores you to look beyond medals, nations, and winning!

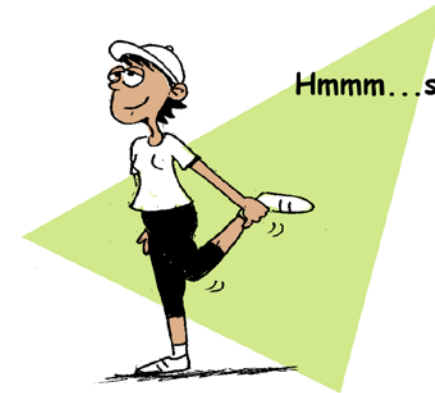
May the spirit of the Olympics live long! Over and out! ■

Metaphors

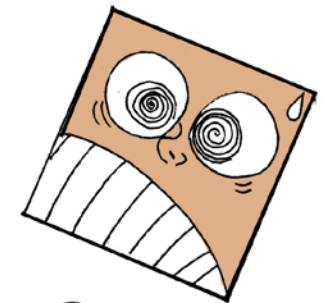
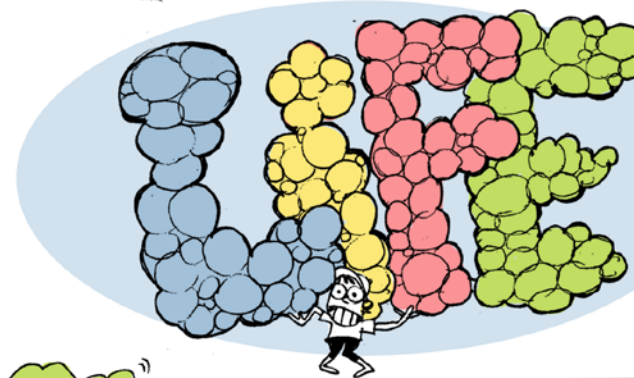
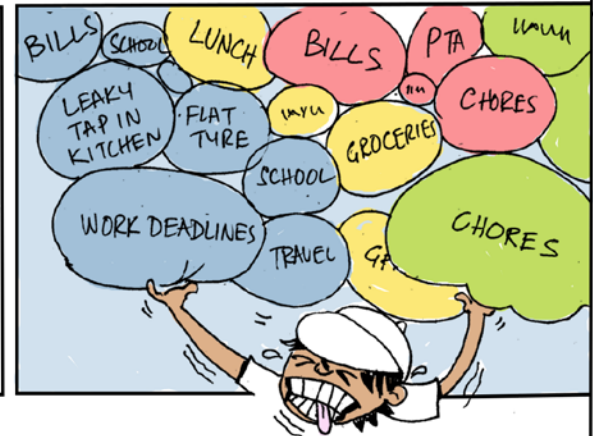
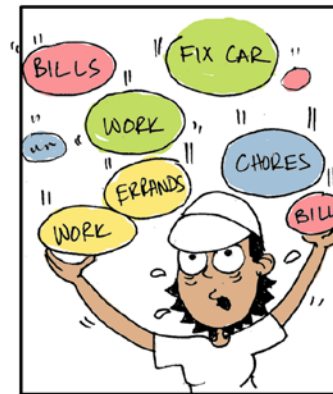
by Lavanya Karthik



They say running is the greatest metaphor for life.



...while life is...



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LESSONS IN METRICS!

Harish Lakshman shifts focus this column to allowing us to understand and appreciate the nuances of advanced running metrics and points us in the direction of wearable devices in the market that are packed with these features...



Now, for gadget geeks - like me - out there, buying that "perfect" wearable device is only a job half-finished. The remaining is to actually use some of the advanced metrics that these devices are capable of. For that, we need to understand what some of these metrics are. This article will cover some of the popular metrics that are measured in all the latest Garmin GPS watches as well as a few others.

VO2 Max

VO2 max is a measure of the maximum volume of oxygen that an athlete can use. It is measured in millilitres per kilogramme of body weight per minute (ml/kg/min).

