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THE RUNDOWN

AN INITIATIVE OF THE CHENNAI RUNNERS

ISSUE #8 JUNE 2015

STRESS PASSERS

THE BODY AND ITS
MIND

NOT CHILD'S PLAY

CHILDREN AND LONG DISTANCE RUNNING

I AM LEGEND

ABEBE BIKILA,
THE BAREFOOT MODEL

WORLD TALK

IN THE LAND OF
THE SAMURAI

THE RUNDOWN

AN INITIATIVE OF THE CHENNAI RUNNERS



Akhila Krishnamurthy

Dear Runner,

If you live where I do — Chennai — the heat and the humidity are probably getting on your nerves! Yet, I must say — and proudly — that nothing seems to have de-hydrated the spirit of the runners in the city. Across Chennai, and in large groups, women and men are waking up in the wee hours of the morning and burning up the roads. Just this morning, two chapters of the Chennai Runners jointly ran a 10K; more than anything, what struck me was the sense of camaraderie among runners... I went home, convinced yet again, that the road is indeed a great leveller!

Meanwhile, in The Rundown Editorial bureau, we've been busy stringing together this edition that you will notice, has a couple of new additions. Starting this issue, we will introduce you to a legend from the world of running; the idea behind this series, simply titled, I Am Legend, is to celebrate the greats and feel inspired to get better at whatever we are doing!

Our cover story, No Child's Play, explores — in detail, the pros and cons of children and running. The central essay, anchored by Dr Ram Rajagopalan, has been padded with a survey and points of view by parents from across the city who respond to why children should or shouldn't run. The story incidentally coincides with the second edition of Chennai Kidathon in August this year.

This apart, the back of the book features its usual suspects — LOL, Doc Talk, Gizmosis (a review of the brand new Apple watch), etc.

And just as we were closing pages, Praveen Giriya from Chennai, returned home after conquering the Comrades; so, we decided to feature the three boys from the city, who, in the last few years, have successfully run the Comrades. You will hear their voice and access their memories from that run in the column, Last Words.

Oh, and just as I was signing off, I received a message from yet another running group in Chennai that is inviting people to join them daily for the next ten days where they will be running a 21K or a 10K, daily. I'm not going to comment on what I feel about that but let me just say, that running and runners are almost omnipresent; making their presence felt across all media, mostly social, and sometimes that is a bit annoying!

What happened to the joy of running?

Think about it.

Happy reading,
Editor



Preeti Aghalayam

Hello Runners!

It has been an exciting few months here in Chennai! Despite the scorching summer heat, we seem to have hardly missed a beat! The weekends continue to be filled with races and events, while the training for upcoming bigger marathons and half marathons has continued unabated!

In April, we proudly launched the “Tenderfoot” programme. The Chennai Runners chapters came together like never before to take newbies under their wing, and fashion them into enthusiastic runners! We were lucky to have 100+ members join the three-week long programme, which concluded with a power-packed and super fun 5Km run at Anna Nagar!

Meanwhile, in early May, we co-ordinated a fund to help our brothers and sisters devastated by the Nepal earthquake. We are immensely grateful that thanks to you, we could donate a truckload of essential medicines and blankets, in addition to Rs3.5lakhs of monetary contributions. The Nepalese Army Wives Association, who are providing on ground support, were our partners who received this.

The Chennai Marathon desk is also buzzing away! Work on putting together the event has started in right earnest, with the marathon scheduled for Sunday, December 13th this year.

Finally, we are excited about the new Chennai Runners membership model that the team has been working on furiously. The Chennai Runners family started in 2006 as a small group of enthusiastic runners, and has today grown into 20 active neighborhood chapters,

a vibrant email group with 2,000+ members, and a popular Chennai Runners Facebook group with 5,000+ members. Now the time has come to build a structured database of “Chennai Runners” in order to comply with the norms of a registered not-for-profit society, and to enable us to provide running related benefits to the engaged members.

For a nominal annual fee of Rs250, runners can now register online through a simple five-minute process at www.chennairunners.com/membership and accrue several benefits including

- A unique Chennai Runners membership number and ID Card
- Complimentary Chennai Runners' branded goodies
- Great offers from Adidas, Probikers, 136.1, TreknRide, and SPARRC Fitness*
- Discounted race registration fee for The Chennai Marathon 2015
- Invites to exclusive running related workshops
- 4 issues of your favorite magazine, The Rundown!

We will further stress that the google groups and Facebook group will continue to remain open, whether you choose to register as a Chennai Runner or not. In addition, as always, everyone is welcome to run with any of the Chennai Runners chapters!

We have many more fun things in store in the future — like mobile apps and so on! Don't you just love being part of the Chennai Runners family?

Preeti Aghalayam
(On behalf of the Chennai Runners Core Team)

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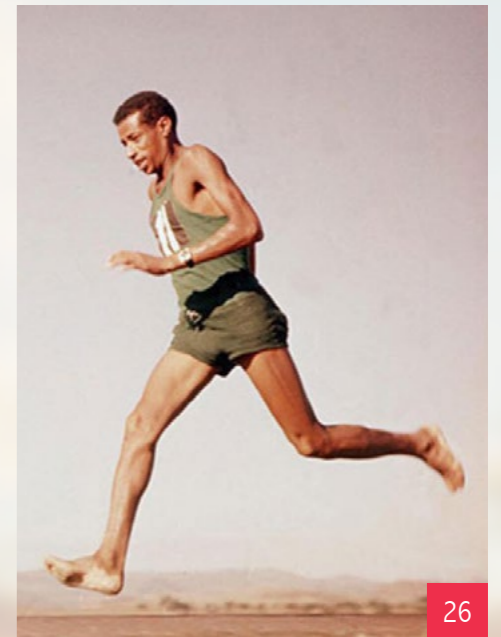
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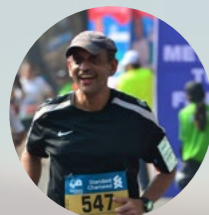


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LAVANYA KARTHIK

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



DR RAM RAJAGOPALAN

Dr Ram Rajagopalan, is a runner with a handful of marathons under his hydration belt! He is not a sports physician or paediatrician and has been unable to convince his 20-year old son, an avid footballer, to take up long distance running.



NIRANJANA SANKAR

The author used to be a lazy couch potato who loved ice cream and beer. He started running 5 years ago, and quickly got hooked. Running has since been a life-changing experience in many ways. He still loves his ice cream and beer (but feels less guilty now about such indulgences thanks to all the running.)



DR MADHU THOTTAPILLIL

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



PREETI AGHALAYAM

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



ARAVIND KUMAR

An engineer turned MBA graduate, a Human Resource professional with roots in Chennai, who now lives in Hyderabad, Aravind Kumar took up running in late 2011 and started long distance running in mid 2012. He has run a handful of Ultra marathons. He has lost count of the full marathons and the half marathons. His larger than life goals are to run the Western States 100 mile Endurance run in 24 hours and to become a renowned coach and open an academy for wannabe runners /athletes.



ASHWIN PRABHU

Ashwin Prabhu discovered the joys of distance running 10 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 4 times a week and considers himself a Chennai Runner for life.



HARISH LAKSHMAN

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



PRAVEEN GIRIYA

Praveen Giriya discovered running two years ago and is now a proud Chennai Runner, for life! He is a very passionate and enthusiastic serial Marathoner and Ultra marathoner. He is also the Joint Secretary of Chennai Runners Association. Running aside, he loves food, music, travel, enjoys meeting people and filter coffee.



BALAJI S

Balaji has been a runner ever since he was found to be unfit to play any other sports. He never challenges himself to repeat his previous achievements in running, knowing well luck doesn't strike twice. An reluctant writer, he blogs at <http://runningunlimited.wordpress.com/> which is the most frequented only by himself.



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PAINT THE CITY PINK

Preeti Aghalayam runs the second edition of Pinkathon Chennai and captures a few of its significant moments

Pinkathon, a run for women which focusses on breast cancer awareness, premiered in Chennai last year, with a record breaking 6,500 women runners on the streets. The brain (and brawn) behind Pinkathon – actor, model, barefoot running evangelist, Milind Soman – energised his team into putting together a grand gala event for nearly 10,000 women runners this year on Sunday, April 12, 2015. The event was flagged off at 5am at Island Grounds, Chennai, and included a half marathon (21.095K), in addition to the 10Km, 5Km and 3Km races. The winners in each category (in addition to the promotion events like the treadathon), were feted.

race. On the other hand, Pinkathon is always more about celebrating the spirit of women, and is just so much more than a running event. The electric atmosphere at Island grounds courtesy the Zumba warm-up troupe, the mammogram tags for a free check-up at any city hospital, the focus on training for several visually impaired and hearing impaired girls, the spirit of participation from volunteers from every corner of the city — so much of the city came together around Pinkathon Chennai! From new mothers carrying their babies in slings, to an increasing number of cancer survivors willing to share their inspiring stories, it was definitely a goose-bumpy day out in the sun for Chennai!

