

THE RUNDOWN

AN INITIATIVE OF THE CHENNAI RUNNERS

ISSUE #9 SEPTEMBER 2015

AMMO FOR THE RUNNER!

WHAT'S RIGHT AND WRONG IN THE WORLD OF NUTRITION, FOR RUNNERS

OBSTACLE RACE

MEET LALITA BABAR, INDIA'S YOUNG AND PROMISING ATHLETE

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Akhila Krishnamurthy

Dear Runner,

It seems like we haven't met in a while; a lot seems to have happened in the last three months. And more importantly, a lot seems to be happening, back here, at home, in Chennai where The Rundown is produced and printed. Yes, I'm referring specifically to all the excitement leading up to The Wipro Chennai Marathon (TWCM) 2015 that seems to have consumed all our lives — social media, print, WhatsApp groups — and TWCM is almost always the central subject of conversation. This morning, in the chapter that I run with and belong to — the Pettai Rappers — a photographer clicked our group as we wrapped up our weekly hill training (read CP Ramaswamy flyover)... I'm not sure where the photograph will find place but I do know that the photo shoot renewed my faith in running, runners and the spirit of camaraderie.

You are probably holding a copy of The Rundown because you are now, officially a member of the Chennai Runners! For us, the core editorial team that brings you this magazine every quarter, the effort is really to allow you the possibility of a product that is informational, engaging, interactive, and fun....

And it is in the spirit of fun that Ashwin Prabhu suggested a quirky story idea that Preeti Aghalayam executed; Ashwin wondered aloud about the possibility of meeting with runners who don't just run — either for fun or on a professional level — but runners who had converted their passion for running into an idea, an enterprise, a job that allowed them to live their love for running. In Run at Work, as the story is titled, you will meet three runners from across India, who share with Preeti their passion for running and how they turned that into a way of life, literally, day in and day out.

Our cover girl this edition is none other than the famed long distance runner, Lalita Babar, from Maharashtra, who, caught up with me, a couple of weeks after her return from Beijing where she created history by becoming the first Indian to reach the final round in the Steeplechase at the IAAF (International Association of Athletics Federations) World Championships. Lalita's story is a story of grit and determination, a poignant story of a go-getter whose singular focus to participate in the Steeplechase is yielding results.

In a sense, grit and determination are the guiding principles of the people featured in this edition. Sharing space with Lalita, is running legend, Emil Zatopek, whose life and career are beautifully chronicled by Ashwin Prabhu as part of The Rundown's newly introduced series, I Am Legend. You will also get to read about six ultramarathons this edition — carefully picked by our writer, Niranjan Sankar, these ultramarathons across the world, are easily among the most gruelling and demand potential and perseverance of another kind.

I was also particularly moved by Chennai-based Zumba instructor, Michelle Sharma's very personal and poignant story where running has an important character. It's always humbling to read personal stories and this edition, I hope you will agree, has a whole lot of them.

Tell us what you think. We are waiting to hear from you...

Regards
Editor

10 ULTRA COOL

The world's most gruelling ultramarathons

14 THE "CZECH LOCOMOTIVE"

A befitting tribute to the legendary Emil Zatopek

16 OBSTACLE RACE

An interview with Lalita Babar, India's young and promising athlete

20 RUN@WORK

Meet three runners from across India, for whom, running and its business, is both cash, and love...

26- TRESPASSERS WILL BE RECRUITED

Mr Know-It-All is back, with a bang!

28- AMMO FOR RUNNERS!

What's right and wrong in the world of nutrition, for runners

31- THE WEIGHT OF THE WRITTEN WORD

An illustration on running and its allied aspects

32- STRETCHES LIKE YOU!

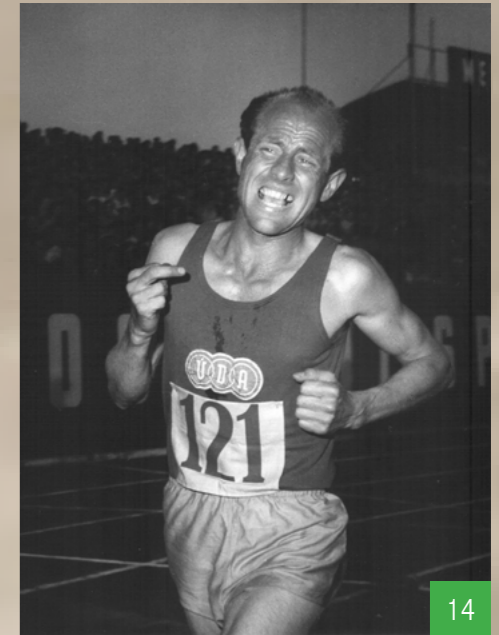
Busting some myths and focussing on the facts about stretches

34- HEAR'S WHAT I'M LISTENING

Choices aplenty in the world of headphones

36- FULL CIRCLE

Chennai-based Michelle Sharma pens her very personal story



14



16



20



10



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/>.



