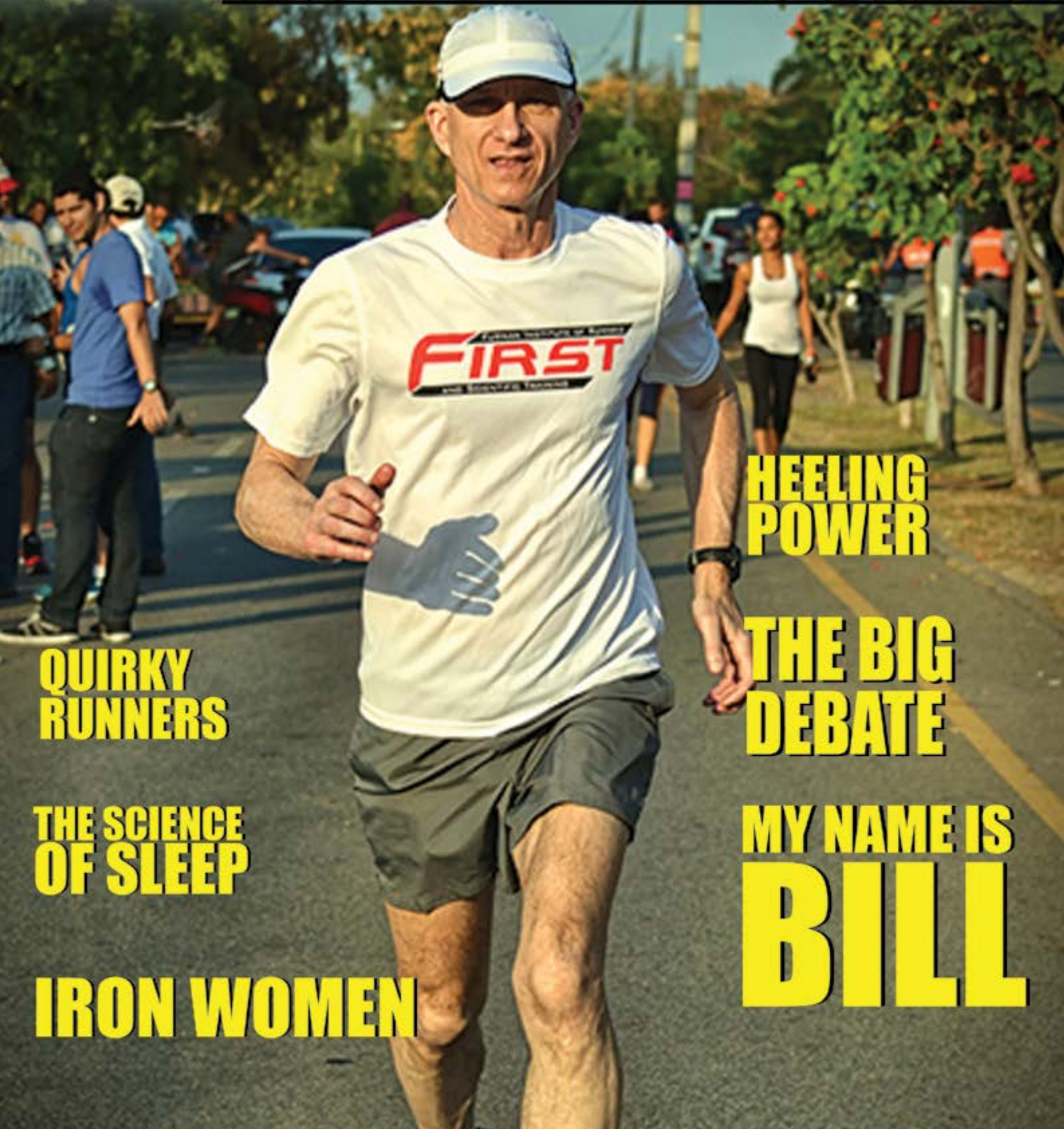


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# THE RUNDOWN

AN INITIATIVE OF THE CHENNAI RUNNERS

ISSUE #5 SEPTEMBER 2014



**QUIRKY  
RUNNERS**

**THE SCIENCE  
OF SLEEP**

**IRON WOMEN**

**HEELING  
POWER**

**THE BIG  
DEBATE**

**MY NAME IS  
BILL**

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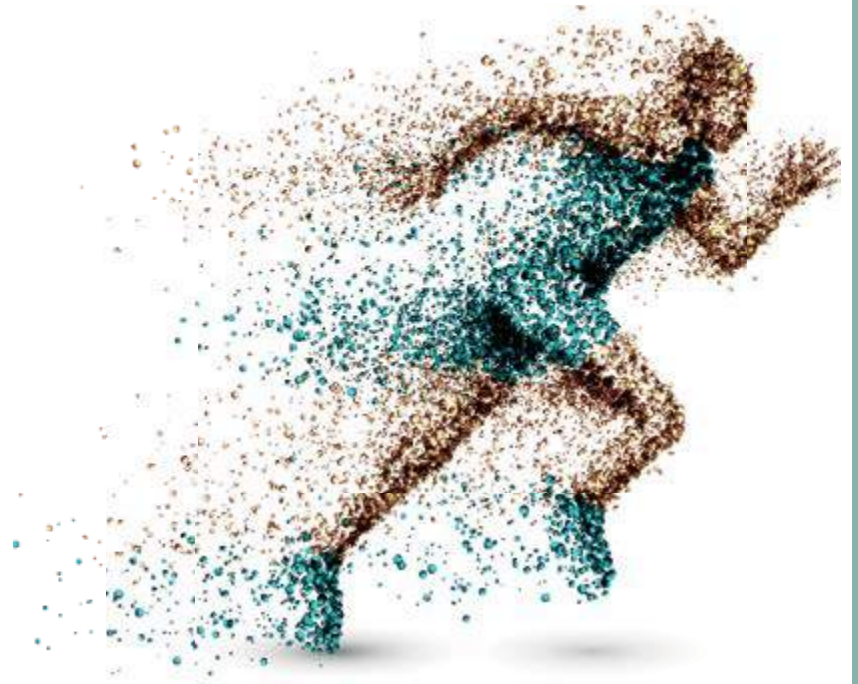
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**THE**  
**RUNDOWN**  
AN INITIATIVE OF THE CHENNAI RUNNERS

*Dear Reader,*

**I**t's starting to cool off in Chennai but in the superfast-growing world of Chennai Runners, the heat is on! We are talking about The Wipro Chennai Marathon (TWCM) '14. A whole bunch of folks have – over the last two months or so – been burning the midnight oil in an effort to raise the event's own bar – more participation, better processes, unforgettable experiences, everlasting memories! I particularly like the word experience in the context of running because after all, that is what running is about; for some, it is about soaking in the experiences of the outside world, while for some others, it is about shutting out all external stimuli and venturing into a quiet, inward journey! That's also the beauty of running; the fact that it is so personal.



Among the many questions Team Chennai Runners and The Rundown's Editorial team asked Bill Pierce – who is also on the cover in this issue – there's one that remains with me. As a supercoach and having run professionally for almost four decades, Bill responded to my question about running alone vs running with company, with a simple answer, “Both, and equally.” When I drove home after that interview – you must know, that he took time off to meet a few of us, at Lemon Tree (Chennai), before breakfast and a morning flight, and answered all our many questions with a sense of calm – I wondered about how running is really a reflection of life; learning to live alone is as important as co-existence, and in harmony!

I must, on behalf of The Rundown's Editorial team and the Chennai Runners, thank the Hyderabad Runners and Runners For Life (RFL) for their support in allowing us to meet and spend quality time with Bill Pierce and understand, first-hand, the premise of his running principles and philosophy. Collaborative efforts like these, we believe, are the way forward in making the running world, truly flat!

Another interesting dimension of this edition is a section called Point/Counterpoint wherein two runners – one from Chennai, and another from Delhi – present their points of view on the idea of paid races and running events that are increasingly growing in popularity. This column will find an extension on Facebook ([Facebook.com/TheRundown](https://www.facebook.com/TheRundown)), and we are hoping, all of you, runners, and observers of the running world, will take time off to share your points of view on this forum so real interaction and conversations happen!

Personally, I have a soft spot for our opening feature – Quirky Runners – that is a compilation of photographs that allows you a glimpse into the other side of runners; you see, runners like to have fun too! Yet another inspirational story is A Magic Wand Called Running, the finale of this edition, penned by Major D P Singh. He sent us his column from Canada, where he is away on a vacation. Boy! What a story! Thank you, Major Singh, for letting us into your life, its struggles and allowing us to feel your positive energy through your words... There's more... Tell us what you think!

*Editor*



*Hello everyone!*

**Y**ou now have the third edition of this year's The Rundown in your hand. It is hard to believe that almost ten months of this year has gone by. So much has happened since the beginning of this year. Your club, The Chennai Runners continues to grow by leaps and bounds. Some highlights below!

Under the umbrella of the club, as of today we have over 12 distinct groups of runners that get together for a morning run in various areas of the city and beyond! The "Chapters", as we refer to them, are being led by an enthusiastic gang of co-ordinators who are doing a terrific job in spreading the gospel of running. The interesting aspect of this "viral infection" is that it has been largely through word-of-mouth. In fact many of them are celebrating their one year anniverseries this year and it is hard to believe their tremendous growth within a short span of 12 months!

After a lot of efforts, false starts, ups and downs, our new website—[www.chennairunners.com](http://www.chennairunners.com) is up and running. This is just a start and we have more plans for this property of ours. You will see more improvements and enhancements in the coming months.

Thanks to your efforts, the number of running related events in the city has exploded. In the month of September alone in Chennai, we had an event every weekend. Our club members have played an active role in helping the organisers and ensuring the success of these events. The same is true for races outside the city. We played a key role in the organisation of The Nellai Marathon in July and our sister club, Kovai Runners is gearing up for its second marathon event scheduled for the first week of October.

Our bi-weekly column in The Hindu's Metroplus under a series called Road Runner has been hugely popular. Our team of volunteer writers has been sharing their thoughts on various topics of interest to runners like nutrition, strength training, appropriate gear, safety of women runners, etc.

A dedicated team of volunteers has been burning the midnight oil for the past four months, gearing up towards our flagship event scheduled for December 7—The Wipro Chennai Marathon (TWCM). The registration list is swelling, sponsors and partners are coming on board and the social, print and other media are buzzing in anticipation of this marquee event. The coming two months are going to be even more busy for this group and we need all your support in making this event a grand success!

If you have any comments or feedback on the club and what we else we could do to spread the gospel of running, please feel free to drop a note to [info@chennairunners.com](mailto:info@chennairunners.com).

*Krishna Kumar  
President  
Chennai Runners*



Photo: Nithin Kunde



## 10 IT'S A WRAP

Runners are a quirky lot! See to believe...

## 13 INTERVIEW

Women of the Half Iron Triathlon tell us how they did it

## 22 CELEB SPEAK

Bill Pierce and all that there is to know about him

## 29 POINT: COUNTERPOINT

Two runners opine on the race culture in India



## 32 PROFILE

How he quit a job, to run, and make others run too

## 34 CROSS-TRAINING

Shake a leg, runner buddies

## 38 NUTRITION

... really; here, there's no beating around the bush

## 40 HEALTH

Quality and quantity are both integral, says our sleep specialist



## 42 LOL

.. And that vicious cycle

## 44 MR KNOW IT ALL

..Rann, Forest Rann!

## 45 DOC TALK

All about Plantar Fasciitis

## 47 GIZMOSIS

The latest gizmos in the market for us runners

## 49 LAST WORD

... A column by Major D P Singh



## >>>> OUR CONTRIBUTORS



**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/>. A lifelong couch potato, she began running mostly to try and understand what the fuss was all about - two years later, she is hooked. Running remains a challenge and she is still muddling her way through with absolutely no goals, mantras or success to report— other than the sheer pleasure of hitting the track and seeing how far her feet can take her.