On the one hand, with running picking up so much momentum in Chennai, this was just another Sunday

Some of the highlights of Pinkathon Chennai 2015 are captured in the photographs below! ■



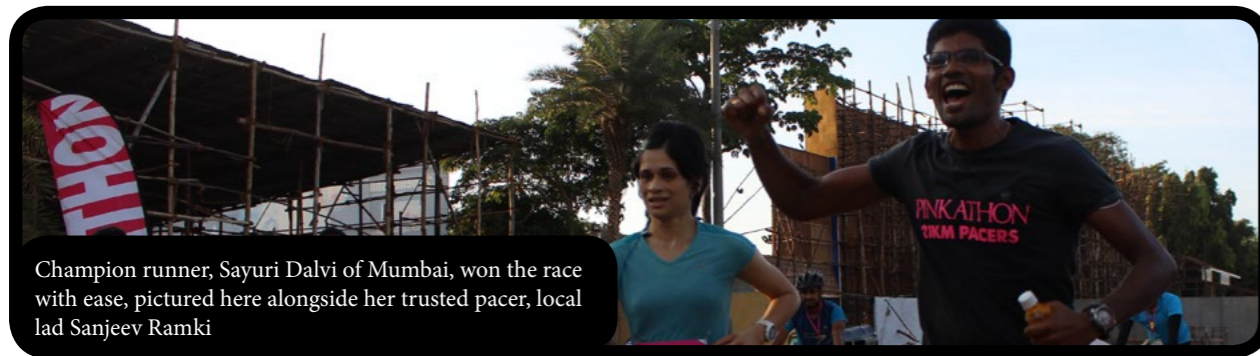
Powerhouse and cancer survivor, Neerja Malik led the 'Cancer Sheroes Squad' at Pinkathon Chennai 2015. She also blazed the road on race day with an impressive turn at the 5K race!



Bringing the joy of running to persons with physical disabilities was an important item on the agenda for 2015 – pictured here are visually impaired runners, ably supported by a team of local volunteers – who hand-held them (literally!) through training and on race day!



Milind Soman celebrates a successful race finish with the team of visually impaired girls from Sathyabama University



Champion runner, Sayuri Dalvi of Mumbai, won the race with ease, pictured here alongside her trusted pacer, local lad Sanjeev Ramki



Partnering with the Waste Warriors group, 'Green Water Stations' were included this year. Notice the shiny, re-usable, 'stainless steel' cups, which helped save Mother Earth from tonnes of plastic/paper garbage!



All half-marathoners were allotted pacers, as part of the 'A Pacer with every Racer' programme, by the Pinkathon team. Needless to say, the men pacers enjoyed the attention, and put in a good day of work at the office!



The humidity was severe on race day, but the ladies refused to let their spirits be dampened! Napier's Bridge looked alive with pink ladies everywhere you looked!

NOT CHILD'S PLAY!

Children and long distance running... Dr Ram Rajagopalan's very well-researched and nuanced point of view on children and marathon running...

It is difficult, if not impossible, to get a consensus from runners on whether or not children (under eighteen) should be allowed to participate in races exceeding five or ten kilometres. Our ambivalence on this issue is not helped by the fact that sports trainers and medical experts are often unable to make categorical recommendations (based on good evidence) on where to draw the line.

It is seldom easy to appease indignant parents who feel that their children are being unnecessarily victimised and that their natural talent is being crushed when "artificial" limits are imposed by "inconsiderate" event organizers.

Maybe I should begin by clearly disclosing that my current position favours the conservative approach to this problem — that it is better not to let children run longer distances before they are older! No wait, before you tear up this issue of The Rundown, or dash off hate-mail to the editorial team asking them to ban this insensitive pseudo-expert, please listen to my rationale.

Should children run?

Of course, they should. Running is a great form of exercise available at minimal cost to virtually anyone on this planet. As it is clear that the current generation of computer-addicted, video-game-obsessed children are becoming increasingly obese, the promotion of an active lifestyle through any means is clearly laudable.

But, what distance?

Most of us know of talented teenagers who can easily finish half marathons or more. Many children are capable of running the

distance. A study of 310 marathon finishers between the ages of 7 and 17 participating in the Twin Cities Marathon in the USA shows that these children complete the event typically between three and six hours, with half the risk of injury or medical problems when compared to their adult counterparts.

So are we saying that there is no risk involved in running?

Conclusions drawn from the studies of exceptional athletes (e.g. marathon finishers) during an event may underestimate the true frequency of injury in less gifted individuals especially during prolonged training periods. In growing children, bone growth and elongation of muscle/ tendon may not proceed synchronously, and the resultant decrease in flexibility may predispose them to injury. In fact, studies of school athletic programmes suggest that cross-country running is associated with the highest rates of injury when compared with other forms of competitive sport.

However, most of the injuries are minor and can be minimized by appropriate attention to injury prevention.

But there is also a fear that the repetitive skeletal stresses induced by the high levels of training required, particularly for marathons, may injure the bones, joints and specifically of the "growth plates" (epiphyseal cartilage) of children and may lead to stunted growth. While this type of injury is demonstrated in experimental studies in animals, the existence of such injury in children is not clearly documented. In the absence of long-term studies of the developmental and growth problems in young runners, most

experts are unwilling to make strong recommendations on limiting their participation in long distance races.

"RUNNING IS A GREAT FORM OF EXERCISE AVAILABLE AT A MINIMAL COST TO VIRTUALLY ANYONE ON THIS PLANET"

So why are we hesitant in allowing children to race in marathons?

Even today participation of children below 18 years is banned in all the Marathon Majors (Chicago alone allows 16-18 year olds with parental approval). Is this position justified? Let me reason why...

a. Absence of proof is not the proof of an absence:

The individual, who justifies child participation in marathons stating that there is no proof of harm, is glossing over the fact that this issue has not been studied adequately. The absence of proof here stems from an absence of studies. Given that there is a hypothetical risk for growth disturbance, I would give children the benefit of the doubt and not subject them to a process that is potentially harmful until we evaluate the problem thoroughly.

b. Autonomy or Coercion:

As adults participating in endurance sports we have the ability to weigh the benefits of the activity against its risks. We make calculated decisions about how we run and the distances we cover. Can children make such evaluations



objectively, especially with regards to long term developmental concerns? While blatant coercion is rare, (as in the case of Budhia in Orissa), most children deciding to run half marathons or longer are subject to far more subtle pressure. Even in the most enthusiastic of young runners, we cannot presume that a “voluntary” decision to train and run long is uninfluenced by their perceived need for parental acceptance or attention. In all other areas of life (medical decisions, voting, driving and drinking, to name a few) we do not believe that adolescents can function autonomously. So why is distance running any different?

c. Jack of a single trade:

Aerobic exercise is beneficial, but its benefits can easily be achieved

with shorter running distances than that required for marathon training. While I have no problem in encouraging children to run often and even participate in mid-distance races, I feel that the rigors of marathon training are too much for a child to handle. In the course of such training the child is forced to pursue running single-mindedly, often at the expense of participation in the traditional activities and sports of childhood. The absence of a wider involvement in other activities often denies them opportunities to learn social skills, team-work or to just have fun, the way that kids ought to.

d. Early starters are often not podium finishers:

Contrary to many parents' expectation few child running

prodigies go on to become record holders in the marathon. Most of them continue to run well in adulthood, but seldom rise to the top of the sport. So if the parent's belief is that the early beginning will 'Kenyanize' their offspring, they are misguided.

So! There you have it; one more opinion that is unlikely to calm the fiery emotions provoked by this contentious issue. The subject of child participation in marathon running cannot be guided by medical opinion alone at this time.

Until we have a better understanding of the medical risks, I'm sure that most parents with a healthy respect for their child's independence would be on my side of the argument. ■

CHENNAI KIDATHON

•The first edition of the Chennai Kidathon was held on August 8, 2014 at the YMCA Grounds, Nandanam, Chennai

•Over 2000 children - 779 girls and 1222 boys - participated in the Chennai Kidathon 2014

•The three categories of children that were accommodated in the marathon were 3-5 years, 6-12 years, and 9-14

years for distances 500m, 1Km, 2Km, and 5Km...

•The Chennai Kidathon 2014 was supported by Neville's Dawn2Dusk team, Chennai Runners, Dream Runners, Tamil Nadu Cycling Club, Round Table India Area 2 and a whole bunch of city-based schools

•Every child was given a medal and a certificate at the end of the run



AND, ONCE AGAIN

children on their first run

•The second edition of the Chennai Kidathon will be held at the YMCA Grounds, Nandanam, Chennai on August 9, 2015

•An online early bird registration process has already begun on Eventjini.com

•This year, the total number of participants is expected to cross 2500 The second edition of the race will also accommodate four categories of distances for children of different age groups - 500 m, 1 Km, 2Km and 5Km. Every child will be awarded with a medal and a certificate at the end of the run

•The 500m race will also allow eager and excited parents to accompany their

•The race will be followed by a grand carnival that will include food stalls, games, bouncing castle, and other fun activities that the children can indulge in

•That apart, participants can also look forward to pre-event activities like talks on running, healthy living, and the importance of fitness in daily life

•The event will also host an expo from where the children and parents can pick up their running paraphernalia

•Children will also be taught some basic stretches and exercises to prepare them for the big day



ANALYSE THIS!

Preeti Aghalayam presents a survey based on responses from a handful of parents who argue for and against the idea of their children running long distances

It seems clear from the literature that the effects (good or ill) of regular, long distance running on young children are not very well-known. As the number of distance running events in the country increase, children participating in races has become a common sight. While most of it is in the 5Km or 10Km events, stray bits of news about a young lad in a half marathon, are seen. Social media is filled with congratulatory messages and cute photos of kids in motion!