NIRANJAN SANKAR

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



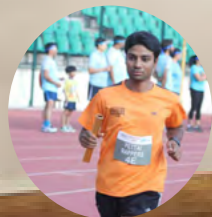
DR MADHU THOTTAPPILLIL

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



ASHWIN PRABHU

Ashwin Prabhu discovered the joys of distance running several years back, roughly around the same time he got his first job. Over the years, running clearly has held his interest more than the Corporate world. Case in point, he doesn't hold a desk job anymore today, but still runs 4 times a week and considers himself a Chennai Runner for life.



RAVI MUNDOLI

Ravi's ancestors are from Trichur, but he considers himself mostly a Vizagite. He decanted into Madras via a somewhat tortuous route involving stops at IIT-M, Amherst, Boston and Hyderabad. Once here, in a moment of insanity, he founded Nadhi (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 consoles himself with a few sedate HMs every year.



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.



RAJ GANPATH

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



MICHELLE SHARMA

A trained pilot, half marathon runner, professional photographer, dancer, mother of two wonderful children and a Maltese by birth, Michelle Sharma grew up in Australia and while training to be a pilot in US, met the man of her dreams. Running started off as a surprise gift she wanted to give her husband which slowly became the best gift she could ever give herself! Michelle is now living her dream of providing Chennaiites the opportunity to learn Western forms of dance at DANZZA which she and her partners recently set up.



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ULTRA COOL

Who knows, you might encounter God en route, sighs **Niranjan Sankar** as he zeroes in on the six best and among the most grueling ultramarathons in the world...

Most of us look at long distance runners with a mixture of awe and bewilderment. 10km is a challenging enough distance to run, a full marathon (42.2km) and a half-marathon (21.1km) are things we only read about. Some of us dare to attempt them; most wonder how (and why) people run such irrational distances...

Hold your breath; there is a world beyond the marathon, a rarefied space reserved for a few hardened souls, where time and distance seem to be irrelevant, and almost incomprehensible.

Welcome to the world of the Ultramarathon.

Technically, any distance over 42.2km counts as an ultramarathon. There is no upper limit, really. While there are popular ultras of 50km or thereabouts, the legendary ones stretch to 100 miles and beyond. Some are brutal; some are scenic; all are tough, and reserved for the most determined and hardcore runners.

We at The Rundown let you a peek into the most famous/infamous ultramarathons, from across the world...



COMRADES:

The Comrades was started in 1921 by World War veteran Vic Clapham to commemorate the South African soldiers killed during the First World War. Probably the most popular ultra in the world, it attracts around 23,000 runners (including a small contingent from India) every year. The distance of 89km in relatively pleasant conditions makes this a challenging yet doable run for experienced long distance runners. Entry norms are relatively easy (applicants should have completed a full marathon in less than five hours).

The fun part of the Comrades is a tight, 12-hour cut-off time for completing the race, with proportionate cut-offs enforced at various points along the course. So, whether you are a hare or a tortoise, you have to just keep moving. Medals are given to everyone who finishes within 12 hours.

SPARTATHLON:

Pheidippides, a Greek hero, is known for his 42km run from Marathon to Athens to announce the victory of the Greeks in the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC. He apparently delivered the message successfully, but collapsed and died immediately after. The 'marathon' was instituted to celebrate this heroic effort.

Pheidippides, it turns out, was not a one-run hero. His achievements as a messenger are truly legendary. Another famous effort of his, involved running from Athens to Sparta to seek help against the Persians, supposedly covering the 250km distance in a day and a half.

To celebrate this run, the Spartathlon follows his footsteps every year in an event which brings together hundreds of runners from across the globe. The race starts from the Acropolis in Athens and winds its way to Sparta. Participants have to complete the 250km course within Pheidippides' supposed run time of 36 hours, which makes this one of the most challenging ultras in the world. There are dozens of check points where laggards are pulled out of the race, so it is a persistent battle against the clock. Only one-third of those who start manage to complete this arduous challenge.

Luckily, unlike Pheidippides, the finishers don't have to run back to Athens.