**ASHWIN PRABHU** discovered the joys of distance running ten 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. His dream is to run all the World Marathon Majors before he turns 40 (he's halfway there, in terms of number of races, not age!) and to then go and discover a completely new sport of which he knows nothing about.



**HARISH LAKSHMAN** is currently a Managing Director at the Rane Group. He has a Bachelor's degree from BITS Pilani and has acquired a Master's degree in Business from Purdue University. Prior to joining Rane, he worked at TRW Inc in the USA for two years. He is also currently the President of the Auto Component Manufacturers Association (ACMA). His fitness journey started with swimming about six years ago. He started running about four years ago. He has also been a regular at the Quad for the last three years now. He has completed three full marathons and several half marathons.

**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 (BCCI) for South India and the Sports Medicine Specialist for the Chennai Super Kings, IPL team. He is also the Medical Specialist for The Tamil Nadu Cricket Association, The Tamil Nadu Basketball Association. He is also the Sports Medical Advisor to the Sports division of various banks and Public Sector companies based in Tamil Nadu.



**PREETI AGHALAYAM**, Professor, IIT Madras is passionate about running, writing, teaching, and Math, among other things. A member of the Chennai Runners core team, she has been a contributing author at The Rundown in previous editions as well. This avid runner is training currently for several half and full marathon appearances in the upcoming months. She lives with an exercise-freak of a husband and ten-year old daughter, and hopes she could have more than 24 hours in a day so she can write more!

**RAJ GANPATH** is a fitness and nutrition expert, public speaker and entrepreneur. Noted for his passionate, no-nonsense approach to healthy living, Raj has helped transform numerous lives for the better.







**RAVI MUNDOLI'S** ancestors are from Trichur, but he considers himself mostly a Vizagite. He decanted into Madras via a somewhat torturous route involving stops at IIT-M, Amherst, Boston and Hyderabad. Once here, in Chennai, in a moment of insanity, he founded Nadhi ([www.nadhi.in](http://www.nadhi.in)), which he helps run now. Or more accurately, it runs him now. His running career started with a bang, a full marathon in the US but he has since learned that ambition is the surest path to ruined sleep (much-prized) and so he consoles himself with a few sedate HMs (half marathons) every year. A wise old runner once told him that the best advise he could give was actually a Prabhu Deva homily from the mid-90s, "Take it easy." And he's been doing it religiously ever since.

**DR N RAMAKRISHNAN** is an American Board certified Sleep Medicine specialist who is currently a Senior Consultant in Sleep Medicine at Apollo Hospitals, Chennai and Director of Nithra Institute of Sleep Sciences. He is a past President of Indian Sleep Disorders Association and has several original research publications. He is a respected teacher and orator and is actively involved through print and visual media to create awareness on sleep problems.



**MAJOR DEVENDER PAL SINGH** is a Kargil war veteran. Injured badly in war to the tune of being declared dead, Major Singh has survived to shine as India's first amputee marathon runner. Popular as the Indian Blade runner, he has successfully completed 12 half marathons till date. He is also a double Limca holder and recently conquered the high altitude, cross country marathon in the Himalayas.

**RAHUL VERGHESE** started running by accident when posted in Chicago with Motorola, on a treadmill in his basement during the long Chicago winter. He ran the Chicago Marathon in 2001 and since then has been hooked onto running. He has completed 50 marathons across six continents since—the 50th—starting from Mt Everest Base Camp. He switched gears from his 25-year marketing career with Unilever, Nestle, a garment firm and Motorola, to set up Running And Living Infotainment, in an attempt to make running a fun and engaging marketing platform. They now organise 30 runs across ten states a year, and want to inspire 200m people to start running and help organisers in various locations with inputs on managing their runs.



**SHANTHI BALSUBRAMANIAN** is a technical writer by profession. She is an avid walker and took to running after her husband began pursuing running seriously. Apart from merely running, Shanthi enjoys volunteering at, writing about and simply witnessing running events.



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# QUIRKY

# RUNNERS

Preeti Aghalayam and Soundarya Srinivasan sieve through runs in the recent past and pick the best from the rest

Who says runners are just like the boy/girl next door? On the contrary, we argue that runners are a unique species altogether. In our biased opinion, they are a more evolved one of course, capable of waking up at 3am, willing to travel thousands of kilometers just to participate in a race (that they are almost certain to not win), feeling happy when it rains and the track is soft and slushy, well the list is endless.

some runner quirks – as seen in various races of the recent past- the Dream Runners Half Marathon on June 22, the Airtel Hyderabad Marathon on August 25, the Sriram Properties Bengaluru, Promo (12 hour) run on August 2012, and the Chennai Trail Marathon on September 7.

The joy is writ large on their faces as they conquer long distances in high heat and humidity, on city roads and uneven rural trails, and emerge victorious at the finish line. They earn medals and pats on the back from friends and family for their efforts. These moments during their journey are sure to capture your hearts as they have ours!

The summer of 2014 saw an explosion of running events across India. In Bengaluru, Satara, Mumbai, Chennai, Mysore, Hyderabad, and Delhi, brave souls clipped on bibs and ran – on roads, in stadiums, and on trails and hills, braving the sun. In this feature, we capture



Imagine running for 12 hours on a 400m track! Now imagine doing that barefoot, and wearing only your customary khadi! The Hubli Express was in his element at this run in Bengaluru, conquering kms and winning hearts as usual!



Photo: Vivek Harinarayan

A mridangam maestro cannot resist a bald head, they say. Give them 50 full K together and see the magic ensue! The Chennai Trail Marathon presented the perfect foil for such indulgences to these natural born runners!





Photo: Veloscope

Volunteers are the heart of any event, and their tireless support goes a long way in making race day experiences more pleasant. This water spray is a simple way to feel blissful (albeit for a few seconds!) on our sweaty journey!



We suggest an award for this guy! “The sun was burning my (bare) back,” he said, haggled with a roadside vendor, and bought this umbrella at the 30th km. Talk about finishing a full marathon in style!



Photo: Chennai Trail Marathon Organising Team

Running comes just so naturally to children. It’s how they move from place to place. The Chennai Trail Marathon (CTM) at Cholavaram lake saw TWCM (The Wipro Chennai Marathon) champion runner, Indresh Dhiraj receive some lessons in joyful running from her young child!





“Shoes are for wimps,” this intrepid runner and triathlete seems to say, as she chooses to let her feet enjoy nature’s beauty straight and unencumbered.



From dancing to playing percussion to virtually bathing at the hydration spots, runners seem to have taken their craziness to new heights this summer! We hope you enjoyed these moments, here’s two thumbs-up to all the event organisers, volunteers, and participants, and a special one to the photographers who captured these for posterity!



# IRON WOMEN

Say hello to three women from Chennai, proud finishers of the Half Iron Triathlon organised by the Chennai Trekking Club at Otiambakkam (on the outskirts of Chennai). They allow us a glimpse into their work, workout routine, personal life, their personality, their attitude and their aspirations. *Akhila Krishnamurthy* records Deepa Bharathkumar, Krithika Chidambaram and Subathra Jeyaram's responses...



L to R: Krithika Chidambaram, Subathra Jeyaram, Deepa Bharathkumar



Photos: Swetha Joyson





**"I do train very consistently but I let things unfold on race day"**

*- Deepa Bharathkumar*

**I**n the fast-growing running world of Chennai, Deepa Bharathkumar is easily a star. At the helm of Marina Minnals, one of the many chapters of the Chennai Runners, Deepa wears many hats, and with élan. An architect and interior designer, Deepa is also a hands-on mother of "two delightful boys". Fitness is really in her DNA. She remembers that as a young child, "we were not given our morning cup of milk unless we had brushed, made our beds, and done our Surya Namaskars. For me, it is still that way: fitness is as regular and as essential a part of my day as is brushing. I don't know of any other way to live". Her current state-of-mind, she says, is, "I can do anything I set my mind on."





**What was the trigger for you to sign up for the Half Iron triathlon on July 13, 2014?**

I would place the blame squarely on the spirit of participation. When Peter Van Geit of the Chennai Trekking Club sends out a call for registration for these amazing events, I cannot deal with myself for not participating. Just consider how fortunate one has to be to even think about participating in an event like this; one needs to have the physical endurance and mental determination. One needs to have the support and encouragement of family and friends. One needs the time and bandwidth to be able to train. One needs to be able to purchase lots of training gear. One needs the opportunity and the forum that an event like this offers. If I were fortunate enough to have all these puzzle pieces in place, and yet didn't participate, I would truly be a miserable person.

**We are curious about the process behind your achievement; tell us about it...**

In a way, I had unknowingly begun training for the Half Iron level when I signed up for the Olympic level in the spring of 2013. I have always been a consistent swimmer and cyclist; running is something that I took up training for only after I registered

for the Olympic triathlon last year. I have been running consistently for 18 months since, and have finished a few half marathons and one full marathon. Now that I was able to run longer distances, I felt I could attempt the triathlon at a level one rung above the Olympic.

**Do you remember how the actual event day was like? Did it go the way you wanted it to?**

Yes, but mostly because I did not get into the Otiambakkam quarry-lake with a very rigid or specific race strategy or plan in mind. I had only one strategy: 'Just finish it'. Even in hindsight, it was an excellent strategy. As it was my first race at this level, everything that happened on that day was a new experience, physically as well as mentally, and I allowed myself to just soak it up. So when most swimmers were swimming freestyle and getting ahead of my slower breast-stroke, I didn't fret. When the head-winds on the bicycle ride back, just 3K to the lake, the running location, were so strong that I felt I was riding a stationary bicycle, I told myself only one thing: 'Don't you dare put your feet down, just stay in the saddle, just keep on pedalling!'. When I ran-walked the slowest half marathon I have ever

run, I was thinking: 'Ah, so this is what happens to a tired Deepa at 36 °C in the hot sun'. It was really an experiment in which I was my own Guinea Pig; and now I know.

**Were you very hard on yourself? Or are you sort the who likes to take things things as they come?**

The latter; but not in a lazy sort of way. I do believe in the 'train hard, race easy' cliché. I do train very consistently but I let things unfold on race day.

**How much of the triathlon is a mind game? How do you train your mind?**

Assuming you have the wherewithal to swim, bicycle and run the target distances, the triathlon is definitely something you have to psych yourself into. Physical training is an absolute must, no doubt, but in addition, it is equally necessary to get into the zone and see yourself breasting the finish ribbon a few weeks before the event. Find an assertive mantra that you can hypnotise yourself with, something along the lines of 'I can do this. I feel strong'. Because no matter how hard one trains, there are going to be moments in the race when exterior factors like heat or head-winds or some such bog you down, and you have to depend on your mental strength to carry you over



those lonely miles.

**Are you inherently competitive? Who are you competing with?**

I am not competitive in an aggressive sort of way. For example, while I often got selected to sports teams during school days, I got chided by my coaches for being too soft on opposition team members just as often. If I can look in the mirror and feel I am doing all I can, I am content.

**Having completed the triathlon, would you encourage more women to attempt it?**

I have been fortunate to have had an upbringing which never allows the fact that I am a woman come in the way of any decision that I make. I would absolutely encourage more women—and men—to attempt a triathlon. Take swimming lessons. Get into the saddle once a week. Attempt the Enticer or Sprint level events, gain confidence before you attempt the advance levels.

**Will you give it a shot, again, some place else?**

Yes.



Photos: PVS Kumar



**“The triathlon is a 50:50 body-mind game”**

- Krithika Chidambaram

**B**orn and raised in Tamil Nadu's Trichy district, 24-year-old Porkodiyal (known better as Krithika) Chidambaram moved to Chennai to start a professional career. An iOS application developer, Krithika admits she always was a lover of the outdoors; “I love adventure, I don't like to be idle” but until she shifted based to Chennai, she had little exposure to fitness and sport. Today, fitness is “as much a part of my life as food and sleep are”, she says. When she is not working or working out or hanging out with friends, you can find her volunteering at an NGO called MAD (Making a Difference) where she teaches young children from shelter homes to read and write...