As you increase your effort when you exercise, the amount of oxygen you consume to produce energy (and hence the rate at which you exhale carbon dioxide) increases. However, there is a maximum level of oxygen consumption, beyond which increase in exercise intensity doesn't lead to further increase in oxygen consumption. This level of oxygen consumption is called the VO2 max. (The initials simply stand for volume of oxygen.)

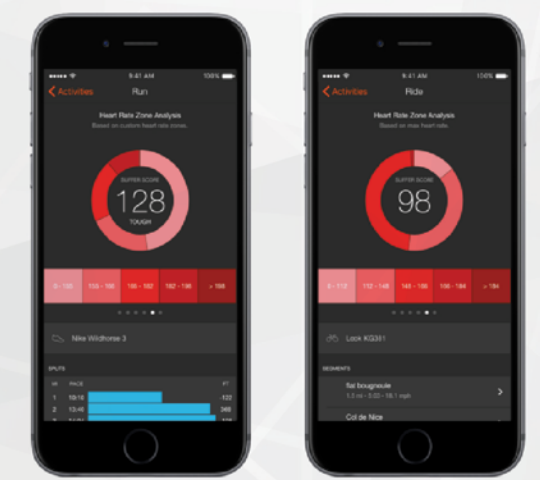
Some experts believe that VO2 max is a key physiological determinant of an athlete's running performance, and that it is an important objective of a training programme and therefore performance. Other sports scientists argue that the limits to an athlete's running performance are determined by a range of factors — adaptation of muscles, running efficiency, metabolism — and that VO2 max is simply a measure of the oxygen that the athlete consumes at the maximum level of energy output.

Regardless, it is definitely a metric worth tracking over time (over a few months rather than days or weeks) to see how you are improving. Some of the watches that include this feature are Garmin — 230, 235, 735xt, 630, 920xt. Some of the Tomtom and Suunto models also have this feature. The Fitbit Surge, another decent watch for runners, has a feature call "Cardio Fitness Score" which is similar to VO2 max.



Fitbit Surge

Strava suffer score



Strava Suffer Score

The Strava Suffer Score is an analysis of your heart rate data and is available on Strava as a Premium feature. By tracking your heart rate through the run and its level relative to your maximum heart rate, Strava arrives at a value to show exactly how hard you worked. The more time you spend going full gas and the longer you ride, the higher the score. Compare your Suffer Score with friends and pros, and see if you can do a truly epic ride and motivate yourself to push that extra bit harder! The Suffer Score is inspired by the concept of TRIMP (TRaining IMPulse) developed by Dr Eric Bannister.

Activities with a Suffer Score of 100 to 150 will be classified as "tough"; those with a Suffer Score of 151 to 250 are "Extreme"; and those with a suffer Suffer Score above 250 are "Epic". Strava Suffer Score is a free download for most of the recent Garmin watches including the Garmin 230, 235. You can download it from the Garmin App Store — <https://apps.garmin.com/en-US/>. While the value can be seen on the watch during the run, if you want the data to be stored and viewed, compared, etc, you need to sign up for the Premium version of Strava for a monthly fee.

garmin 735XT



Ground contact time

Another smart stat you can use to improve your form is Ground Contact time. It is the amount of time during your running that your foot is on the ground rather than flying through the air.

Measured in milliseconds, a typical runner will have a ground contact time that falls somewhere in the 160-300 milliseconds range. Talented types like Mo Farah and the Geoffrey Mutai spend about 190-milliseconds in contact with the ground each step.

Ideally, you should have a pretty symmetrical running form. It's something closely linked to cadence as well, so as cadence increases, your ground contact time decreases and you should be running quicker. Reducing the ground contact time can also reduce the risk of injury.

So how do you reduce ground contact? There are a few things you can work at like shortening stride length. This is the length of your stride from one footfall to the next. You can also focus on strengthening glutes and adding some sprint training to your routine.

Both Vertical Oscillation and Ground Contact Time can be measured in the advanced Garmin watches like 630, 920XT, 735 XT, Fenix 3, to name a few.