We, at The Rundown, asked a few parents about this phenomenon—in order to understand it from their perspective. The responses we got (from parents with children ranging in age from 8-21 years), were interesting indeed!

Should children run long distances (>10 Km), & participate in races? While several said, “No”, a handful felt that it’s fine as long as it is something the child wants to, one seeks proper guidance, or is part of a training routine. As regards the ‘safe’ age for participation in races, the opinions were fairly divided, with some feeling that 10 year olds can take part, while others estimating a conservative age of 18. “We don’t know what is sensible, there are no studies, mostly because no one wants to use children as guinea pigs” concluded one of the surveyed members!

We laid out a scenario where the child trains for long distance running. Current perspective on

that being that one runs 5+Km, a few times a week (say, 4-5 at the extreme). We asked parents if they thought there were health risks associated with such a programme, for children. A few parents said that this sounded sensible, just adding some caveats that it would best to mix up the type of runs or type of surfaces on which they run, during the week. “Haile Gebresselassie ran 10Km+ daily from a very young age” said one. But the majority of parents were opposed to this – insisting that it was better that children are not forced into a running regimen like this, worrying about form and posture and the potential for repetitive stress injuries, and expressing concerns about stunting of growth and bone density.

Are there any benefits at all?

After all, the polled parents are runners themselves, who participate in and organise quality events. Of

course, there are, they replied. As long as it is not a forced activity and it is something the child enjoys, running is a great way to get physically and mentally fit! “It builds patience” said the mother of a very active 15-year-old. “Pulls them away from gadgets and devices”, said a concerned father of an 11-year-old. Most of them agreed that the discipline, grit, mental strength, ‘never give up’ attitude, and that wonderful sense of achievement we all develop and hone from long distance running, are benefits a child deserves as well.

“Parents shouldn’t make children the vehicle for achieving their own thwarted ambitions”, said one experienced father – and that we felt was a great way to view this. Children, we know, love to ‘play’ – on their own terms, with their friends, with no big pressure of achievement or time/distance goals,



and most of all, without significant risk of injury/long term detriment to their growth. Even in the oppressive summer heat, children run around happily, kicking a ball, or chasing

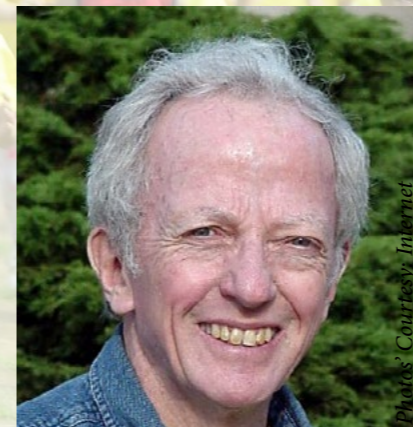
one another, or whatever invented games are currently popular, without heart rate monitors or GPS-enabled devices or ‘activity monitors’. In all this hype and hoopla

about distance running, it is best to keep in mind that childhood is most of all about fun and enjoyment — Personal Bests and Bucket List items can come later! ■



- Airtel Delhi Half Marathon:: 18 years
- Bengaluru Full Marathon:: 18 years
- Chennai Marathon:: 18 years (Half and Full Marathon), 15 years (10Km)
- New York Marathon:: 18 years
- Berlin Marathon:: 18 years
- Hyderabad Marathon:: 18 years (minors can participate with parental consent)
- TCS 10K Run (Open):: 15 years
- San Francisco Rock n Roll Half Marathon:: 12 years
- Mumbai Marathon :: 18 years (Half and Full Marathon)
- Boston Marathon:: 18 years
- USA Half Marathon (Invitational):: 15 years
- Hartford Marathon:: 16 years (Full Marathon), 12 years (Half Marathon)

AGE CRITERIA

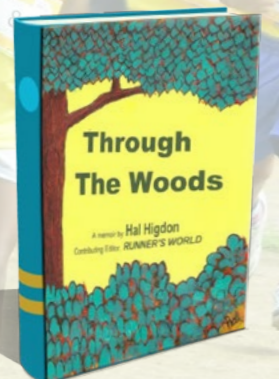


HEADLINE MAKERS

Hal Higdon, who is best known for his wonderful articles on running and training that appear in the Runner's World, has also authored a number of books including a cute little novella called *Through the Woods*. In this book, which is a rich memoir of Hal's early career as a runner and coach of a high school cross country team, one gets a glimpse of the exciting and romantic world of young runners in the west. The well-established high school athletic championships in the US focus, other than the short distances typically run on a track, on distances of 3-4 miles — typically in

scenic surroundings, through woods and greenery. "I never ran cross country in high school" says Higdon, in the opening lines of his book.

Despite this (which he deeply regrets), 83-year-old Higdon went on to complete more than 100 marathons, with several victories and age-group firsts. Read this fascinating book with your children to motivate them to participate in age-appropriate events, and to encourage them to emulate Higdon, and make running a life-long activity! ■





Photos' Courtesy: Internet

MARATHON BOY

Nine years or so ago, Budhia made it to the Limca Book of Records for a remarkable feat: Aged just 4 then, he ran from Bhubaneswar to Puri, completing that distance of 65 kms in just over 7 hours. His story intertwined with that of the man who trained him, Biranchi Das, gripped the world's attention.

Budhia, born in a poor family, lost his father early and was sold by his mother for a paltry sum. Biranchi Das, a judo trainer, who took him under his wing, noticed Budhia's amazing skills – the boy's ability to run for long periods – quite by accident and developed a programme of rigorous training for him. Budhia ran many marathons and appeared in a few commercials. But when he collapsed during a particularly stressful marathon, Das' methods came under severe criticism. Budhia was temporarily barred from participating in marathons.

What later followed is in turns tragic and also hopeful. An inquiry by the Odisha child welfare board looking into Budhia's alleged exploitation by Biranchi Das led to the boy being taken into state care. Presently Budhia, now 13 years old, is in a government sports hostel in Bhubaneswar, where he will be till he turns 17. He was also given a scholarship to attend one of Bhubaneswar's highly regarded English medium schools.

Budhia Singh's story came to worldwide attention after a documentary on him, *Marathon Boy*, was aired by HBO in 2011. Incidentally, Das was murdered in 2008 after he intervened and raised his voice in support of a model and aspiring actor who claimed that a gangster had been stalking her. The killers were sentenced to life in prison in 2010.

Though Das was benevolent and loved by the boys – and there were others he and his wife Gita adopted – there was always the suspicion and also allegations that he was keener by far to find a sports champion among them. While Budhia made no allegations against his coach mentor, the maker of *Marathon Boy*, Gemma Atwal, at that time expressed her concern at the rigid and rigorous schedule Budhia was put through.

The trust Atwal and other producers helped set up four years ago in 2011 would extend financial help to the orphanage Biranchi Das had set up and also go a long way in assisting Budhia once he leaves the sports hostel. His present coach was quoted as saying that it's too early to say if Budhia will run marathons again, though he still practices avidly. ■

An excerpt from a series titled Child Prodigies published by Scroll.in on March 27, 2015



IN THE LAND OF THE SAMURAI

If this isn't a parable of the marathon or of life in general, what is? Wonders *Niranjan Sankar* as he presents data and analyses how the Japanese have, through sheer grit and years of hard work, become a force to reckon with in the world's running community...

East African distance runners rule the major marathons. They are supposed to be naturally gifted; they have better lung capacity, thanks to high altitude living, they train from a young age because they need to run many miles back and forth to their nearest school, etc.

While there is no disputing the hold the Kenyans and Ethiopians (and the occasional Ugandan) have on the sport, one would be hard-pressed to identify which other nation produces such consistently great long distance performances.

In 2014, there were 20 Japanese women among the top 100 certified marathon times. Among the men, there were 10 Japanese (of a total of 190 men) who ran sub-2:10 races.

The United States, with its large population and great sports heritage, produced 3 women and 0 men of this calibre.

The Japanese seem to beat every other country outside East Africa in terms of depth and consistency in long distance running, at every level. However, the only Japanese runner most people know of is Haruki Murakami, celebrated writer.

When you think about it, the Japanese dominance shouldn't be surprising. Ask anyone about typical Japanese traits, and you are likely to hear things like 'discipline', 'perseverance', 'determination', etc. These are almost the exact same traits associated with marathoners. Add the famed Japanese dedication to teamwork into the mix, and you have the perfect recipe to set Japanese hearts on fire.

Enter the Japanese long distance

relay running races, called the Ekidens, which combine the grit and resolve required of distance running with the harmony and solidarity required of relay races. These events often attract super-bowl like TV audiences. Ekidens can vary in distance from 1Km to 25Km per leg. The most popular one – the Hakone Ekiden – covers 217.9Km over 2 days, with each leg varying from 18.5K to 23.4Km.

For most of us, a long distance run is not the most exciting sport to watch. Seeing people push and struggle and fall down and get up and push some more and sweat and toil their way for hours towards a distant finish line is not exactly as adrenalin-inducing as watching Dhoni on the rampage or Federer at his artistic best. But the Japanese totally love it.