Photo: M. Prabhu





### *A typical day in your life...*

My day begins at 4am. I finish my workout and head to office; I get home at 8pm and go to bed by 10pm. Over weekends, other than a workout, I like to hang out with friends and I also do voluntary work for an NGO called MAD (Make A Difference).

### *What does fitness mean to you?*

Fitness is as much a part of my life as food and sleep are. I love to stay fit; and I don't only mean physical fitness. Being fit mentally is also very important.

### *Do you remember how you felt the day you finished the Half Iron triathlon?*

I always feel great when I reach the finish line! There are always friends cheering along, re-inforcing my belief in myself. I participated in the 400K Brevet this July; it was conducted by the Madras Randonneurs. The ride was quite challenging. The head-winds, the elevation, having to ride continuously without sleep or food and very little energy made the ride extremely gruelling. I was determined though to complete the ride on time (27 hours being the cut-off time). I was confident that I would make it. The moment I reached the finish line, I just burst into happy tears. I had survived the 27-hour challenge! I can now say with pride that I'm the second girl in Chennai to finish the 400BRM. My friends welcomed me with a garland, and that only made the event even more memorable.

### *Do you feel exhausted after a challenge of this sort?*

I don't think I've ever felt exhausted during/after an event. I'm inherently a very active person. To give you an example, in July this year, I did a 200K Brevet one day; the next day I ran the DRHM (Dream Runners Half Marathon). Perhaps, I need to do more to overcome what has become a sort of a saturation point.

### *Personally, what do achievements like*

### *these mean to you?*

Challenges like these have become a passion. A part of my life. If I achieve something or reach some point that I've always aimed for, I will extend my goal and keep going. And this doesn't affect my daily life/career. I wish I could continue this way, forever!

### *What really prompted you to sign up for the Half Iron triathlon?*

In July last year, I went on a trek to Nagala. I didn't know to swim at that point. I was extremely jealous of all my friends who spent the entire day in the pool. I got back and decided to learn to swim. Next day, I joined a crash course that taught swimming in 30 days. After that, to stay fit, I started running (initially, 2K and slowly increasing the distance). One day, I read about the Chennai Trail Marathon (CTM) and decided to give it a shot. It was the first marathon I participated in. I haven't stopped since.

### *Do you have a fixed training regimen?*

To tell you the truth, I regret that I don't train hard enough. I work for an IT company and I don't go to bed as early as I should be and that naturally affects my training. But when I do, this is my schedule every week: 1 day of strength training, 1 day of interval training, 1 day of cycling, two or three days of running and one day to rest.

### *Are you very hard on yourself when challenges like these are around the corner?*

Never. I always listen to my body! Health is as important as training. I don't overdo things. I like to do things at the pace that they should be done.

### *Being a good runner or being an ace swimmer is one thing; being good at all, quite another. How did you get here?*

I participated in the Olympic level triathlon (1.5K swim) three months after I learnt to swim. We had to swim in the open waters; I had never done

that before. I was a novice swimmer when I attempted my first triathlon; I must add that I'm still a novice. I'm not familiar with running either. I practised swimming a couple of weeks before the event and with loads of willpower and a truck full of support from friends, I managed to sail through.

### *Have you had to sacrifice a lot on the personal front to achieve these feats?*

Sometimes I sacrifice my sleep; I often miss the late night chatting sessions that girls in my hostel often indulge in. I miss watching movies late into the night on my laptop. I'm basically a night owl and challenges like these have forced me to re-work my sleep schedule. But I'm not complaining.

### *How much of the triathlon is a mind game? How do you train your mind?*

I believe in the saying, 'The body achieves what the mind believes'. For me, the triathlon is a 50-50 body-mind game. I have an awesome bunch of energetic friends; talking to them is enough to train my mind! They make me believe that I can achieve whatever I want to. What more do I need? I train my body, my friends train my mind. Simple!



Photo: Gowri Shankar

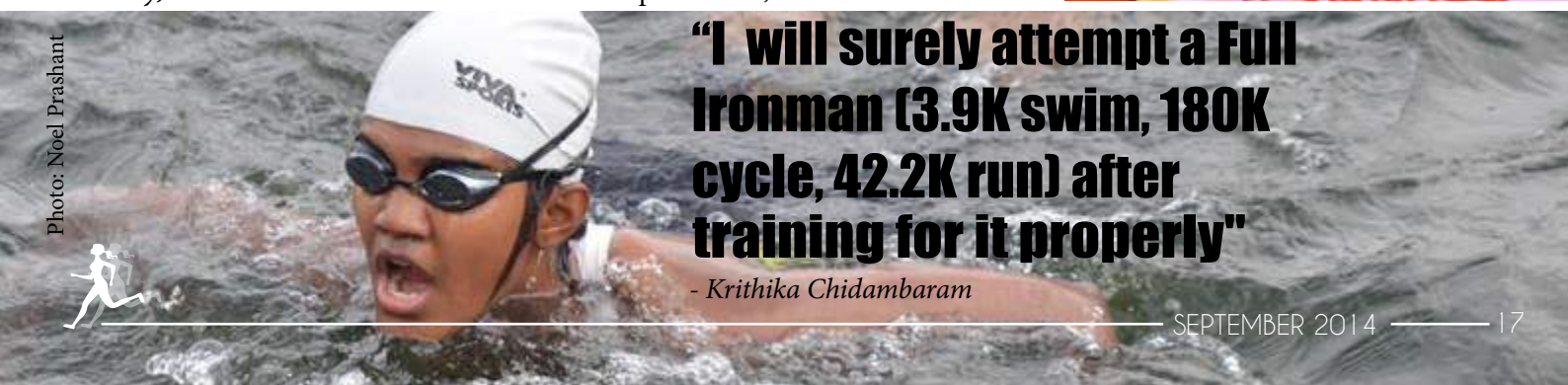



Photo: Noel Prashant

**"I will surely attempt a Full Ironman (3.9K swim, 180K cycle, 42.2K run) after training for it properly"**

- Krithika Chidambaram



**H**er day begins at the stroke of 3.30am and ends at 9.30pm. She finishes cooking before she heads out to her workout, which she says, most necessarily “needs to finish by 6.15am” so “I am back to be able to get my son ready for school and myself, to work”. Oscillating—and with a sense of calm—between rushed and relaxed, Subathra Jeyaram, a Rhodes Scholar (India, 1999), who is a Psycho-oncologist, recently achieved a Super Randonnuer (SR) status. This is a self-supported long distance cycling event also called brevets conducted by the Audax Club Parisien (ACP), France. Riders ride through a particular route and reach pre-determined control points within specified time limits. In order to achieve this, one must complete 200, 300, 400 and 600K distances within a calendar year (November to October). What keeps her going? “You see, endurance is an addictive sport. It is hard to let go.”



**“ I am competing  
to know my limits”**

*- Subathra Jeyaram*



**Do you remember the exact feeling/sentiment you experienced when you touched the finish line on March 30, 2014? Who/what did you think of?**

Okay, I'm going to disappoint you here. There was no feeling when I crossed the finish line. My mind was blank, body was numb. It took a while for all the euphoria to set in. Friends had come to see me finish and I was most happy to see them. An endurance event of this nature is a lonely journey (about 9 plus hours) and one has exhausted thoughts and lived and re-lived the finish much before the actual finish.

**Were you exhausted, after? How did the day go by?**

Yes, I was exhausted and excited, still on a high from the race. I remember I had to drive back home in really bad traffic. When I reached home, my body was so stiff and my son told me I was walking like a robot. I showered and went to bed (it was late evening by then).

**Personally, what does this mean to you?**

Each stage of an endurance event has been a personal discovery. I'm learning more and more about myself, my strengths, my drawbacks, pushing my limits and I have been enjoying it or I wouldn't be doing it. I like to keep challenging myself and I'm really curious to know where I would max out.

**What really motivated you to sign up for this? Has it always been on your mind?**

No, I had never imagined myself doing triathlons or any endurance sport for that matter. I have been an athlete since school, a sprinter. I mostly did 100m distances and long jumps. The longest distance I had run in school was 400m

and the maximum distance I'd cycled was 4K. When I started running long distances, I remember telling myself I will only do 10K, but few weeks after my first official 10k I did my first half marathon and I was hooked to running. Triathlons particularly appealed to me because it breaks the monotony. There was no trigger, it was just serendipity.

**When and how did you begin training for the triathlon?**

The time I did my first full marathon and the Half Iron Triathlon (December, 2013) was actually a very hectic year, career-wise. I had three conferences (two international) from September to November, with a family holiday thrown in, so I was away from Chennai for the most part. I was training on and off with Team PASO (focussing on conditioning, core strengthening and speed work) and doing long runs whenever possible. I had put in more regular training earlier in the year with a couple of 10X10s (10K runs on 10 consecutive days), swimming and logged more saddle time. Plus I had done many events - a 200K brevet, many half marathons, few 100K cycling and individual and team time trails which collectively contributed to my preparation. The only triathlon specific training I did was brick workouts (doing two workouts in quick succession) which I did very regularly for three to four months before I began my travels.

**What is your training regimen like?**

I follow the 'less is more' style of training. I don't log in long hours of training or rather I can't due to my other commitments. I run, cycle, swim and do cross fit in a typical week. I train for specific events and I give equal if not

more focus on nutrition, recovery, sleep and planning. Being a control freak I like to plan all aspects of an event and think through and be prepared for potential challenges.

**Are you inherently competitive? Who are you competing with?**

Yes I'm competitive. I'm competing to know my limits.

**Did you have to make a lot of sacrifices on the personal front to achieve this?**

Yes, a lot of sacrifices - sleep, toe nails, tanning (my body looks like a ruled book with at least five different shades at any given time), scarring from blisters and chafing. Time spent with the family is compromised as weekends are best for longer training sessions. But I do take care to compensate and plan some weekends exclusively for family.

**Tell us about your support system; as a woman, particularly, was it tough?**

I'm not sure if I would have done any of this differently had I been a man. That said, I have an excellent support system. My husband gives in to all my craziness; he lets me be me, and helps me source running, swimming and cycling gear from wherever. I'm not the only crazy person in the family; my husband, sister and brother-in-law also run. My dad is also a Half Iron finisher. My son (seven), who is my biggest supporter, runs, cycles and swims and completed an Enticer triathlon (entry level) recently. He loves to talk and hear about my experiences and I hope he would enjoy these sports as he grows up.

**Your favourite mantra in the fitness context...**

'If I rest I rust' - Swami Chinmayananda.



Photos: Swetha Joyson and Vijay Anand S





YOU CAN'T FLY. YOU CAN'T LEVITATE. YOU CAN'T TOUCH YOUR NOSE WITH YOUR TONGUE. YOU CAN'T STOP A SNEEZE. YOU CAN'T SEE THROUGH WALLS. YOU CAN'T DO A ONE FINGER PUSH UP. YOU CAN'T READ MINDS. YOU CAN'T BE THE PRESIDENT OF AMERICA. YOU CAN'T SING. LIKE SPB. YOU CAN'T ROTATE ONE HAND ONE WAY AND THE OTHER THE OTHER WAY. YOU CAN'T RESIST PUPPIES. YOU CAN'T WALK ON WATER. BUT YOU CAN RUN.

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# MY NAME IS BILL

Legendary marathon coach, Professor William 'Bill' Pierce was in India recently on a whirlwind tour. Prof Pierce is Professor and Chair at the Health Sciences Department at the Furman Institute in Greenville, SC, USA. The Furman University is famous, among other things, for the FIRST (Furman Institute of Running and Scientific Training) programme. Bill is also well-known in running circles as co-author of the modern marathon training guide, *Run Less Run Faster (RLRF)*. *Preeti Aghalayam* and *Ashwin Prabhu* were privileged to spend time with him, picking his brain on various questions about running- and about Bill, the 'supercoach'—that have been plaguing our minds!