Vertical oscillation

Watch any professional runner in action and you'll notice that there's very little movement in their upper body. Their top half glides almost like a swan while their legs do all the work under the surface. One measure of this optimum running efficiency is called vertical oscillation and shows the degree of 'bounce' in your running motion. This bounce is measured in centimetres from a fixed point on your body. In the case of GPS running watches, this tends to be a sensor built into the heart rate chest-strap. Typical oscillation is between 6cm and 13cm with the Paula Radcliffes of this world moving at the lower end of that scale. So why is it useful to be able to monitor vertical oscillation? Well, it's all to do with running efficiency and not wasting energy as you put in the miles. Ideally, you'll want to reduce that 'bounce' and that's closely linked to increasing cadence, which we'll talk about next.



garmin 630

Photo Courtesy: Internet

Lactate Threshold

Simply put, Lactate Threshold is the line between aerobic and anaerobic running. For most runners, the aerobic zone doesn't begin until around 120 [heart] beats per minute. That's the beginning of your aerobic training zone. The end of your pure aerobic training zone would be your lactate threshold.

Lactate threshold is the exercise intensity at which lactate (lactic acid) starts to accumulate in the bloodstream. When a runner exceeds the threshold, fatigue starts to increase at an accelerating rate. For experienced runners, the threshold occurs at approximately 90% of their maximum heart rate and between 10k and half marathon race pace. For average runners, the lactate threshold often occurs well below 90% of maximum heart rate.

Knowing your lactate threshold can help you determine how hard to train or when to push yourself during a race. During training, it is recommended that you do several of your runs at or slightly above the Lactate Threshold heart rate or pace. This will improve your threshold. Some of the latest advanced Garmin watches can measure your Lactate Threshold. They are Garmin - 630, Fenix 3 and Genix 3 HR and 735XT.



Fenix 3

Cadence

Very simply, Cadence — also known as stride rate — is the number of steps a runner takes per minute (SPM). It's the most common metric used to measure running form and remains important for several reasons.

For starters, the shorter your stride length and the quicker your stride rate, the faster and better you run. If you have a low cadence, you are also likely to have a long stride. Runners who overstride tend to lock their knees and slam their heels to the ground on every step. This slows you down, creates a choppy, bouncy gait, and puts extra pressure on your muscles and bones, making you more susceptible to injury.

By increasing your cadence, you're doing more than moving your feet faster; you're changing the positioning of where your foot lands. Rather than having your foot land in front of your hips, with a higher cadence, it lands underneath you — in your center of gravity. This naturally decreases your stride length and increases your turnover, which means you're wasting less energy moving up and down (from the ground to the air and vice versa). Your body is focussed on moving forward, thereby making you faster. Professional athletes have a cadence upwards of 180 steps per minute (spm). All runners should work towards a cadence of above 170 spm. Cadence is measured by most of the Garmin running watches including the 230, 235, 630, 920XT, 735XT. Some of the Suunto models also have this feature.

garmin 920XT

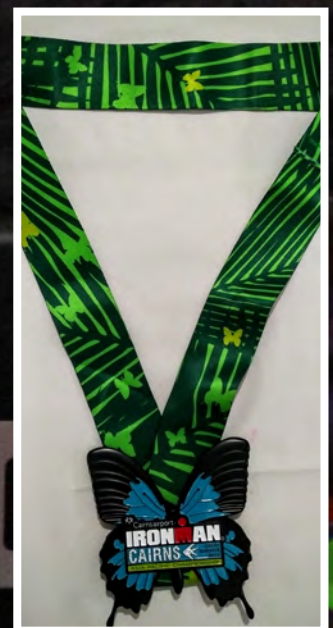
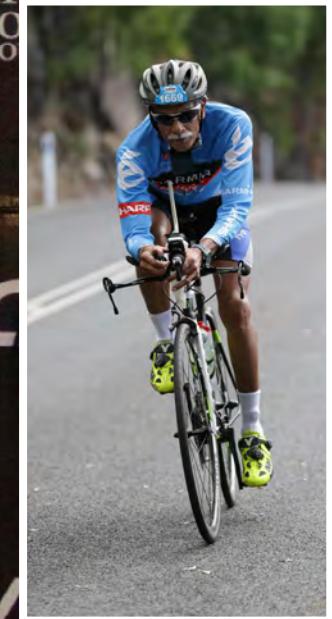


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“THINK ON YOUR FEET”

A goosebump-worthy personal account of how Chennai-based veteran runner, *Arun Krishnan*, made it, in the nick of time, at the Ironman Cairns, Australia, to be pronounced, “Ironman”

I shall relate my saga of Ironman Cairns and trust that it inspires Runners to train effectively for their target distance.