Ekiden and marathon winners are rock stars, celebrated by the sedentary and the sporty. This national adoration of distance running has brought about its own eco-system of sponsors and scouts and university teams.

ASK ANYONE ABOUT TYPICAL JAPANESE TRAITS, AND YOU ARE LIKELY TO HEAR THINGS LIKE 'DISCIPLINE', 'PERSEVERANCE', 'DETERMINATION', ETC

At the school and university level, there are multiple competitions at all levels, culminating in the Hakone Ekiden, which is usually held on January 2 and 3 every year.

Good runners are identified and trained towards these events from a young age. The training is tough and relentless, but it gives results. In university level half marathons, you often see the top 10 (or 100) finishers achieving times which would put national champions of most countries to shame.

Companies love to be associated with the Ekiden, and many large ones have their own Ekiden teams with star runners and coaches. The All-Japan Men's Corporate Ekiden Championships held on New Year's Day (and the women's version held in mid-December) are very prestigious and fiercely competitive.

Many of these top university talents are hence in demand for dozens of corporate running teams. In company teams, the runner's training, nutrition, housing, etc are fully supported by the company, and the athletes also do actual corporate work, usually for a few hours every day. As a consequence, while most countries have a few dozen professional runners at best, Japan has thousands of them.

All this makes for a fantastic environment to identify, attract and train the best runners. There is a clear path for runners to be identified and to grow from junior school. This focus on running, to the exclusion of almost everything else, also gives runners the wherewithal to indulge in grueling training schedules.

And Japanese training can be particularly tough and regimental, indicative of the general work ethic of the nation. Many experts feel the Japanese overtrain, which is why they aren't (yet) able to compete with the best Kenyans. Elite runners

often run 150+ miles a week, with multiple runs in a day. As Japan is short on open spaces, most runs involve multiple repeats of short loops. This develops mental toughness, as it is hard not to stop each time you pass the finish line.

For many Ekiden runners, a marathon is a logical next step. After all the grueling training, the 42Km mark is no longer intimidating,

and there is no talk of hitting the wall.

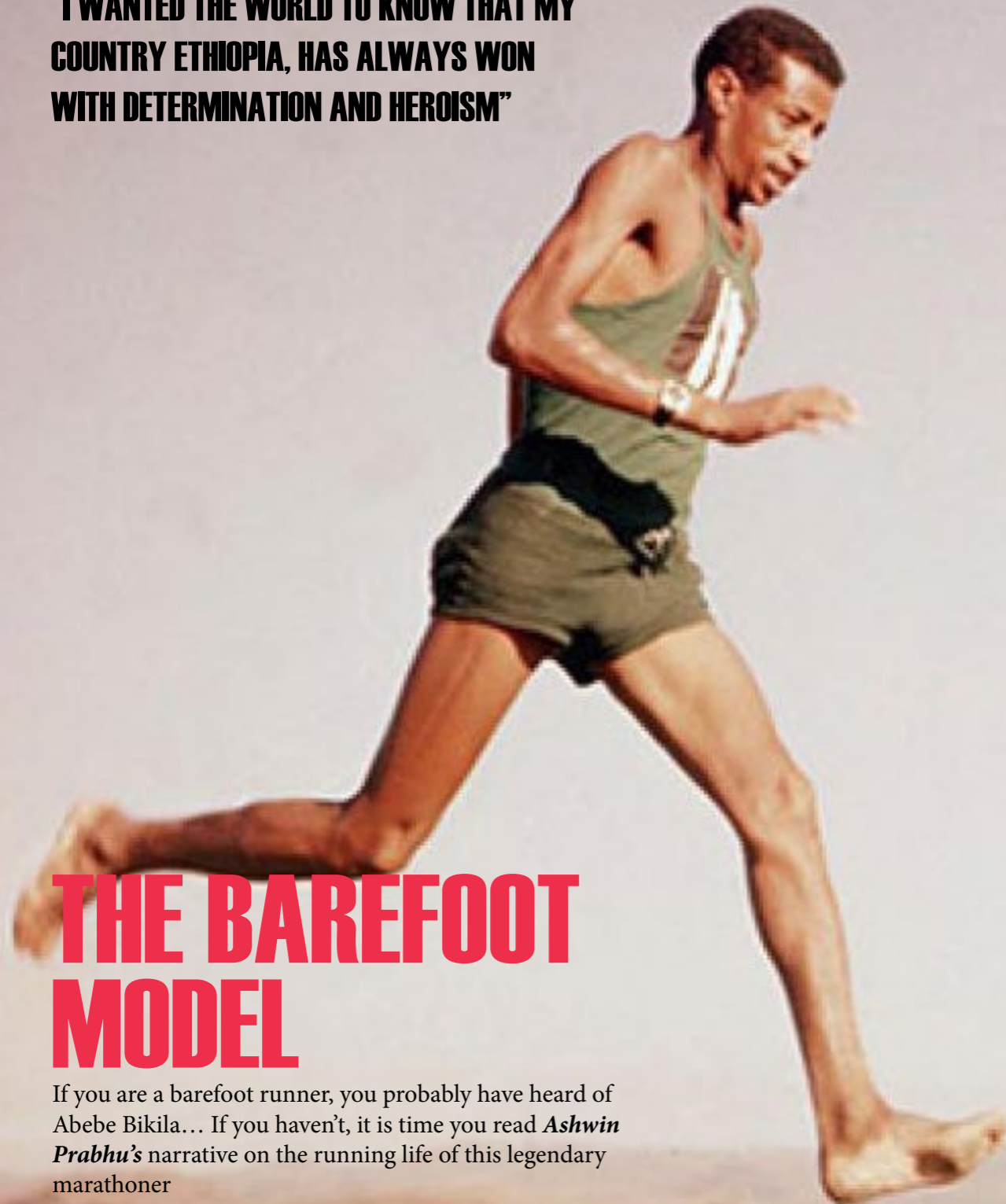
Because of this localized system and a training calendar focussed on national events, the Japanese (so far) aren't seen much on international events. The World Championships and Olympic Games are what many elite runners work towards, which is why so many medals in these events have been won by the

Japanese through memorable and tenacious runs.

The Japanese may not have the natural gifts or the geographical advantages of the East Africans. But, through sheer grit, dedication and years of disciplined hard work, they have become acclaimed runners and a force to reckon with on the world stage. If that isn't a parable of the Marathon, or life in general, what is? ■



“I WANTED THE WORLD TO KNOW THAT MY COUNTRY ETHIOPIA, HAS ALWAYS WON WITH DETERMINATION AND HEROISM”



THE BAREFOOT MODEL

If you are a barefoot runner, you probably have heard of Abebe Bikila... If you haven't, it is time you read *Ashwin Prabhu's* narrative on the running life of this legendary marathoner



about **THE I AM LEGEND COLUMN**

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

Photos' Courtesy: Internet

Most modern day recreational runners would've perhaps encountered the name 'Bikila' when they pondered buying or bought the minimalist running shoe model of the same name from Vibram. It is another story altogether that the company shamelessly borrowed and trademarked the name without seeking permission from the family of Abebe Bikila, one of the greatest marathoners of all time.

Abebe Bikila's story set in place the leitmotif of East African runners from the Rift Valley region dominating the world stage at the marathon distance. In an era when participation of black athletes in Olympic sport was viewed with suspicion and raised eyebrows and when they would have to compete under the flags of their colonial masters, Bikila ran into the history books by becoming the first black African athlete running for his home country to win an Olympic Gold medal when he won the marathon event at the 1960 Rome Olympics. His win at Rome had all the attributes of an unforgettable Italian Opera - drama, suspense, romance and finally, a climactic crescendo in which Bikila running barefoot sprinted first across the finish line under the Arch of Constantine, under the heavy cover of darkness, illuminated only by torch lamps held aloft by the soldiers of the Italian military. After the race, asked by incredulous journalists why he ran barefoot, Bikila, a last minute addition to the Ethiopian Olympic team, replied - "I wanted the world to know that my country Ethiopia has always won with determination and heroism".

Bikila's journey had just begun

at Rome. A member of the Imperial Royal Guard of Emperor Haile Selassie, he had been spotted by the Finnish-Swede athletics coach, Onni Niskanen in the lead-up to the 1960 Olympics Games and had been drafted into the Ethiopian national team as a last minute replacement for an injured athlete. After his spectacular victory at Rome, Bikila became a national hero and household name overnight.

"ABEBE OWES HIS LIFE TO HIS GOLD MEDAL"

Drama and intrigue would follow Bikila throughout his life. Two months after returning to Addis Ababa, Bikila became embroiled in controversy when Ethiopia's Imperial Guard staged a coup to overthrow the Emperor. Bikila took no part in this daredevil uprising and was let off after the coup ultimately failed, to which a newspaper apparently reported - "Abebe owes his life to his gold medal".

Two months before the 1964 Tokyo Olympics games, even as his training was peaking, Bikila felt a searing pain in his stomach and was operated on for appendicitis. Despite questions about his recovery and fitness for the marathon, Bikila traveled to Tokyo unsure about his participation. The lion-heart that he was, Bikila bravely lined up at the start line aiming to become the first athlete to defend his olympic marathon gold. Running this time in brand-new white Puma shoes, Bikila ran his own race and broke away from the leader pack at the 30 Km mark and finished in a world record time of 2:12:11, a stunning

4 minutes and 7 secs ahead of the silver medallist. To further compound the crowd's and commentator's disbelief, Bikila went on to perform an elaborate series of stretching and calisthenics exercises in the centre field even as he waited for his fellow competitors to arrive in the stadium. Two Olympic Gold medals, two world records, all in the span of 8 short years - Bikila had charted the course from total obscurity to world domination in his chosen sport.