Photo Courtesy: Bill Pierce



*Bill Pierce running on Furman University campus with Dr Scott Murr, co-author of Run Less Run Faster*

**What can you tell us about the FIRST programme?**

The FIRST programme is highly effective for marathon training; it aims to trade volume and frequency for intensity, and is specifically designed to reduce orthopedic injuries. Since inception, it has grown in popularity worldwide, and a whole breed of runners have benefitted immensely from it.

**Is it only for elite athletes? Will other, recreational runners benefit from this type of training?**

The programme aims at assisting runners of all abilities reach their goals, not just Olympic level/elite athletes. In fact, it presents some particular advantages to busy people! Tens of thousands of people have used our programme effectively, staying injury-free, achieving their goals, running personal best times, and also in many instances, qualifying for the prestigious Boston Marathon. So do make sure to look into it yourself!

**What are the main elements of the programme?**

The FIRST programme focusses on quality over quantity; providing training runs (three key runs per week) at different paces and distances. The focus is on intensity, and a graded scientific sequence of runs, guaranteed to

improve running performance is envisaged.

**Is it a proven technique for marathon training?**

Yes, of course! Research studies indicate that with FIRST training, over three years, runners improved an average of 4% to 5% in - VO<sub>2</sub> Max, lactate threshold and running speed at VO<sub>2</sub> Max, which are the most important criteria determining running performance. 70% of the runners who participated reported improved personal best times! Plus, we have got literally thousands of messages from folks who have benefitted in one way or the other—in injury prevention, accommodating marathon training into busy lifestyles, and so on.

**We love the idea of three key runs plus 2 cross training workouts per week (see box). Which do you think is the most challenging workout of all?**

Of course, each of the three runs is equally important, as are the cross and strength training routines. Each has it's role in building running potential, and you cannot escape any of them. In my opinion, the Tempo run – in which you are never really at a comfortable pace; and don't get any Rest Intervals – is the one that you may work hardest at.

**That brings us to the cross training**

**workouts. There are many misconceptions about cross training. Can you tell us what counts, and what doesn't?**

I think it's very simple. In our programme, the cross training workouts (the plus 2 part of the 3+2 formula), are meant to be aerobic exercises that support the running. Cycling (indoor and outdoor), swimming, rowing, deep water running, are good examples. The Run Less Run Faster book provides a graded programme of cross training workouts that go alongside the 16-week marathon training routine, for example. Very long bike rides (such as the ones you do for Ironman training) don't fit very well into the routine, as the recovery from such rides may not be efficient. Sports like basketball don't work either as cross training components in the training programme, because the intensity is not easy to quantify, and the potential for injuries of various kinds is high. Yoga, p90x, cross fit routines, etc, are also not effective as the plus 2 part of the weekly exercise routine. So, your best bet is to figure out a good cycling, swimming, deep water running, or rowing routine!

**How about strength training? Should I bother? Doesn't the fact that I am running so much automatically bestow strength?**



Bill Pierce counselling a runner



Photos Courtesy: Bill Pierce

Bill Pierce teaching flexibility



Photo: Karthik Guruswami



Photo: Karthik Guruswami





In the FIRST programme, we recommend 'functional strength training' alongside your other workouts. Strength training is important for runners as it helps tone their muscles and prevents injuries. Body weight exercises including squats and lunges ought to form an important constituent. You don't need to lift very heavy weights, and should be doing 10-15 reps of exercises, focussing on breathing, form, and recovery. In addition, stretching and keeping yourself flexible is critical. Simple hamstring and glute stretches, and some focus on the calf and the Iliotibial Band, are needed.

*What is the ideal diet for runners?*

Well, I am mostly vegetarian, aside from fish. I think that works well.

*The current trend of minimalist shoes and barefoot running has become*

*popular here in India as well. What is your recommendation on footwear?*

Your feet need good support when you run long distances. You can figure out your foot-type and decide on the particular shoe that will work for that.

*How critical is a training partner in successfully following the marathon training plans?*

A training partner is not essential of course, but I guess it makes it all the more fun. I run with my brother a lot and that is always memorable.

*Should I be planning to walk during a marathon?*

No, I don't think so. Except of course at hydration spots and so on. Our training plans aim to equip you with the ability to run a marathon fully!

*As running has become very popular in*

*India, there are events at least every other weekend. Should I be running/racing all of them to become a better runner?*

No, definitely not. I race a maximum of two events every year. A marathon, that I decide early on, and train towards, and maybe a 5K race several months away.

*What else should I be concerned about during marathon training in general, and following the RLR programme in particular?*

Long distance running, especially when done over an extended period of your life, is enjoyable but challenging. Make sure you train smart for it—plan and diversify your training, do it with purpose, and most importantly including quality recovery. You will have fun, minimise risk of injury, and even run faster!

# ON AN ASIDE

*Have you enjoyed your visit to India, what's stuck with you?*

India is a vibrant country; I have been soaking in its sights and sounds, palaces and monuments, and of course the food. It has been fun (and a bit scary!) riding around in the traffic, stealing glances at street shops and generally having a good time.

*What do you think of the recreational running and marathon scene in India?*

I'm really impressed! Rajesh Vetcha (core founder member of the Hyderabad Runners) and I met three years ago and since then, we have been talking and doing our bit to try to develop running in India. We've been communicating and I've also been helping a few folks here, train and run races across the world. It has been truly gratifying to actually come down and experience, first-hand, the phenomenal progress that running has made here.

*Tell us a little bit about how the experience of travelling across India and meeting with running groups in*

*various cities has been.*

My interactions with people – both individually and as a group – have been very interesting. I'm really struck and impressed with the general sense of smartness, kindness, and generosity that running folks from Hyderabad, Bangalore and Chennai, have displayed.

*Among the many questions people asked you, is there any specific question that has set you thinking?*

Well, someone asked me if I have plans to come to India to develop running further, here!

*Do you?*

I don't, to be honest but I must admit that with Rajesh, I'm going to be available to assist in any way that is feasible for me.

*You are constantly motivating other runners to do better. But how about Bill, the runner? Where do you draw your energy and inspiration from?*

Bill Pierce running in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic



Photo Courtesy: Bill Pierce



Regular exercise and running have always been a significant part of my life. I have been interacting with people from across the world and talking to them about the importance of good health. As a scientist and a health educator, the opportunity to promote healthy living has been my profession. It is a part of who I am.

*How did that happen? Is it what you always wanted to do?*

Well, it's a long story. I must first confess that as a kid, I thought nothing of running. My brother and I ran together as kids; we ran around and played at my grandmother's house, we ran to school, we set ourselves little challenges like who ran to the end of the sidewalk first, and so on. We were basically two energetic boys. I always tell people that exercise should be play, it shouldn't be work. In college, I played a lot of basketball; I also learnt the many benefits of exercise to prevent cardiovascular diseases. Even then, running was never more than 4K; and

then one day, I heard about a 10K race. I gave it a shot, and like they say, I was hooked. What that race did was also help me realise that I could enjoy competition through distance running. It was a gratifying moment and one that I really appreciate. 40 years have gone by since.

*On the one hand, you describe running as play, on the other you use the word competition. And clearly, the RLR programme is intense, and many of the runners you train are serious athletes.*

*How do you bridge the disconnect here?* I'd like to recall what Dutch historian, Johan Huizinga said: "Through play, we can act with utmost seriousness with the results being inconsequential." Time and distance are just numbers, no doubt but when I'm out there competing, at that moment, they are important. I remember when I played basketball that the famous coach at UCLA, said, "Don't be exuberant in victory or dejected in defeat." Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. I believe very firmly that what

matters at that moment is the participation, the process and the journey not the destination. To give you an example, I enjoy the 16 weeks of training towards a race with my friends as much as I do the actual race! May be that is the right spirit with which to treat marathon training, one that can yield really long term benefits to you.

*Do you enjoy running with company or do you prefer running on your own?* Actually I enjoy both equally.

*What would you say is your running moto?*

In a race, you need to focus on pace; else, you will drift into comfort. If you are well trained, this is a situation when everything is in control. It is imperative to be in the moment and listen to your breath, and relax. In a way, running allows you an insight into who you are, it's a process of discovery, and I hope more and more enthusiastic people find that!

# BILL ON-BOARD

- Bill Pierce is part of that rare breed of experts in any field, an academician as well as a practitioner. He's a Professor and Chair in the Health Sciences Department in Furman University, Greenville, South Carolina
- A native of West Virginia, Bill played on his college basketball team at Davidson College, a small liberal arts institution in North Carolina, and won three Southern Conference Championships. He was also a part of the college track team
- Bill's name is legend in 'serious recreational runner' circles and he is listed as one of the ten marathon supercoaches by Runner's World. A true evangelist for the sport, Bill makes hundreds of presentations on running, wellness and fitness and loves meeting with beginner runners



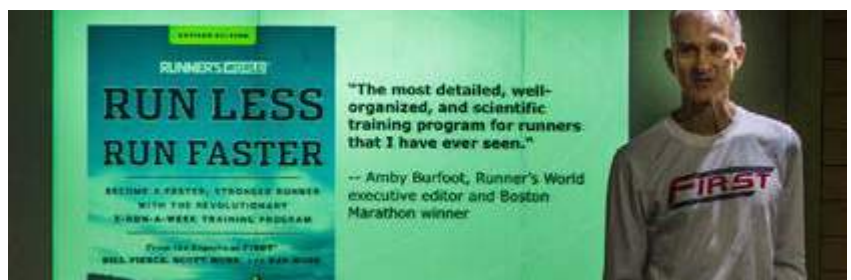
Photos Courtesy: Bill Pierce



Bill Pierce giving a lecture at FIRST Running Retreat



Photos: Karthik Guruswami

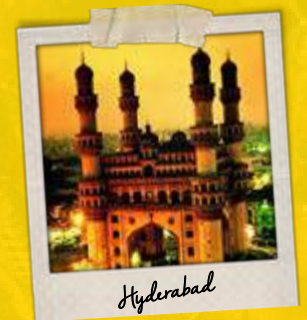


# RLRF-CENTRIC

- Bill and his colleague at Furman, Scott Murr's research into marathon training began in 2004 with a cohort of 21 runners they followed and trained for the Kiawah Island Marathon in South Carolina. The results were jaw-dropping and resulted in a landmark August 2005 Runner's World article by Amby Burfoot, the 1968 Boston Marathon champion and an Editor at Runner's World. Christened Train Less, Run Faster in its early days, the programme got re-named to a cheekily provocative Run Less, Run Faster (RLRF) very soon and today enjoys a unique identity and a die-hard loyal fan following across the world
- Buoyed by the warmth of the reception to their research, Bill and Scott Murr went on to set up the Furman Institute of Running and Scientific Training (FIRST) laboratory. The thumbs-up from Runner's World also resulted in Bill and Scott authoring that bestseller book which most runners would instantly recognise - Run Less, Run Faster: Become A Faster, Stronger Runner With The Revolutionary FIRST Training Program
- The central thesis of the RLRF programme lies in favouring quality over quantity, intensity over volume. This idea finds expression in a simple and elegant 3+2 running plan where each week of training has three unique runs and two days of aerobic cross-training. The three runs are a track workout, a tempo run and the staple long run. On a scientific level, what the programme really aims to do is to increase aerobic capacity, raise lactate thresholds, improve running economy and consequently increase running speed

# INDIA IMPRESSIONS

- Bill completed a tour of India recently in which he got to visit Hyderabad, Bangalore and Chennai. He served as the event ambassador for the popular Airtel Hyderabad Marathon besides running a speedy 1:50 half-marathon on the punishing course there. He met with running clubs in all three cities, immersed himself in runs on local running routes, feasted on idlis and dosas and merrily posed for Facebook selfies with hundreds of enthusiastic recreational runners
- Bill and Marianne (his wife) enjoyed the temples, the palaces and the unique sights and sounds of our country but were most impressed by the famed Indian hospitality
- Bill made several perceptive observations on the young and lively running culture in India while here. He noted how road races here are becoming increasingly well-organised, how volunteerism underpins every Indian running event and the huge role the weather played in running performance in our country. He cautioned against over-training, over-racing and strongly recommended that running clubs organise more 5K and 10K races to bring more new runners into the sport



Hyderabad



Chennai



Bangalore



Yummy



# RLRF

## TESTIMONIALS

*Aravind Kumar, Chennai*

“With a hectic work schedule involving frequent travel, RLRF has been the most compatible and beneficial training plan for me. The plan has helped me to train better and smarter especially because of the variety of runs. RLRF has reiterated to me that the quality of workouts is always more important than quantity including in my Comrades Training. With RLRF, I shaved closed to 90 minutes off my FM (full marathon) time (5.53 to 4.20).”