An Ironman attempt requires 24 weeks of intensive training for the person to safely complete the 3.8K swim in open water, 180K of cycling and finally a 42.2K run all within the time limit of 16 hours, 30 minutes. I had realized the importance of planning much earlier on while training to be a scuba diver, where the mantra is: plan your dive and dive your plan. *So it helps to devise a plan, jot it down either on paper or in an electronic format, stick to it, review it periodically and be prepared to revise it, if required.*

TRAINING COMPLETE. LET US MOVE ON TO D DAY.

Sunday, June 12, 2016, started early though not particularly auspiciously, with rain, muddying up the swim and bike start at Palm Cove, Cairns, Australia. I had chosen to swim with the slowest group and therefore 35 minutes had lapsed after the professional triathletes had been flagged off, before we crossed the timing mat and plunged into the waves for our 3.8K swim.

Initially the going was good. I passed a few competitors. But towards the end of the second lap, the rain came pelting down and with it, the Pacific Ocean rolled and swelled. At one point the swell was almost 2 meters high, which was a cause for concern.

AT TIMES OF STRESS, THE AXIOM IS 'DO NOT PANIC. REMAIN CALM'.

I literally weathered the storm. Overall my timing of 1 hour 38 minutes for the swim leg of 3.8K, wasn't too bad considering the conditions.

The bike leg spanning 180K was the one I had trained for, the most. I passed quite a few competitors and had the pleasure of hearing my name being called out by announcers when I crossed a timing mat.

"Arun Krishnan from India"! It had a nice ring to it.

Then I heard the ringing sound of a hammer striking metal which seemed odd on a Sunday. Initially, I'd thought the noises were from a nearby construction site only to realize to my horror, that it was emanating from my bike. I decided that I had to reduce speed, smoothen my pedal strokes. hope and pray that the bike made it to finish of the bike leg. After what seemed like an eternity, I saw the sign of a transition area — T2 — and gladly handed my bike over to be racked. It was with dismay that I realized that as against the planned duration of 6 hours 15 minutes for the bike ride of 180K, I had used up 7 hours 53 minutes and was just about within the cut-off time for the bike leg.

I knew that I had to make up the time lost on the bike segment by running hard right throughout the 42.2K race. But the stress and duress of limping the bike home all the while dreading that it would break down had taken its toll. I cramped up! Bananas and electrolyte helped relieve the spasms. On the last loop of 14.2K, I knew that I was behind

the clock and that there was every chance of me being ordered off the course for not making the intermediate cut-offs. A volunteer by the name Nick told me that by his reckoning, I was 3 minutes behind the cut-off mark. I did what years of training had taught me: **LENGTHEN STRIDE; RUN TRUE AND STRAIGHT, PAYING NO HEED TO PAIN.**

Nick kept me abreast of my timing. I had made up two minutes. But I simply had to make the cut-off at a penultimate timing mat which was 4K away from the finish. This was it. I gave it all, cramps or no cramps. Nick and two other volunteers were looking intently at the monitor connected to the timing mat.

"Mate. You made that timing mat with 20 seconds to spare," they said to me, later!

Australians compete hard and seemed to respect those who fight hard. The support from the crowd, was unbelievable. It seemed as if each one of them was pushing me to the finish with their encouragement.

I could scarcely believe my eyes, when I entered the finish chute. The officials had formed a guard of honour by lining up on either side with their arms forming an arch. I ran through exchanging high-fives and onto the timing mat recording 16 hours 27 minutes 35 seconds and heard the magic words "Arun Krishnan. You are an Ironman."

If there is a lesson to be learnt from this ordeal: Think on your feet and never give up! ■

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