Gunning for a third consecutive Gold medal, Bikila took to the start line at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics harbouring an injury. Despite being in the lead, he eventually pulled out at the 15th Km mark and saw his compatriot Mamo Wolde, a fellow member of the Imperial Guard win the gold medal. An Ethiopian had won Gold in three consecutive Olympic marathons.

In 1968, Bikila was involved in an automobile accident which left him a quadriplegic. He underwent surgery at the Stoke Mandeville hospital in England, regained the use of his arms and further more, on the advice of his coach Niskanen, took up Archery as a competitive sport in the 1969 Stoke Mandeville games, the predecessor to the Paralympic Games. However, Bikila never recovered his health fully and died in 1973 of Cerebral Hemorrhage at the young age of 41. In a poignant sporting feat, in 2010, the 50th anniversary of Bikila's Olympic win at Rome, an Ethiopian runner, Siraj Gena won the Rome Marathon running the last 300m of the race barefoot to commemorate his countryman and all-time running great, Abebe Bikila. ■

The 5 BEST things about Race Day

by Lavanya Karthik

#5

Finishing



#4

Improving on your timing (or not...)



#3



The medal

#2

Meeting up with running buddies



#1

Discovering that there are, indeed, runners even slower than you!



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Mahesh Jayaraman



Venkatesh Kaman



Hari Krishnaswami

Photos: Courtesy: Shwetha Joyson and Sathvika Venkatesh

FAT BOYS SLIM

Three men from Chennai tell *Akhila Krishnamurthy* how they tackled obesity with running...



119 TO 77!

One day, in 2006, *Mahesh Jayaraman* made up his mind to lose all the extra weight, and he did it! This is his story

Mahesh Jayaraman had his moment of epiphany nine years ago, while shopping for a pair of trousers on a vacation in Singapore. Scouting nearly every store in every big mall in the city, Mahesh didn't find a pair that fit him. "I didn't find my size there," he confesses, tracing that episode as a trigger to his journey towards weight loss.

When Mahesh reached Chennai, among the first things he did was to sign up for a year-long membership at a gym in Alwarpet. "I gave myself a year to get back in shape, and to the weight that I once was," Mahesh says. That morning, while planning his training schedule, his gym instructor asked him to take a treadmill test where he had to run for 12 minutes. "I could run only for 15 seconds; I walked the rest and covered a distance of 850 metres," he says.

At that point in time, Mahesh weighed 119.8 kilograms. He set himself an arbitrary deadline of 12-15 months and a somewhat arbitrary target of 77 kgs. He started

hitting the gym regularly, eating small portions of nutritious food six times a day and not jumping onto any of the fad diet bandwagons.

His cardio sessions involved running about 5-6 loops around Boat Club Road with each loop measuring 1.4km and pretty soon, he started seeing incredible results. Doing this consistently six days a week (Mondays being the off day) started producing some astounding results — 3 to 4kg loss each month and suddenly, the arbitrarily set timeline and target became a reality. In 14 months, he was at 77 kgs and en route to this target, he had given up on sugar, ice cream, artificial foods, carbonated drinks, alcohol and any kind of packaged food.

“ALL YOU NEED TO DO IS BE CONSISTENT; PUSH YOURSELF TOWARDS YOUR GOAL.

The daily runs that originally contributed to the weight loss soon

became a way of life with Mahesh. "I started loving what I was doing," he says. At this point, he attempted to do what most people who enjoy running do – transition from a casual runner into distance running and races. The first such attempt came in the form of a 12Km run to Besant Nagar beach and back. Two months later, Mahesh registered for a 10K run at the MARG Chennai Marathon and finished it in 1:06 minutes. "That, I think," he says, "was the beginning of my running journey. I told myself I will give myself a year to run a half marathon and I did as I planned. There has been no looking back, since."

Since then, Mahesh has completed 16 half marathons, five full marathons, and several 10Km races. An active member of Chennai Runners' Pettai Rappers group (as the Alwarpet chapter is called), Mahesh is a regular in the circuit. His famous last words to others wishing to get back in shape are: "All you need to do is be consistent; push yourself towards your goal. It is surely possible." ■



“PERSEVERANCE IS A QUALITY I APPRECIATE AND STRIVE FOR. I FEEL LONG DISTANCE RUNNING IS A TESTAMENT TO THAT!”

RUN FOR KEEPS!

Venkatesh Kannan ran his first 5K race as a student in the United States; he hated the weight he carried along but loved the feeling of running. So, he ran a whole lot to feel light, again!

“I was always a slightly fat kid,” says 30-year-old Venkatesh Kannan, an entrepreneur and a restaurateur, with a shy smile. You know instantly that he is honest; you also know that this young, fit man sitting in front of you, taking a break between business and a workout routine at The Unit, believes in the power of process, and is committed to staying strong, and healthy. “I used to go to the gym while I was in college but wait, at that point, going to the gym was like one week at a stretch, once every three months. I’d lose a kilo or two and end up feeling great about it.”

Some six years ago, taking a fairly long break from the gym, KV, as friends and family refer to him, landed himself at 93 kilos. “That figure scared the hell out of me,” he chuckles, “So, I cut down on food drastically and when the weight dropped below 90, I remember being very happy.”

The real weight loss story kick started when KV arrived in the United States to pursue a Master’s programme in Business Adminis-

tration. As a student, he remembers having access to an array of amazing facilities – a gym, a pool, great running tracks, et al. One day, following a friend’s suggestion, KV ran a 5K race. “It was a great feeling,” he says, “You know the whole works, right? T-shirt, a medal, many photographs... Plus, I finished the run in 36 minutes and even though my legs hurt like crazy, I knew I wanted to run.”

KV was 89 kilos then. He still vividly remembers feeling disgusted with the weight he carried while he ran that 5K race. “And because I enjoyed it so much, I wanted to get better at it.” He became a part of the running club in his B-school and thereafter he was hooked. Even when he visited Chennai, during summer next year, he remembers running from Adyar to Velachery in peak traffic post 6pm, after work at his father’s office. “People thought I was nuts but I was too much into it to really care,” he says.

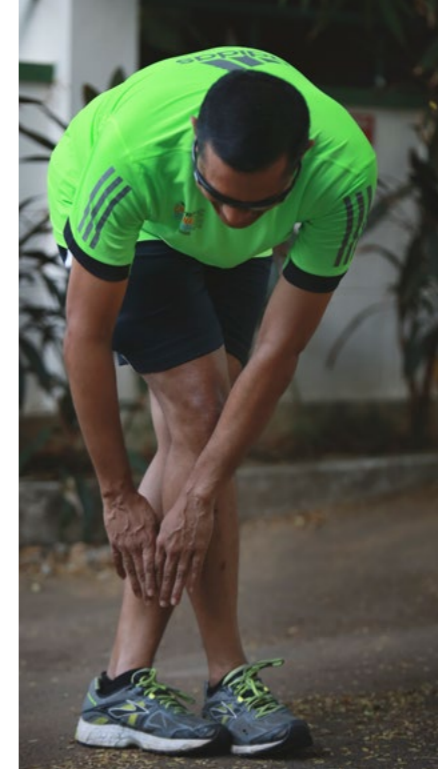
Yet, despite being regular with running, KV didn’t see weight loss instantly. The thing about

your body, he says is that it has an “amazing ability to adapt to anything you throw its way. The only way I realised I was going to lose weight was to shock my body and let it get out of its comfort zone.” In KV’s case, that comfort zone was a 7Km run. “If I had to lose weight, I knew I had to change things around. I pressed the accelerator both in terms of speed and distance and combined running with weight training.”

To make things a little goal-oriented, he signed up for a marathon and began to rigorously follow the training programme recommended for it. “When I finished the marathon successfully, I weighed 72 kilos,” he adds.

He is still a runner at heart even though of late, he is a regular at The Unit, a boot camp in the city where he avers there is “always something new, something more to be achieved along with a great group.”

His famous last words: “Perseverance is a quality I appreciate and strive for. I feel long distance running is a testament to that!” ■



SHEER JOY!

Running is both pensive and like a party, says *Hari Krishnaswami*, who stumbled upon running much later than most but courted and married it, and made it his own, in a jiffy!

“I’ve had several bouts of weight loss,” says Hari Krishnaswami, an advocate based in Chennai, who is known among the running fraternity, for his wit and sense of humour, “Three to be precise.” Okay, tell us about it, we nudge him and he lists them, obediently: “In June 1996, when I lost about 20 kgs watching my diet and doing aerobics. In 2002, after gaining some 20 kilos in three years, I lost that weight over two years. And gained it subsequently! In 2010, with a personal trainer at the Madras Cricket Club, I lost 20 kilos – from 122 kilos to 102 kilos. That’s the thing about weight loss; you usually hit a plateau when the weight doesn’t reduce beyond a point and trainers usually say you need to do something different both in terms

of exercise or/and diet.”