*Bhasker Sarma, Bangalore*

“Having never been a fan of high mileage training, the RLRF programme struck an immediate chord with me when I first read the book in 2010. The methodology gave structure and focus to my training, specially when training for a specific target. While the 16 weeks FM training is quite intense, I love the variety of 3+2 and it has enabled me to improve my FM timing significantly over the three years+ that I have been using it. Full credit to this method and Bill’s guidance for my being able to shave over ten minutes off my FM timing to run my first sub 3:40 in October 2012.”

*Niranjan Sankar, Chennai*

“I loved the book, and I’ve used the RLRF method for my last three marathons. The variety in the programme keeps my training engaging and interesting. I enjoy pushing myself on my runs and RLRF is perfect as it ensures I work hard on each run. Set targets for each run also means it is easy to monitor how well your training is going and to avoid surprises on race day. RLRF helped me break the 4:00 hour mark, and I am hoping it will help me touch 3:45 in Chicago this year.”



COUNTERPOINT



Photo Courtesy: Rahul Verghese

# THE BIG DEBATE



Photo: Swetha Joyson

POINT

Running events are being conducted in the country by the dozen. Thanks to some savvy marketing and the present-day social media phenomenon, the news of any running event spreads like wild fire. In response, runners are going absolutely berserk registering for these events. It is no doubt a healthy trend as it has helped countless 'couch potatoes' to step out of their comfort zones and enjoy the outdoors. In fact, for many, participating in these running events has been a life-changing experience. Even for those watching these events from the other end of the finish line, the events have been a source of great inspiration to step into the runners' shoes and change sides. It's no wonder then that Kathrine Switzer, the first woman finisher of Boston Marathon said, "If you are

losing faith in human nature, go out and watch a marathon". A little more than a decade ago, specific to India, running events were largely confined to the aegis of Athletic associations, and participants were largely from the athlete pool aiming for national and international events. The concept of paying for running events was virtually unheard of. Over the past decade, there have been a lot of changes in this scenario - from the days where entry to running events was offered at a few 'rupees' to running events these days that are priced at a few 'dollars' or its rupee equivalent! Take the example of one of the premier events in the country - The Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon, started in the year 2004. The entry fee has gone up from Rs200 in the 2006 edition to Rs1,400 for the 2015 edition.



The expectations from running events have also changed during this period. Gone are the days when runners expected nothing more than a few glasses of water during the run. Participants are now accustomed to timing chips, personalised T-shirts, goodie bags and other luxuries. Every running event is a Pandora's box of dreams. The finisher's dream. The run! The euphoria! The finish! The medal! The T-shirt! And the never-ending discussions about what could have been better. The high entry fee does not seem to deter any runner as the number of participants seems to be always on the rise.

As a concerned observer, to me the ever increasing entry fees pose many questions – practical as well as ethical. To begin with, does it really promote running? I once asked my friend, a regular walker, if she wanted to run at an organised running event. She categorically refused stating that she was not interested in the T-shirt or the medal or any of the luxuries offered. And why pay for something you can do for free? She said she could run the route any other day for free. I tried to explain that running events are more than just the medals or T-shirts and tried to focus on the intangibles that running events offered like the joy of running, cheerful volunteers, spirit of running with a group of runners etc. She questioned back if these intangibles actually cost so much. There are many important expenditure heads that I could have missed out in the conversation however the perception

for a non-runner remains that if the road is available for free, why should the run cost anything at all? Since we share the roads with the public at large, it is pertinent that we feel answerable to them too. The mound of garbage that is generated at the end of each event is an important matter that affects the entire society regardless of whether they are runners or not. But that is an issue by itself and needs to be addressed separately.

Secondly, are the entry fees becoming prohibitive to certain sections of the society? With entry fees of many events crossing four digits easily, is it still accessible to larger sections of the society? While it is not possible to offer conclusive evidence that a low entry fee would guarantee wide spread participation from people belonging to lower income groups, the question remains—“Is socio-economic diversity of the running crowds an early casualty of sky-high registration fees?”. This question becomes all the more important, given that running events involve road closures and use of public infrastructure affecting all sections of the society, it is therefore important that running events should not be restrictive through their entry fees.

Third, high entry fees bring in issues of governance. There are diverse sets of organising entities; there are the professional event management firms who conduct running events to earn their income. Then, there are the charitable, non-profit organisations

(including running clubs) that conduct running events to raise money for a good cause. And then there are those who are somewhere in between the two. The stakeholders in a running event are always diverse. From the runners who pay for the event, to the volunteers who offer their priceless services, to the audience who cheer the runners and to many other invisible personalities who make the event special. Not everyone stands to gain financially from the increase in entry fees. In many events, the charitable cause brings in an increased level of trust from the participants. Sadly, it seems that charity donors are also on occasion being taken for a ride. I once came across a running event with a slogan: “Run for Drug Free India and Harvest Rain, Feed the World” and I could not find any coherence in the objectives.

Finally, are we losing a sense of purpose by participating in events like these? A friend of mine recently thought aloud if running events are organised for promoting running or selling running? Most Indian events are not even remotely comparable with some of the world class events in terms of the facilities and support for the runners. Many events are not even able to provide road closures beyond the first few runners. Sometimes basic infrastructure such as portable toilets is missing in many events.

A compilation by *Shanthi Balasubramanian* based on inputs from various runners...

**"Running events are very much in their infancy in India. If we do not make the change now, it will be too late before we can do anything about it. A runner once said, "Don't ask me why I run. Ask yourself why you don't". I think every runner must ask themselves, 'Why this event?' rather than 'Why Not?'"**





Photo Courtesy: Rahul Verghese

**“We should celebrate those who run, who spectate and cheer, celebrate those who enable the runs and celebrate those who organise!”**

At the outset, I think it is important to understand the life cycle of any industry—here may be a few differences but by and large the broad trends are pretty universal.

First there is nothing, then there is a set of cottage sector offerings, then one or two professional offerings which spur the market onwards and then a flurry of new entrants with more diversity differentiation and then finally an ecosystem with a variety of offerings where consumers and competition make the product offerings better and many start dropping off.

Running is no different and it is important to realise that choice is great. Organisers of runs who are unable to step up and get the perceived value of their offering to be more than what they charge the consumer, or their sponsor for that matter, will have to look afresh, else they will be out of business.

Consumers with today’s social media have great information as also word-of-mouth - so can pick and choose an event to participate in, or if they are not interested in paying—can

simply go out and run. They are running groups, running clubs, the neighbourhood groups in a park, etc.

We also have to realise that not everyone will be able to run in every event; some may be expensive, some may be tough, some may be too far away, etc - but as long as there is something aspirational and some people are not able to participate in what exists, enterprise and market forces will develop an option. Consumers are also getting off their ‘free’ mindset if they want to participate in an event, as many do now.

Choose the experience, see if the cost benefits are worth it for you personally, and then make a choice. There will still be some events that will have no entry fee, and some that are out of reach—but that’s what choice is all about. As soon as you do an event open to the public as opposed to a closed group event—various things get added on—permissions, time engaged

of various people, operational issues to be managed beyond your immediate control, sudden changes at times by the

authorities, far lower participation than expected, sustainability and more.

There are however several basic hygiene factors that organisers must manage

- 1) Start on time
- 2) Execute what they promise
- 3) Clear garbage immediately after the run, and perhaps see how they can reduce the levels of garbage
- 4) If it is a charity run - show how the proceeds are being put to use by the charity etc
- 5) Ensure everyone in the ecosystem - volunteers, spectators, runners, sponsors, and others have a good time

We should celebrate those who run, celebrate those who spectate and cheer, celebrate those who enable the runs and celebrate those who organise the runs and make them sustainable because each of these publics will pave the way for more choice, better experiences and a more vibrant running culture which has so many more attendant benefits.

*A response by Rahul Verghese...*

*To share your thoughts and participate in The Big Debate, log onto [Facebook.com/TheRunDown](https://www.facebook.com/TheRunDown)*



Within a few days of quitting his job at KPMG, in September 2011, Dharmendra began coaching fellow runners. Now, a certified personal trainer, Dharmendra finds place in *The Rundown* also because he is among the select few to have qualified to run the Boston Marathon in 2015. He is also more than half-way through his book that in its literal sense, traces his own personal journey of starting off as an amateur runner and qualifying to run the Boston Marathon but in a deeper sense, the book is meant to motivate and inspire people to pursue their passion... As of date, he has run 17 full marathon distances or over; he admits he runs a half marathon almost 40 weeks in a year. When he is not running, he is reading about running. In an email interview with *Akhila Krishnamurthy* and *Ashwin Prabhu*, he shares some gyaan on running, management, and some connections...



# LIFE COACH





**“I began aspiring for a BQ (Boston Qualifier) at around the age of 30 but I began training only at the age of around 33 mostly due to not having the courage to say goodbye to a comfortable life”**

As a minor aside, I had taken approval for a sabbatical in 2010 from work, but had to defer it by about a year due to an appendectomy. I am 36 now. In January 2011, I ran the Mumbai Marathon in 4:05:20. 14 weeks later, thanks in large part due to my coach's magic, I ran 3:09:46. So my first ever sub-4 marathon was what we call a BQ (Boston Qualifier) in under 3:10 hrs. However that year, the eventual cut-off for a place in the 2012 edition of the Boston Marathon for my age group was exactly a minute faster than that (3:08:46).

**“The disappointment of missing that mark definitely precipitated my decision to quit”**

However, the period between January 2011 and May 2011 (my sabbatical), was amongst the happiest times of my life. I decided that if I could be that happy most of the time, then it was perhaps because of ditching a comfortable job. Another sidelight was during the new manager training workshop in 2010 at KPMG, my employer at the time, all of us were asked to set long-term goals for whatever we wanted to accomplish with our lives. I took that exercise rather seriously and decided that, that was what I wanted to do with my life, at least for the foreseeable future. Since then, I have planned my life six months at a time till May 2014, when I finally ran a time that has qualified me for the 2015 edition of the Boston Marathon.

**“The only assumption (amongst the several I made when I quit my job to become a coach) that has turned out true to expectations, has been that I would be happier than I had ever been in my life before”**

The drastically lowered income was not too difficult to get used to. The bank balance alert every Sunday morning keeps me grounded. The lack of time for pursuing my only other hobby (I used to be a reasonably enthusiastic quizzer) is occasionally dampening but then you don't get what you want in life by doing what you want only.

**“My running journey has pretty much mimicked the premise of management consulting”**

In consulting, you see, we try and isolate process and outcomes and always advise clients to focus on process, saying outcomes will follow, perhaps not in the time periods we expect but certainly if there aren't some abnormal changes in system variables. That is true in running too.

**“If your expectation is to make a decent, honest living from coaching, I think it is possible”**

I am not sure one will buy a 3 BHK in Bangalore or any other Indian city, purely by coaching runners but it's possible to live comfortably.

**“Train Conservatively, Race Aggressively”**

That is the premise of my training.

**“The podcast I have been publishing, Runalyze This, has had over a 1,000 downloads across eight episodes, despite only five of them having interviews with some inspiring personalities”**

The response to the podcast has been somewhat modest, although the few who have gotten in touch have made it worthwhile to keep recording once in a while. I am hoping it soon gets a sponsor so that it could get better in the future.

**“We are about 10 years into anything of a mass participation culture”**

The top end has actually regressed somewhat considering we have had just one qualifier for the Olympic Marathon since 1976. I am not sure anything will change about the top end at least, unless something deliberate is done in the next 5 years. I am a closet strategist on that but for now, will keep my plans to myself. The mass participation segment will only grow from here. I won't be surprised if SCMM or some other Indian city's marathon becomes the one with most runners in Asia at least by 2020.

**“Part of the mission in writing the book was in getting its readers to pursue their calling in life”**

My book is about my journey as an amateur runner to qualifying for Boston. I intend to add the last chapter when I run the event in April 2015. The draft has been through a few rounds of revision over the past two years with chapters getting added with every miss in my Mission Boston! Right now, I am not sure whether to self-publish or to go to an established publisher although I have gathered enough interest to self-publish.



**>>>> CROSS-TRAINING**



**ZUMBA HO!**



Photos Courtesy: Kirti Samant, Jegatha Muralidharan and Nidhi Bantia Mehta



Despite the common good that they serve independently, together, Zumba and running are surely a mismatch! They look different; they feel different; their outcomes are different! In the recent past, however, the two have found common ground, and runners are especially reaching out to a combination of both these activities with rather contrasting natures, in an effort to perform further and faster.

“In fact, most marathons nowadays host an exclusive Zumba session before their commencement,” says Jegatha Muralidharan (Jags), Zumba trainer, and at the helm of a dance and fitness studio, Dance Jockey, with 18 centres across Hyderabad. “A mere 15-minute session can really help the body warm up; the body is then well-prepared for the run, and can help one run better and faster. Besides, it is definitely not as intense as running, so people don’t usually mind it.”

A serious runner is assumed to be performance-oriented, focussed and

mostly preferring isolation, during his run. Where does Zumba, a light-hearted, social sport fit into his/her taste? “A Zumba class is called a Zumba Fitness Party,” says Kirti Samant, fitness consultant and trainer for nine years now, and Zumba trainer for four years, who splits her time between Chennai, Mumbai and Bengaluru. “Just taking from that, other forms of workouts get monotonous over a period of time. Zumba, on the other hand, is fun and upbeat, and never runs out of fresh music or choreography. Most importantly, like running, Zumba is a high intensity workout. Most of my students say that they are having a blast and hardly realise that they are working out.”

Nidhi Banthia Mehta, Zumba trainer at the Let’s Sway Dance Studio, Jaipur, says, “Zumba is usually a combination of different forms of dance. I personally intermix Cha-cha-cha, Salsa, Merengue, Swing, Cumbia, Hip-hop, Samba and Bollywood. So you see, there are different kinds of movements in the body, and the body responds to it

a lot better. Hence there is more energy, better stamina, and the monotony of running is broken.”

Beyond merely breaking monotony, doing Zumba for cross-training is acknowledged to assist runners in improving their cardiovascular endurance, muscle endurance, core strength, stroke volume and anaerobic threshold. It follows the pattern of interval training using aerobic pathways (with oxygen) and anaerobic pathways (without oxygen) which is important in training runners.

It also helps increase the range of motion around joints thus enhancing stride lengths. “Since it strengthens the core,” says Kirti, “it also helps prevent kinetic chain leakage and thus avoids loss of energy that needs to be transferred to the upper body, particularly in the case of runners. Cross-training in Zumba also improves psychological disposition and reduces stress levels. This is significant to help a runner stay positive and focus on accomplishing his goals. So, naturally runners are taking to the exercise!”



Kirti Samant, Fitness Consultant



Jegatha Muralidharan (Jags), Zumba trainer



Nidhi Banthia Mehta, Zumba trainer





# FIRST-HAND

**Akanksha Jain, 38, Entrepreneur, Jaipur**

“I have been running for five years or so now; I started Zumba about a couple of years ago. What I realised is that Zumba does to my body what running does not. Zumba tones my body; this does not happen while running. Besides, Zumba has made my body a lot more flexible than it was. I run five days a week, for an hour each day. I combine this with an hour-long Zumba class, twice a week.”

**Naveen Krishna Ambati, 30, IT Professional, Hyderabad**

“I have been running since I was in school. I started running long distances in March 2013. I have been training in Zumba for two years now. I usually run three to four times a week, and my knees hurt a lot. Besides, running is a very serious, high-intensity workout, and I like to balance it with something lighter, yet intense. Swimming, cycling and aerobics are also great options, but they can become boring in due course. Zumba is a heavy cardiovascular exercise, yet fun-filled. We also do stretches and squats that help my knees. My running regimen comprises of three to four days of running distances, 6K, 12K and 21k to 36K (on Sundays). I combine this with a 90-minute Zumba workout, twice a week.”

**Sheetal Vyas, 46, Homemaker, Jaipur**

“I was an avid walker for 22 years, but I realised it wasn't making much of a difference. So I signed up for Zumba classes a year or so ago; I began running a month ago. In a Zumba class, we dance to four to five songs continuously, and that has helped improve my stamina a great deal, and in turn helps me run faster and further. I usually run about 4K to 4.5K every day, along with an hour-long Zumba class, twice a week.”



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# PERFECT BODY POSTURE

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# THE REAL THING ABOUT GLUTEN

“If health and fitness is what you want,” *Raj Ganpath* says, “walk away from the immortal boxes and run towards the perishable foods.” In this column, he sheds light on what exactly going gluten-free means...

Going gluten-free is a cool thing to do today. You can see people announce their gluten-free streak on Facebook and you can even spot that sense of pride when a friend exclaims, “Oh, I’m not eating gluten,” at the dinner table. For a few it’s about health while for the rest, it is about doing the newest cool fitness thing. Some of you reading this may have even half-heard incomplete information to come up with your own half-baked thoughts on the subject. Today, I’ll very quickly clear things up for you.

Gluten is a protein that is found in wheat, rye and barley. It provides elasticity to dough helping it rise and bind while cooking and is a critical ingredient in baking and other forms of bread making. Just like how some of us are allergic to dairy, certain vegetables, meats and nuts, a lot of us are allergic to gluten. While I don’t have the luxury of space to explain the biochemistry behind this, I’ll say that if you are allergic to gluten, the repercussions of consuming gluten may range from just a slight rash or acid reflux to, in some extreme cases, death. No reason to freak out here by the way. Any allergy, in extreme

cases, could cause serious health complications or death and it’s necessary to stay away from foods that you are allergic to. But is gluten really universally bad? Should you give up gluten? Will going gluten-free help you lose weight? Well, it depends on whether you are allergic to gluten and if you are, to what degree. If you are allergic to gluten then, like any sane person would, you will need to make some gluten-related changes to your food life. Gluten allergy is dose dependent and different people will need to consume different amounts of gluten to be affected. That is, your friend may be totally fine eating roti for breakfast, biscuits for an evening snack and pizza for dinner. But there maybe a colleague, who is so allergic to gluten that a bite of bread tears her apart. So, as a first step, it is important to understand if you are allergic to gluten or not. Here is what you need to do:

Remove any and all gluten from your diet for a period of four weeks. Roti, rava, biscuits, pizza and everything you will find when you Google “what foods contain gluten”

Monitor how you feel during these four weeks. Is anything getting better? Generally, even if you are mildly allergic to gluten, going gluten-free will improve digestion, sleep quality, energy levels during the day, rate of fat loss and skin quality



If you find that you feel better without gluten, there is a very high probability that you are allergic to gluten. If you feel no different with or without gluten, well, then there isn't much to worry about. If you are severely allergic you may need to stay away from gluten for a very long time. But if you are mildly allergic to gluten then all you need to do is to limit and optimise your consumption of products containing gluten. That's pretty much all there is to it



That said, there is a growing body of evidence that says everyone is allergic to gluten at some level. While the truth behind the claim is yet to be proven on human subjects, food manufacturers and sellers have jumped on the possibility of another gold mine. This is why you see gluten-free products lining the shelves of health and even grocery stores today and gluten-free options available in restaurants. While the availability of gluten-free options is a wonderful development, especially for people allergic to gluten, there are some warning signs too



The first thing you want to remember is that "gluten-free" means that the food is free of gluten. It doesn't mean that it is healthful in any other way. For example, milk chocolate, ribbon pakoda, soft drinks and potato chips are gluten free but in no way healthful just like how gluten-free pizza is not better for you than a regular pizza

Secondly, the majority of gluten-free products are those that replace junk food in your life. Cake mixes, flour, cookies, biscuits, pastry, pizza etc are what are mostly marketed and sold under the gluten-free label. So make sure you don't end up eating more sugar in the name of being gluten-free



Thirdly, if gluten-free is what you want to be, why not do just that? Eat only foods that don't contain gluten. Natural foods (ie foods that don't carry a brand name) are filled with gluten-free options. All fruits, vegetables, meats, dairy, lentils, legumes and rice are gluten-free and most south Indian traditional foods from rice, daal and rasam to avial, poriyal and payasam are gluten-free and are perfectly suitable as long term food choices.

So gluten-free is neither a complete fad nor a solution. It is just a matter of whether it applies to you or not. My advice: if health and fitness is what you want, as a general rule, walk away from the immortal boxes and run towards the perishable foods.





# THE SCIENCE OF SLEEP

*Dr N Ramakrishnan* insists that adequate and appropriate sleep is essential for the marathon of life...

**M**ost runners are keen on personal and environmental hygiene and incorporate optimal hygiene measures in their daily life. However, sleep is often taken for granted and it is not uncommon for several runners to have inadequate sleep and a chronic sleep debt. Our health, happiness and ability to succeed in life are strongly dependent on how well we meet our bodies' needs for rest and quality sleep. Simple healthy habits (referred to as sleep hygiene) would go a long way in getting adequate restful sleep

to gear up to wake up and run! For those of you who are concerned about how much sleep is good enough, remember that whatever sleep your body requires to keep you awake, refreshed and functioning the next day is the amount of sleep that you require. There can be a wide individual variation in the amount of sleep required. Most adults require an average of 6-8 hours.

Let me summarise seven habits for highly effective sleep to help more effective running!





- **Keep regular bedtime hours:** This is particularly important for runners who have an early morning wake-up schedule. Most of us sleep somewhere around 9 to 11pm and wake up usually around 5 to 7am and meet our 'usual' sleep requirements during these socially accepted sleep hours. This not only ensures adequate quantity of sleep but also adequate proportion of various stages of sleep which include REM sleep (Rapid Eye Movement Sleep) and three stages of Non REM sleep. By sleeping late and waking up early, runners could reduce the proportion of early morning REM sleep which could lead to daytime fatigue and ineffectiveness. Although maintaining sleep routines may not always be practical, remember your body is more comfortable with routines although it may not sound too exciting. So pick a reasonable and regular time (earlier to bed if you need to wake up early!) and stick to it. Even if you don't think you're tired when the time comes, your body will appreciate it. And after a while, when it feels it can rely on the routine, it will begin to repay the favour by letting you sleep when you want. Along the same lines, get up the same time every day, even on weekends and holidays. Once you have woken up, get up. Don't lie in bed awake, thinking about getting up. Just do it.



- **Ensure that your sleep environment is appropriate and comfortable:** Keep the bedroom adequately ventilated, quiet and adequately dark when you are sleeping. Optimal room temperature, a firm bed and a comfortable pillow will provide you the necessary relaxing conditions to sleep well.

- **Train your mind and identify bed with sleep:** (And intimacy with your partner). But certainly not for working, reading, social networking, watching television, answering phone calls or whatever else occupies you in evening. If you can't sleep, get out of bed: don't lie awake trying to get to sleep any longer than 30 minutes. Do something quiet and non-stimulating. When you feel tired again, go back to bed.