That exact moment in Hari’s life is when running met him. In 2012. Over dinner, one night, a few friends, who were already into long distance running, shared notes on their Sunday long runs. “That conversation kindled my curiosity,” Hari says, “I heard and watched them describe the fun of an outdoor run and I knew I wanted to give it a shot.”

He did by starting to run along the perimeter of the M A Chidambaram stadium for a few months. And then one day, a member of the Chennai Runners invited him to run with a group of regulars inside the IIT campus. “I was baptised with a 10K run/walk by the run/walk pro, Karthik Padmanabhan,”

Hari says. He hasn’t stopped since! That 10K run was in June. In July, Hari ran his first half marathon and completed it in 2:14 minutes and ran his first full marathon in January next year in Mumbai, finishing it at 5:04 minutes and very quickly graduating to a 4:30 minutes finish in Berlin in September 2013. “In between, I have run several half marathons including a sub 2 at a recent race organised in Chennai. The journey is on,” he says. Hari now manages his weight between 78 and 80 kilos and mixes his runs with training at The Quad, a cross-fit routine that helps in strength training and that he believes is very important to run well. Famous last words: “Running is everything from meditation to partying... It is absolute joy!” ■

STRESS-PASSERS!

Dr Madhu Thottappillil says the body has a mind of its own and pushing it beyond a limit, rapidly, comes with its share of problems...



Everybody is hitting the roads! It's a good sign. It speaks volumes about the increased level of fitness and its awareness among people. It's almost admirable, actually! I understand how it works. It starts off with this feeling that everyone you know is running. Maybe I should too, you think. Thereafter, it is about discovering where you stand in terms of your Fitness Quotient; one is just testing oneself, and sometimes, merely for the heck of it!

CAN I RUN?

Heck! Yes, I seem to be able to! Yay! #itoocanrun

HOW FAST CAN I RUN?

My Runkeeper (an app) says I can manage 8K in an hour! I could run only 4K today but I am sure I can do 8 tomorrow.

HOW FAR CAN I RUN?

I can run the entire stretch of the beach, non-stop! Wow! #beachruntoday

CAN I SET HIGHER GOALS FOR MYSELF?

Maybe I can do the full marathon the day after tomorrow! #runningmotivated
And then the attention slowly shifts to yourself in relation to XYZ around you. If he can run 10K in

an hour, I am sure I can manage that. After all, I am younger and fitter! That pushes you to push yourself more! He can do it, why can't I? I need to raise my own bar! Honestly, I rarely see people set for themselves a comfortable goal for a considerable period of time and just stick to that. People rarely settle for a simple canter! They want the so-called adrenaline rush. This is precisely how this young man landed up in my clinic. This young new runner was making good progress, but he felt this need to constantly increase the distance and clock more running hours.

How much distance one can run depends on each person. Endurance levels, you must know, differ from person to person. Any load on the body cannot be upped drastically and as per one's whim. It takes time for one to know one's own body's pace and believe me the body has a mind of its own when it comes to comfort level. One needs to gauge that. Fast and long distance running is all fine, but smart running is better in the long run!

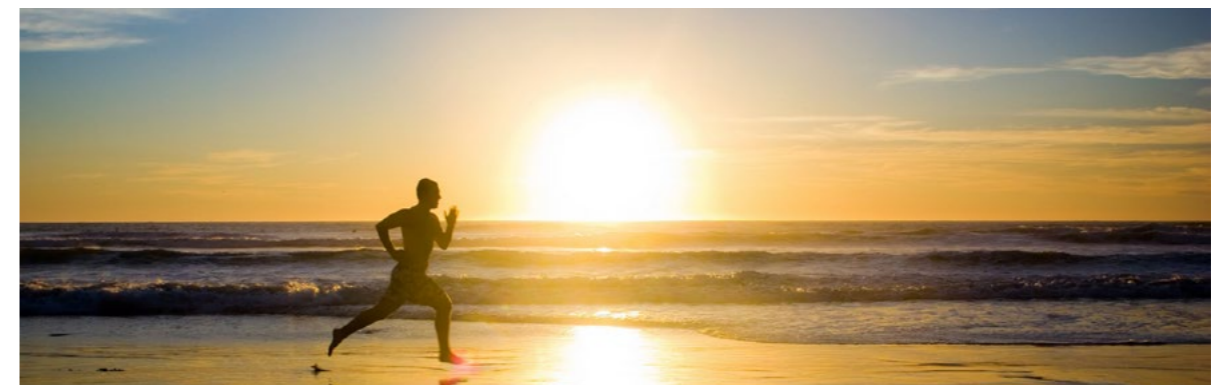
The point I am trying to make here is our body. There is no point in pushing our bodies. We are just adding load and this in turn leads to all kinds of injuries. We should understand

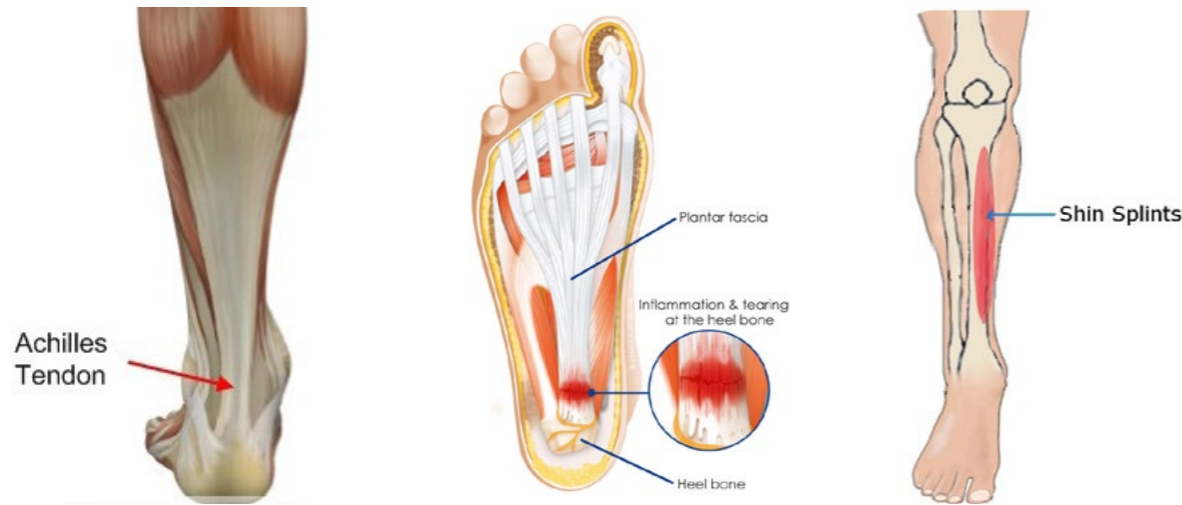
that our bodies, specifically the skeletal and muscular system, need time to heal. Popping a medicine to address a pain is not the answer; neither is it sensible to pop pills and keep running. The bone or the muscle needs to be rested.

Our Musculoskeletal system is a dynamic structure which is capable of re-modelling and repairing itself as a result of any kind of micro trauma. This is the primary concept by which training works, either in running or any kind of resistance training. For example, our bones respond to loading stress, by developing microscopic damage, which starts the re-modelling process by which the damaged bone cells are repaired, which makes the re-modelled bone stronger and a little more capable of taking stress.

But this process of re-modelling and adaptation takes time to repair. If fresh load is placed on the bones or tendons, due to the inadequate time for repair and re-modelling, the tissues - instead of becoming stronger - end up becoming weaker in the process.

Running is an activity that exposes musculoskeletal structures of the lower extremity to a large amount of repetitive stress over a period of time, which may result in fatiguing of these structures with the potential of repetitive stress injuries.





From Left: Achilles Tendon; Plantar Fascitis and Shin Splints

THE MOST COMMON REPETITIVE STRESS INJURIES ASSOCIATED WITH RUNNING ARE:

- **STRESS FRACTURES**
- **MEDIAL TIBIAL STRESS SYNDROME(SHIN SPLINTS)**
- **CHONDROMALACIA PATELLA**
- **ACHILLES TENDINITIS**
- **PLANTAR FASCITIS**

The growing popularity of long distance running over the last couple of years has resulted in a higher incidence of stress fractures and shin splints. Typically, I encounter these injuries in first-time marathoners or half marathoners who have an improper training load, where there is an increased intensity in training and more kilometers done over a shorter duration. Stress fractures usually occur in the bones of the feet, the most common among them being the metatarsal. The causes of stress fractures in runners are usually, over training, rapid increase in running loads and inappropriate shoes.

The Medial Tibial Stress Syndrome, as the name suggests, affects the tibia and is also a result of abnormal loading during running. Signs

that suggest the presence of stress fractures are intense pain that is present during the run and is relieved with rest initially, though in advanced cases, the pain may even be present during periods of rest. There is usually a redness around the site and severe tenderness on touch. If left untreated, stress fracture can progress to a complete fracture.

Diagnosing stress fractures and treating them early is imperative to ensure a quick recovery. Management of stress fractures usually involves stoppage of running for a period and possible immobilization of the feet. If abnormalities of the biomechanics of the feet are present like pronation deformities or hypermobility, then custom orthotics are prescribed along with the appropriate

supportive running shoes.

Prevention of stress fractures as well as other repetitive stress injuries in runners involves a very gradual increase in mileage. A general rule of thumb is approximately ten percent increase in intensity/distance each week. It is also extremely important to have periods of rest between the runs to facilitate recovery.