- **Avoids stimulants such as caffeine, alcohol and tobacco at least 4-5 hours before bedtime.** Well, preferably avoid them totally! But if you are used to these stimulants for a long time, it is not wise to stop them abruptly as the withdrawal symptoms can disrupt your sleep pattern. Discuss with the doctor and gradually stop using any of these stimulants. Remember that coffee is not the only drink that contains caffeine. Tea, chocolate and aerated soft



drinks are high in caffeine as well.

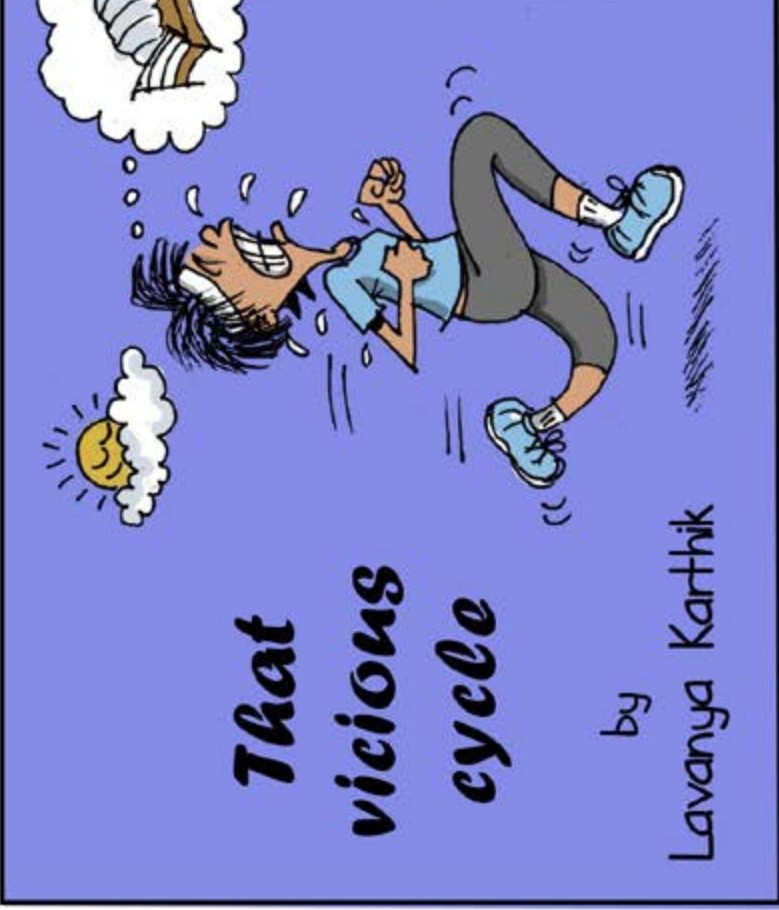
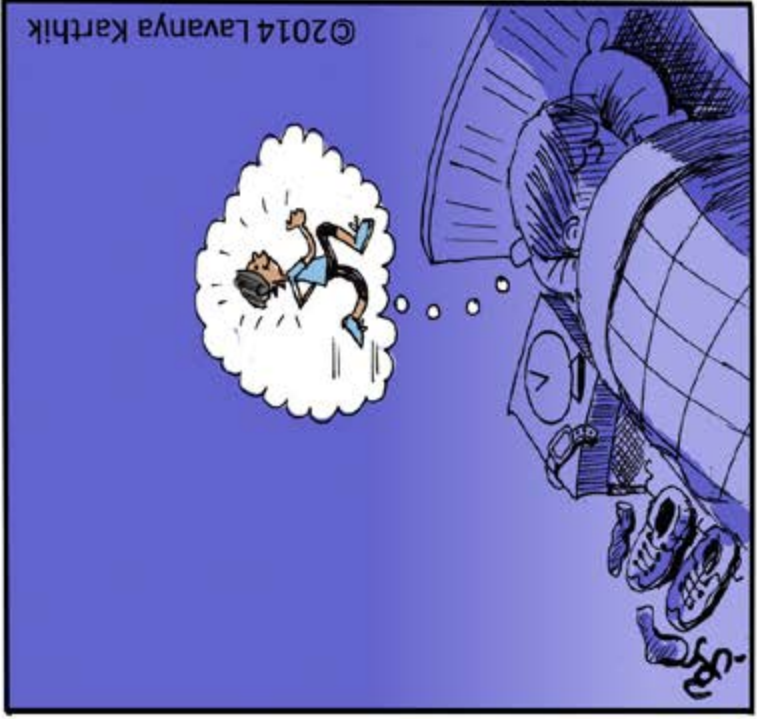
- **Avoid sleeping with a full stomach:** It's a healthy habit to have dinner at least two hours before bedtime. This will ensure that you don't have a full stomach when you sleep and also prevent acid reflux (heartburn). Runners need to have the energy in the morning and should ensure that they are not hypoglycemic (low sugar levels) in the morning. A small, healthy late night snack and milk at bedtime is advisable.

- **Enjoy the day:** People with jobs that tax the mind have far more trouble with insomnia than do people who work physically hard all day. Increasingly most of us work indoors and don't get adequate sunlight. Get regular exposure to outdoor or bright lights, especially late afternoons. It would be best to avoid daytime naps to get adequate consolidated sleep at night.

- **Use Relaxation Techniques:** Only you can determine what is relaxing to your body and mind. Some common relaxation techniques that have proven to be beneficial are warm bath, massage, listening to music, yoga and meditation. You decide whatever works for you best. Take a warm bath a few hours before bedtime. It's a great way to relax your body. Don't over do it, however. You merely want to relax your body, not exhaust it.

Observing these simple sleep hygiene measures will eventually make you just go to sleep and enjoy it. If after trying the above techniques, you continue to have problems with inadequate sleep, significant snoring and non-refreshing sleep, it would be best to consult a sleep specialist (a new breed of sub specialists who are far and few in India!) and seek appropriate treatment. Remember adequate and appropriate sleep is essential for the marathon of life.





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# DEAR GUMBULINGAM

BY RAVI MUNDOLI

Continuing our series where we bring our valiant Chennai runners face to face with running luminaries from the days of yore, in this edition we have the pleasure of bringing to you someone whose name is often taken in vain by bystanders who want to cheer runners. Although he now lives off South Mada Street in Mylapore and answers to the name of Sri Kaadu Gumbulingam, this gentleman was born and bred in the mighty state of Ah Lah Bhama, USA. Christened Forrest Gump at birth, his running career started when as a child he played football (whose proper name, of course, is handoval) for his school and university. Widely recognised as the first bona fide ultra-marathoner in the world, after his retirement, he tried to move to his ranch in Indiana, but owing to an incident involving auto-correct and an irate travel agent, he arrived in Madras. Here he found refuge in the benediction of Lord Kabaaleswarar and a quick change of latitude, longitude and nomenclature later, we are blessed to have him in our midst.



Photo Courtesy: Ravi Mundoli

**Q:** Sir: I beg to inform you that I am a retired person of approximately 62 years and 4 months of age and by the grace of the Lord, am able to take part in various athletic activities such as the 5K marathons that are held regularly in Madras. Nowadays, I am noticing that certain persons are encouraging the runners by cheering from the roadside saying “Rann, forest, Rann.” As a regular reader of The Hindu, I am aware that the Rann of Kutch is a seasonal salt marsh which only an untied donkey would describe as a forest. Then another kind person has kindly drawn my attention to your presence and suggested that I write to you and that you will be able to forthwith clear up the mystery. If required, I can even come to your residence, as I am living only 2.4 furlongs from you, this side of RK Mutt Road.

-- WT Srinivasan, BE, LLB, MBBS

**A:** Back in Ah Lah Bhama, when Ah was a young man, mah friend Jenny usedta holler, “Ruhhhn Forrest, ruhhn!” whene’r Ah’d be set ‘pon by the otha kids. When they made that motion pickcha ‘bout me, Ah gness ah became famous! And folk all around the world now shout “Run Forrest, run!” whene’r they see someone hurryin’ by in their sneakers. Oh cawse, down here, they oughta be sayin’ “Odu Kaadu, odu!”. But that’s just ornery folk for you...

**Q:** I have a serious and somewhat embarrassing problem. I started running 4 months back and am doing 8 to 10K every weekend. Recently I noticed that my nipples are sore and sometimes bleeding, and it makes my weekend quite painful. What do I do?

-- Love Me Tender

**A:** You ain’t the first girl to face this problem. See, back this in

the day Ah ran shirtless, so Ah never had to deal with sort of thing. But that being said, the answer is simple. Invest in a good sports bra and you should be sorted. Next...

**Supplementary Q:** Err... umm... sirji, I’m a man not a woman.  
-- Love Me Tender Dude

**A:** Oh! In that case...Have you considered using a lubricant (Body Glide, KY Jelly)? A visit to the nearest kinky toys shop and you should be sorted. Or using Band Aid to tape ‘em up? I really think you should go shirtless. Or get bra.

**Q:** I am planning to run my first cross country race in a couple of weeks. So far I’ve stuck to city roads. Do you think I should be worried?

-- Fussy Me

**A:** No! Go for it! What’s the worst that can happen? You’ll step on a krait and be bitten and die! Big deal! My Amma always said, “Life is like a box of kozhukattais, you never know what you’ll get next.” Running a new race in a new place is sorta like that. You’ll find out new things about your body and about kozhukattais. I’m always looking for new types of kozhukattais. Do you know where I can get kozhukattais out of season in Mylapore?

**Q:** Why has your accent lapsed from that fake Southern twang thing at the beginning into what sounds suspiciously like a writer who sat on his piece till the deadline to go to press came?

-- Smarty Pants

**A:** Shhhhhhhhhh. I’ll give you a lifetime free supply of kozhukattais! Please?



# HEELING POWER

Dr Madhu Thottapillil presents a case study and tells us how it is possible to keep Plantar Fasciitis, at bay

**D**etermination, I believe, is always a good thing! Especially in sports. The decision to be determined, to persist at a sport, is a tough call, and I laud those who keep at it, and get there. Having said that, I must say it'd be utter foolishness if people keep at a sport in the name of determination at the cost of their well-being or health. I'd never advocate turning a blind eye in the name of keeping on at a sport!

A friend of mine, a young woman in her 40s, started running suddenly, one fine day, coaxed by her possibly well-meaning friends. She was determined to catch up with her running friends and their running miles. If they could do it, so could she! Within a week, she was pushing herself to run 5K, non-stop.

On Day 8, when she woke up in the morning and placed her leg on the floor, she felt a tearing pain on the underside of her left leg. She was taken aback! Her first step was extremely painful, but she limped a few steps and then felt okay. That evening, as she began her run, her pain returned. She tried to slow down and after a while, her pain settled and she was running at the pace she had begun.

A full month later, and when the pain became unbearable, she arrived in my clinic. I diagnosed her condition as Plantar Fasciitis. Needless to say, I discovered, there were a lot of things she was doing wrong! For one, she embarked her running journey without ever feeling the need to stretch. Secondly, she had increased her running distance rather rapidly. Thirdly, she was

running on the open road where the terrain is hard and unrelenting for a starter. And lastly, she hadn't adequately cushioned her feet in a good pair of running shoes. She had particularly compromised on that front. I keep urging my running friends - condition your body to run first! Plantar Fasciitis is a very common problem faced by runners and I am constantly inundated with patients who are victims of this condition.

Symptoms of Plantar Fasciitis usually begin with a pain in the heel and along the arch of the foot. The pain may be sharp or of a dull intensity depending on the duration of the problem. The pain characteristically occurs first thing in the morning and usually while standing up after prolonged periods of being seated.

Usually, the first step you take, is extremely painful. Runners will notice that the pain settles down with running after some time, and after some distance has been covered. To put things in perspective, Plantar Fascia is a thick connective tissue which supports the arch of the foot on the underside of the foot. It connects the Calcaneus (Heel Bone) to the head of the Metatarsals.