It is indeed a great feeling that one is able to do the impossible. But one needs to take care it doesn't lead to it becoming impossible to run!

So run by all means, but do not run like an angry mob is after you. Trot, enjoy the feeling and feel the fitness levels rising gradually in you. ■

Photos' Courtesy: Internet

DEAR MS MTS

BY PREETI AGHALAYAM

Sri Mundolious, who answers your queries so earnestly on a regular basis, is busy. Doing what, you ask? Well, let that be a question for the next edition's column, when Sri M will be back at the helm. Meanwhile, do not fear, 'cause Maami ThayirSaadam(MTS for short) is here to fill the gaping void! She is an accomplished expert on all matters running, in fact, Sri M trained at her feet in his youthful years. You may want to frame this column for posterity!

Dear MTS,
It has come to my notice that the drinking of 215.2ml of beetroot juice before a run; followed by the ingestion of 23.5ml of beetroot juice spiked with asafoetida post-run, will improve my running speed by as much as 30s/Km. Kindly corroborate.

– Vampire Wannabe

Dear Mr. Wannabe, you ask a very pertinent question indeed. This is a matter of national concern, in fact. Beetroot juice is known to ward off evil spirits, sprites, ghouls and other such inhabitants of the dark regions. You should drink it with diligent efficiency, particularly if you want your pee to be coloured a decorous pink.

Dear MTS,
I am a seasoned runner who has participated in several marathons over the past two years, earning medals in all of them. As I enjoy

mathematics as a hobby (in fact, I scored a centum in school), my training plan is a methodical, mathematical one. To ensure that I can run at the convex limit of my abilities, and recognizing that temporal variations are not uncommon, I have devised a precise plan that I am now in the process of patenting. As I am your ardent fan, I would like to pose an assignment problem for your readers regarding my "Arithmetic Progression Plan."

If I ran 10Km last Monday, and 11.5Km on Tuesday, and so on, in average Chennai humidity of 85%, what is the total distance I covered in the month of May? (Please show your working). – Centum Raja

Raja – kudos on your invention. Here, take a free sample of cortisone, and a kilo of beetroot for juicing purposes. And the solution to the assignment problem is You_Are_Insane.

Dear MTS ma'am,
I am a woman runner from Chennai. What should I wear?

–Modest Aunty

Dear Aunty, let me tell you a story. In the beginning, there were pants. Track pants they were called and you could buy them in blue, black or maroon, though they all had two white stripes on the sides. Sometimes you bought them by the kilo. They lasted years and years, particularly if you ran a sewing machine over the seams before starting to use them, and despite

the gentle ministrations of the dhobi and the washing stone. Then P.T.Usha ran her famous races wearing shorts, and you could buy shorts (never by the kilo). They also had the two white stripes, so that, thigh up, you looked like you were in track pants. Then came short shorts and pink shorts and denim and Deepika Padukone and it was all very messy and the universe was not happy. So the ocean was churned and what bubbled to the top was bound to restore balance across the lands. "Mukka Pants" as they are called, extend down to your knees, and what they lack in the form of the white stripes on the side, they make up for in zippered pockets to stash your cash. You must wear Mukka Pants, along with Tshirts and shoes and wrist-bands and bandanas and watches and iPods and phones and antennae for picking up the satellite signal. And perhaps you can consider wearing all that and running?

Dear MTS,
I find it quite disturbing that even women are running these days. Are you sure it is safe for you all? Please take precautions.

–A Macho Man

Dear Macho Man, we thank you for your deep concern about this issue. We will take many precautions, as suggested by you, particularly against caring men on the road. MIND IT. ■



NOT AN APPLE A DAY!

One of the most anticipated products of Apple is finally available; does it live up to its expectations? It is also being touted as one the best fitness wearables in the market. Is this the dream gadget for every runner out there? **Harish Lakshman** wears it, runs with it, and writes about it



There is no doubt in my mind that this is absolutely the best SmartWatch in the market today. The few Android ones in the market don't even come close. Its looks, build quality, the digital crown are all absolutely Applesque. The user interface is also very elegant. While there are differences to the iOS, it is still classy.

In terms of features, it seems to me that Apple is trying to achieve two objectives. The first is to get you to use your phone less and watch more (apparently it is less obtrusive and rude to check your messages on a watch than on a phone during meetings). The watch also shows all the notifications that come on your phone and you can even send short replies to messages/email. It also helps you look up quick information like upcoming meetings on your calendar, access the weather, cricket score, etc. It is voice-enabled so Siri can come up with answers to your queries as well. You can also play music that is stored in your iPhone and watch.

On this front, Apple has clearly met my expectations. I definitely

tend to pick up my phone less these days (which, by the way, increases the battery life of your iPhone!) and look at my watch more.

The second objective of Apple is to get you to lead a healthier lifestyle. The watch comes equipped with a Heart Rate Monitor that constantly is measuring your heart beat. It measures the number of steps, kilometres walked, stairs climbed, calories burnt, etc. It also has a Workout app that is specifically meant for cycling, running, etc. The watch does not have a GPS. It, however, has the ability to use the GPS from your iPhone. So, you have to carry your iPhone in order for your watch to work as a running watch. While that is a big bummer, there is an interesting twist! Apparently after five or six long runs, the accelerometer in the watch calibrates your running and has the ability to measure your distance, pace, etc. even if you don't carry your iPhone. While this sounds cool, essentially this is the same accelerometer that is used when you run indoors on a treadmill (all the new Garmin watches — Forerunner 220, 620, Vivoactive, 920xt have this feature).

The accuracy of this is not 100% and can vary even upto 15%. Also, the watch does not have the ability to record lap splits. You cannot customise the data fields you want on your screen.

One of the good things about the Heart Rate Monitor (HRM) though is that it is built into the watch. So you don't need that strap around your chest which you need with a Garmin. While the monitor is fairly accurate, the recording is not continuous. It measures every couple of minutes, so you will not be able to get your "Instant Heart Rate".

I did a couple of runs with the watch, and I am absolutely convinced it is not a "runner's watch". The data is very basic and the user interface needs a lot of improvement. Knowing Apple, future software updates will have some improvements but even then this will not meet most runners' requirements.

Also given that this watch is almost useless without an iPhone and the cheapest Apple Watch is a good \$400, it is probably not worth it. Until Apple Watch 2 then! ■

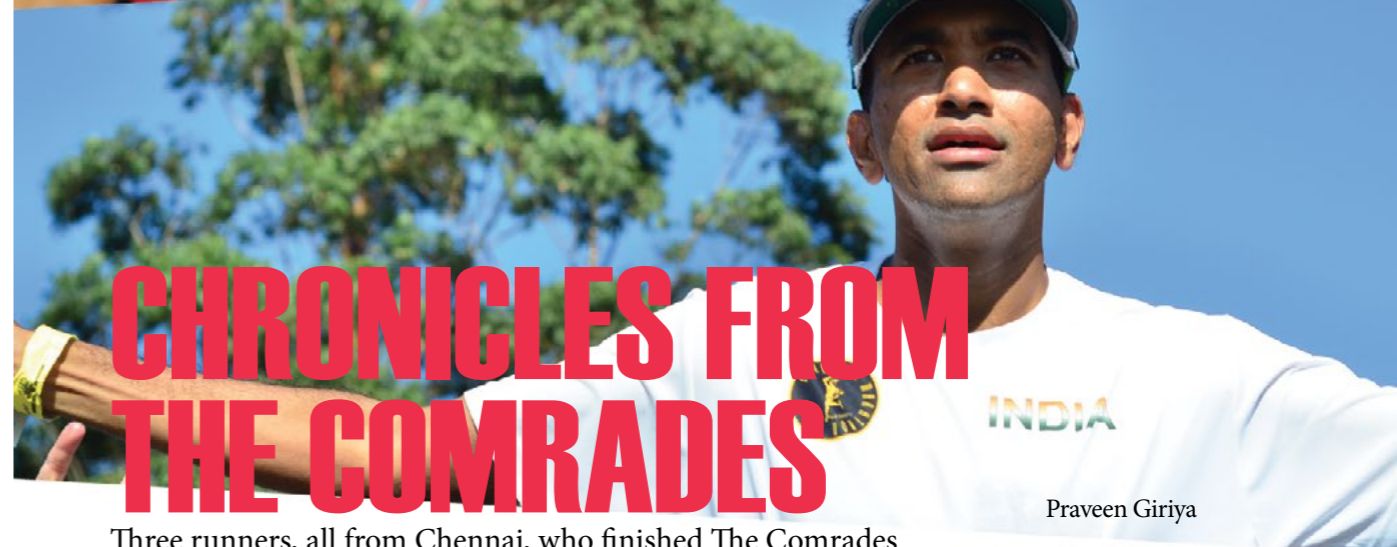
Photos' Courtesy: Internet



Balaji S



Aravind Kumar



Praveen Giriya

CHRONICLES FROM THE COMRADES

Three runners, all from Chennai, who finished The Comrades Marathon — Comrades for short, in the recent past, jot some learnings and experiences from that super challenging race... The Comrades Marathon, for the uninitiated is the world's oldest and largest Ultramarathon run over a distance of approximately 90K/56.1 miles between the capital of the Kwazulu-Natal Province of South Africa, Pietermaritzburg, and the coastal city of Durban



YES, WE RAN

A real, unfussy, mildly funny but essentially inspiring story by *Balaji S*, who finished the Comrades in 2012

In March 2011, Amit Sheth came to Chennai to launch his book, *Dare to Run* and asked us ‘who among us’ were ready for the Comrades 2012? Karthik Padmanabhan (KP) and Ramani (Sir) put their hands up, and asked me to do the same. Unaware of the consequences, I followed them. It’s a different story that they let me down later!

My training for Comrades is best kept a secret. The only day, I adhered to the plan, in terms of time and distance, was the race day. Few good runs and loads of encouragement from friends prompted me to book my tickets and apply for a visa.

John Bingham said, “The miracle isn’t that I finished. The miracle is that I had the courage to start.” For me, more than the courage, it was a miracle that I made it to the start. Visa issues had me with my fingers crossed for the most part, and my passport reached me literally three hours before my departure, finally, officially, confirming my travel to South Africa. The day before the marathon, Ram (Viswanathan) and I had to change our accommodation and had no

clue on how to reach the start point. Thanks to Gideon, who was also running the Comrades, we found transport to the start point. The start of the race was worth every effort that took to reach it – an electrifying atmosphere with fully charged up runners.

The KM (kilometre) marker boards in Comrades show you the distance that is yet to be covered. It makes you feel that all the distance that you completed so far is absolutely worth nothing. After running for 6 hours and completing 46 Km, the first board I saw was “43 Km More”. I had run 46Km, yes 46Km, more than a marathon distance and here I was looking at the board that said that I had to run more than a full marathon now!

With 5Km to go and about 41 minutes left, I could sense that the crowd around me was thinning down leaving me with doubts of finishing. The next 2Km possibly defined my Comrades run. I decided to go gung ho and throw myself into the race. I gathered all the energy, prayed to all the Gods I knew and stepped up my pace. I recollected famous lines from the film, *Chariots of Fire*: “Then where



does the power come from, to see the race to its end? From within”, and guess what, actually managed to finish with literally two minutes to spare.

My Comrades attempt was more than an individual pursuit. It was a collective effort, be it running a marathon under 5 hours or being a pacer for a 5-hour bus.

There were runners who always believed and instilled the belief in me. They inspired me to register for the Comrades; they helped me train for it, in Chennai, at a remote spot in the hills; they kept my hopes alive during the delay in my visa. When the clock was ticking towards the 12-hour mark, there were people back home refreshing their browsers rapidly, hoping my name appears soon. Some of them remained glued to the internet broadcast.

And there was Ram and his family spending more time praying for me to finish than brooding over his misfortune. It was each one of them who helped me run the Comrades, and it was they, who finished the run through me... Yes, together, We Ran! ■



POWER OF THE SUBCONSCIOUS

No matter how many 100 mile races I run, Comrades has taught me to stay humble and appreciate the beauty of life, writes *Aravind Kumar* who finished the Comrades 2014

There is no alternative to Discipline and Hardwork

Training for the Comrades made me realise that nothing can replace proper discipline. I logged close to 400K per month for 3.5 months with long runs every weekend. The training phase during the Comrades was fantastic and I have matured as an individual and as an Ultra runner. Irrespective of any Ultra races I run in the future, the Comrades will remain special to me.

Training is Paramount

There is no such thing as a free lunch. Being fit is a continuous process and cannot happen in a day. I spent close to a year training for the Comrades including the qualifier race. I have been blessed to receive lots of training tips and pieces of advice from veterans like Bib Bala (from Chennai) and Santhosh Padmanabhan (from Bangalore). Bala has been instrumental in instilling in me that sense of madness in training.

Going all out and training and the feeling of crossing that finish line after so much hard work is just inexplicable. It cannot be explained and has to be felt personally. I strongly believe in the concept of No Pain No Gain.

The Power of the Subconscious

“Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go” – T S Eliot
Training for the Comrades also made me realise the true potential of the human body and the power of the subconscious. Today, I am aiming for 100 mile races and beyond, and I completely owe it to my experiences and learnings from training for Comrades. It has helped me dream beyond reality.

Support from Well-Wishers

For any Ultra marathon, you need to spend hours every day on training and it definitely takes a toll on your personal and professional life, not to mention the monetary

aspects involved in participating in a big race like the Comrades. I am blessed to have a wonderful family, friends and well-wishers who have run hand-in hand with me in this journey.

How I did it!

I attribute only 10% to my training and 20-30 % on my mental ability. 60-70% of my success is attributed only to my family, friends, mentors and all well-wishers from the Chennai Runners’ community.

Being Humble and Grounded

The first thing any athlete will tell you about the hills is that they humble you. Running on these hills have made me realise how beautiful life is. It has also made me realise that to reach to the top, one has to be grounded and humble.

I find a big similarity between life and the hills. Both are full of ups and downs and we have to treat them with respect. ■

MINUTES OF THE COMRADES

Praveen Giriya, Joint Secretary, Chennai Runners, jots down his most favourite moments from his journey of running the Comrades Marathon, this year...

On June 8, 2014 I was surprised to receive a courier from Ram Viswanthan, founding member of Chennai Runners and our godfather that had a nice little note along with his Comrades Marathon goodie bag. The letter read: “Dear Praveen, wishing you to be the next Chennai Runner to cross the Comrades finish line.” Without any further hesitation, I wanted to sign up for the race; I also persuaded a friend of mine to sign up along with me, and thus our Comrades journey began! Some of my most favourite memories of this journey are as follows:

Training:

First and foremost, Comrades demands a lot of preparation, and my training began in January. What were once merely casual morning runs became rigorous training schedules demanding about 130 -150Km per week. As the miles accumulated, I began to question whether or not I would be able to complete 90 Kilometres with steep hills and high temperatures. I was fortunate to have a strong network of runners to encourage me along the way, and help me push through. I’ll never forget the support I received from them, and their encouragement energised me. Their encouragement and support is surely one of my fondest memories of the race.

Durban:

I had a comfortable journey to Durban along with a few of my

friends from the Team India contingent. I also met my best friend Matt at Durban along with Lalit bhai. We hung out at the expo on all three days, sightseeing and relaxing at the Durban beaches. We had tasty Indian food at Little Gujarat, their owners became very good friends with us, and we almost dined there daily until the end of our stay. The Durban beach front is a heaven for runners, cyclist and surfers.

Race Day:

The ultimate human race lived up to its name; it was truly a fantastic experience! In its 90th edition it had more than 23,000 runners, and the atmosphere was electrifying with so much energy and passion. The crowd support was phenomenal across the route; people kept cheering, “Go India go; go Praveen go,” and fellow runners kept patting each other’s backs, and encouraging each other.

I was racing steadily along with Matt until the 71.5Km mark where I had to stop for 17 minutes as I cramped both my legs, quad, calf, severely, and that also for the first time ever. I was in deep pain but I never gave up on my target of a sub 11 finish, and continued running despite the pain, and this was possible only because of my mental toughness and determination to push out of my comfort zone. This definitely was a life-changing experience, and the defining moment was when I ran the long

stretch and steep hill of Polly Shortts, and got the Bronze!

The last 18Km in pain was my fastest in the race, and this only means that nothing is impossible if you decide to go for it.

Celebrations:

Holding the India Flag at the finish line of Comrades was an unbelievable experience.

Family, friends, running buddies were tracking the progress of my race throughout, and it is with their blessings, prayers and good wishes that I was able to cross the finish line successfully and strongly. My social media groups started flooding with wishes.

I was pleasantly surprised when I was given a heroic welcome on my arrival in Chennai well past midnight on a weekday by family, and my friends from Chennai Runners joined in and made the celebration extra special.

I want to use my experience to coax more people into running the Comrades Marathon. I hope to see at least 6 to 7 representing Chennai Runners in next Comrades and in years ahead. I am also looking forward to my back-to-back run next year at Comrades.

This was definitely an unbelievable experience!

Happy Running! ■

REFRESHING STAYS ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

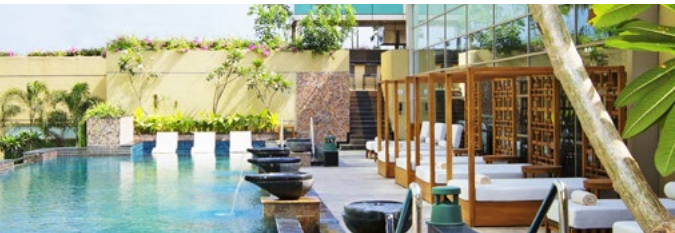
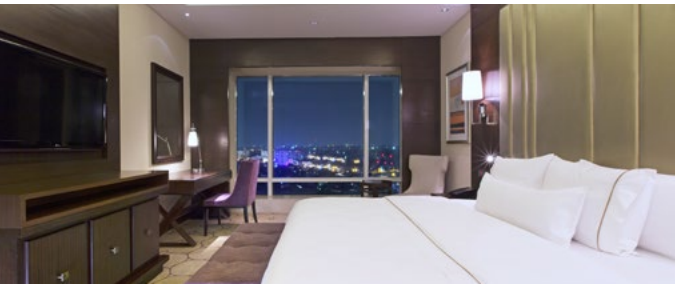
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