## **Causes:**

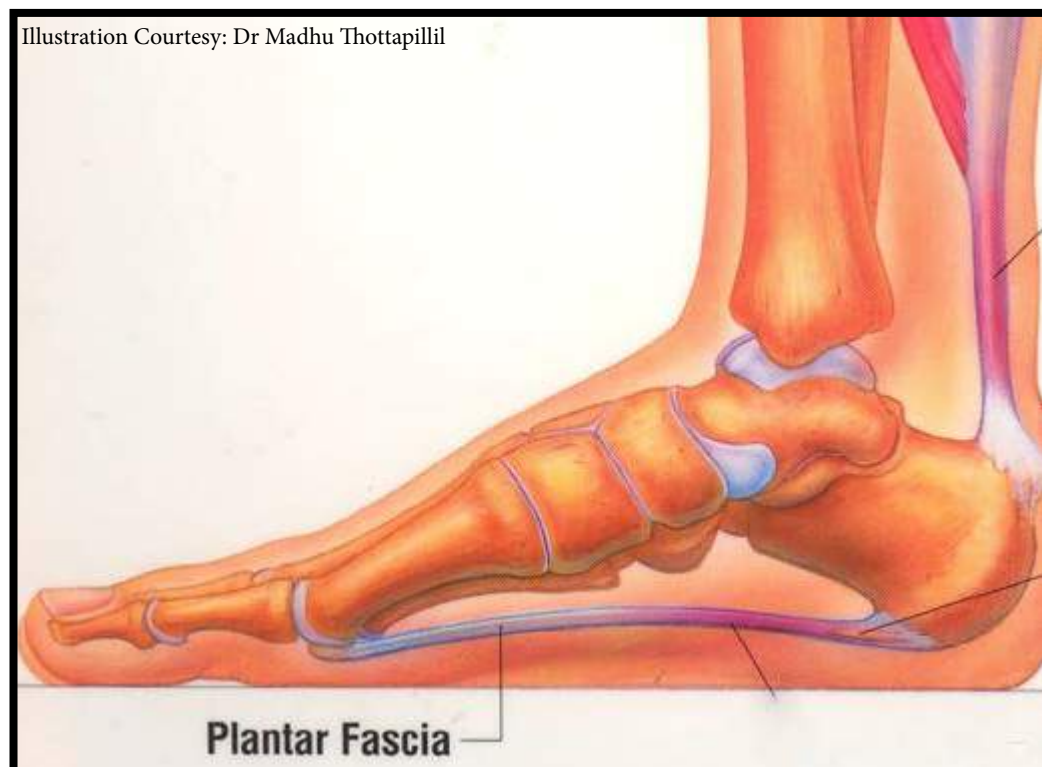
For runners, the most common causes are overtraining, rapid increase in mileage, running on hard surfaces and inadequate stretching of the calf. My runner friend was guilty of all of the above!

**Biomechanical Causes:** Specific issues in foot like flat feet, over pronation, flat feet, tightness of the Achilles Tendon, to list a few, can result in the development of Plantar Fasciitis.

## **Prevention:**

Running distance has to be increased gradually; usually a ten percent increase in distance every five days, is safe. Running continuously on hard surfaces needs to be avoided. Investing in good quality running shoes is imperative, if one is flatfooted or an over pronator. It is crucial also to stretch the calf muscles, especially specific stretches for Plantar Fascia.

Illustration Courtesy: Dr Madhu Thottapillil





Tackling the Onset of Plantar Fasciitis' symptoms:

1. The first step is to ensure that soft footwear with adequate cushioning is used at all times (especially when you are not running). Avoid barefoot walking at all times.
2. A heel cup or a heel insert will help reduce the symptoms and increase shock absorption.
3. Golf ball stretches to the underside of the foot must be done preferably twice daily. Icing the sole of the foot at least twice daily, is vital. People usually keep a horizontal, cold water bottle on the floor and rest their foot over it.
4. Stretches of the Achilles Tendon must be done at least twice daily. For the same, stand facing a wall with your hands on the wall. Put the leg you want to stretch a step behind your other leg. While keeping your back heel planted on the floor, bend

your front knee until you feel a stretch in the back leg. Hold the stretch for about 20 seconds.

5. Towel stretch: While being seated with your legs stretched out, place a rolled towel under the ball of your foot, holding the towel at both ends. Now, gently pull the towel towards you while keeping your knee straight without using any sudden force. Hold this position for about 20 seconds; repeat this three times.

If the symptoms persist beyond two weeks, a doctor would have to be consulted. At that point, one may benefit from some guidance on management of the symptoms. The treatment may involve medications, physical therapy, gait training and orthotic advice.

I must end my piece with a little about my friend who, with advice, treatment and medication, is back on the road, and this time with caution and oodles of good sense!



Photos Courtesy: Dr Madhu Thottapillil



# TRACKER TOYS!

Harish Lakshman analyses the pluses and minuses of the four most popular fitness trackers that are the buzz in the market

There is not only an increase in the number of people who are turning to fitness but also a significant increase in the array of fitness-related activity in today's world. To cater to this burgeoning market, there is an explosion of sorts in the world of gadgets! Fitness enthusiasts, especially those with a passion for gadgets, specifically those who like to monitor their performance, are literally spoiled for choice. You are right; we are referring to fitness trackers or bands that use technology to monitor and thereby improve your fitness goals. Be warned though that there are options aplenty and choosing the best from the rest, isn't always easy.

In this article, we attempt to throw light on the four most popular ones in the market—Nike Fuelband SE, Fitbit Flex, Garmin Vivofit and Jawbone UP24. All these have a few things in common—they track the number of steps, measure distance and give you a count of the calories burnt. In addition, they also sync data to a smartphone app that allows you to assess your performance and analyse your fitness goals. What sets them apart are features that are particular to the brand, and the model - one among them tracks your quantity and quality of sleep, yet another indicates the number of stairs you climbed, another alerts you to literally get off your butt when and if you have been sitting for too long, one among them allows you to monitor your heart rate... You get the picture, right?



1 Nike Fuelband SE



2 Garmin Vivofit



3 Fitbit Flex



4 Jawbone UP24

Photos Courtesy: Website of Manufacturers



## >>>NIKE FUEL BAND SE

Nike, as a brand, needs no introduction, and in a way, the brand itself is enough to make this product a winner. It has all the regular metrics and a special one called Nike Fuel. Nike calls it its own proprietary formula to measure fitness levels. A daily target can be set for this Nike Fuel and there is a cool multi-colour LED indicator that shows how well you are doing every day as you progress towards this goal. It syncs well with an App that presents all your data in good-looking charts. It also helps you track your friend's progress (of course, he/she needs to have a Fuelband and you need to connect with them, just the way you do on Facebook). The minuses in this product though are the App is available only for iPhone (although Nike mentions they may release an Android version, soon), the sleep function is very basic and it does not measure the number of steps climbed. However, If you are a runner and you use the Nike Running App from your iPhone for your daily runs, the Fuelband is a perfect accompaniment for the rest of the day. The battery usually lasts a week.

## >>>GARMIN VIVOFIT

This one is a serious contender for the top spot. Garmin is well-known for its Running, Triathlon and Golf watches. The watch has all the regular metrics, including sleep tracking. The interesting thing about this is that it works with a heart rate monitor, so calorie data accuracy is high and can be used for activities in the gym like weight-lifting and strengthening exercises to measure your calorie burn. The battery in this is replaceable, and lasts upto one year, which, in my view, is an outstanding feature unlike most other bands where you need to recharge after a few days. You can also wear this while swimming. One negative is its lack of backlight. So you cannot see any data including time in the dark. The App in iOS and Android

works flawlessly. The App also connects to a My Fitness Pal App, so you can also monitor your calorie intake (it is not automatic! You need to key in the data, but the process is simple). For the runner who uses a Garmin watch and syncs to Garmin Connect, this is a fantastic additional toy!

## >>>FITBIT FLEX

This is a very popular band, especially in the US. It not only has all all the regular metrics but also comes with some some cool visuals and charts to look at your data and share with others. The sleep features and calorie intake data are very elaborate and you can also track the route for walks/ runs in the App when you use the GPS from your phone. It also has a sound alarm with a vibrator that wakes you up without disturbing anyone else in the room. Its minus though is the lack of a full display on the band itself. All the data can be seen only through the iOS or Android App. But it does have small lights which show your progress towards your goal.

## >>>JAWBONE UP24

This is probably the best-looking band because it does not look like an electronic gadget. It fits very well to the hand and is available in attractive colours. Featurewise, it is very similar to the Fitbit with some additional sleep features. If a comfortable band with extensive sleep monitoring is important for you, then this is probably the top contender. A negative, like the Fitbit, is the lack of a display on the band itself.

Bear in mind that, while these products are all in the Rs6,000 to Rs9,000 range, and are focussed on basic fitness data, the market for fitness gadgets is rapidly evolving. Samsung has its Smartwatch, Google has just launched the Android Wear and with Apple's just released Watch, there is going to be a lot of excitement, at a higher price of course!



Photo Courtesy: The Internet





# A MAGIC WAND CALLED RUNNING

“Go for a run and take charge of your life,” says *Major D P Singh*, a Blade Runner from Delhi, who shares his story with us...



I called up my mother. She usually helped me with applying a mud pack on and around my stomach area the way the Naturopathy doctor had suggested. I have a damaged intestine. It used to be very difficult for me to keep my stomach under check. IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome) is a common thing even now but back in those days, it was just too bad. It is said that most diseases begin in the stomach. I am talking of the year 2008.

Those days, life was busy not just because of official and other engagements but also due to a lack of agility. Life used to be dull and boring. There was not much of physical activity and that in turn had made life very sedentary. I wanted, desperately to get out of that situation but I wasn't sure how to. In 1999, I was injured in the Kargil war; I sustained various injuries all over my body, including a partial removal of my intestines, partial hearing loss and an amputation. But I had made up my mind that I wasn't going to allow these things make me compromise the quality of my life. I had begun involving myself in various physical activities but unfortunately, all those either needed a partner or a gadget. Car rallies too; I needed money for that and raising funds from sponsors was near impossible.

After a series of rejections, I finally came to terms with the fact that I had

to pursue something that was easy on the pocket and yet sent a strong message out to people who often write off those like me as useless and of no worth.

Running needs a pair of legs and being able to do that with just one seemed like the best bet. The longer the distance, the better. I went on to register myself for the ADHM (Airtel Delhi Half Marathon) in 2009. Ironically, prior to this, it had never even occurred to me to run a marathon. I had no idea of the distance but I was confident of one thing; to run, I didn't need support from sponsors, I didn't need gadgets or a partner. The only thing I needed was a clear understanding of the right method to run with prosthesis. Yes, that was the biggest challenge! Even walking with prosthesis isn't easy, so you can imagine running. Plus, back then, I didn't have a blade, the running leg, which I have now. But I must confess that if you chase and follow something with passion and determination, it will definitely come to you. Sometime the exploration is also a process of discovery. I can't remember how it happened but one fine day, I heard about Terry Fox from Canada. For those who don't know, Terry Fox was a young cancer patient, greatest of ever, an amputee, who ran across Canada to collect funds for cancer research. Through his

videos on YouTube, I began to learn the method of running with a walking prosthesis.

I completed my first half marathon in 2009 in 3:49. Since then, I have run approximately 12 half marathons and over the years, not only has my timing improved significantly – my PB (Personal Best) being 2:10 - but also my quality of life has scaled up. Running has helped me utilize all my body parts well. And that's what they are meant for, right? The body is like a car. If you go on a vacation and keep your car parked in the garage for a few days, unused, there is always trouble re-starting, right? The car's battery dries out, the oil becomes sludge, some parts get rusty, the tire's pressure drops... You get the picture, right?

Likewise the body; if you stop using it well, problems like cholesterol, blood pressure, etc, affect it. We tend to our car well because we have invested money in buying it. Somehow we take the body for granted because it is given to us, for free.

Let us start using our body to its full potential. I can tell you from experience that the more you use it, its life and quality will be better, and longer. What are you waiting for? Go for a run and take charge of your life.



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