Photos Courtesy: Internet



MARATHON DES SABLES:

Also known as the Sahara Marathon, this was ranked by the Discovery Channel as “the toughest foot race on earth”. It covers around 251kms over six days, in gruelling desert conditions.

Except for a measured quota of water handed out at each stage, the race is fully self-supported. Candidates must carry a backpack with their supplies (a mandatory list of equipment is specified) and food for the entire race. The backpack must weigh between 6.5kg and 15kg including the specified equipment and at least 14,000 calories worth of food at the start of the race. So, choosing the right backpack and contents is in itself a complicated task.

Most of the race takes place under the sun where temperatures can go to 40-50 degrees Centigrade. Plus, desert sand isn't the easiest surface to run on, and can create some fierce blisters. In spite of this, over a 1,000 competitors queue up at the start line, every year. Unlike other ultras, Sables is not a continuous race. Rather, it is run in stages, like the Tour De France. Every day, runners cover varying distances, after which they get to rest in a communal tent to chat about the day's exertions and prepare for another sunny and painful day.



BENGALURU ULTRA:

A staple of the Indian running calendar, this is probably the most doable ultramarathon in India. It is held in November near Bengaluru, when the weather is quite mild. There are 50km, 75km and 100km runs, plus a 24-hour challenge. It attracts a regular crowd of Indian ultramarathoners, and a lot of newbies. For those bored with marathons and wondering what all this fuss about ‘ultras’ is about, this is a good place to start.



THE HIGH – LA ULTRA (LADAKH):

If the other ultras make you gasp for breath, then brace yourself for this one. Combining extreme altitude (elevations between 3,300 to 5,400 metres) where oxygen levels could be 40% of sea level, extreme vertical inclines (total elevation gain over 4,000 metres), extreme distances (111km, 222km and 333km), and extreme temperatures (-10 degrees to +40 degrees Centigrade), this is one of the most unique and intense ultramarathons.

The route is entirely in the Himalayas, passing through some of the highest mountains and passes in the world, with gorgeous vistas all around. If the rarefied air doesn't leave you breathless, the views definitely will. While this is a recent event, it seems to have all the ingredients to make it a magnet for runners looking for their next big challenge.

BADWATER:

Curiously, this race also advertises itself as the “world's toughest foot race”. That title may be debatable but it is definitely no idle boast. While this isn't the Sahara desert, the weather is often hotter, and a cumulative elevation gain of over 4,000 metres makes it even more gruelling. The race starts at Death Valley, which, at 85 metres below sea level, is the lowest elevation in North America. And the race happens in mid-July, when summer is at its peak and temperatures can reach 50 degrees Centigrade in the shade. Just in case someone is tempted, the race rules state that “Nudity is specifically not allowed”! The run goes through 135 miles across three mountain ranges, finishing at an elevation of 2,548 metres at Whitney Portal.

Entry is restricted to a 100 participants, many of whom are considered the best ultramarathoners in the world. Dean Karnazes and Scott Jurek have been regulars here. Even with such an exclusive entry line-up, many struggle and drop out before the race ends.

During his legendary run to Sparta, when he was around 200kms from Athens, Pheidippides is believed to have met Pan, a Greek God, and chatted with him about this and that. Coincidentally, many ultra runners, after 20-odd hours on the run without sleep, have reported seeing and hearing outlandish stuff,



from UFOs to mermaids to, yes, the occasional God.

Ultra Runners get to experience a lot of camaraderie and selflessness, while enjoying the pure joy (and exhaustion) of running. And, who knows, you might encounter God en route. ■



**"IF YOU WANT TO WIN SOMETHING,
RUN THE 100 METERS ...IF YOU WANT TO
EXPERIENCE SOMETHING, RUN A MARATHON"**

THE "CZECH LOCOMOTIVE"

Ashwin Prabhu re-visits the life and never-say-die spirit of Czech long distance runner, Emil Zatopek

about the **I AM LEGEND COLUMN**

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

Long before Mo Farah, the indomitable Somali-Briton came along sweeping the 5000m and 10000m golds at the 2012 London Olympics and trying his hand (or rather his legs) at the marathon distance at the 2014 London marathon, there was a man who had not just attempted the unimaginable, but had actually conquered it winning all three distance running events — the 5000m, 10000m, and the Marathon in a single sports meet. His name was Emil Zatopek, the Czech runner who won Gold at all three of these events in the 1952 Helsinki Olympics, setting Olympics records in each, a feat which has remained un-eclipsed in the 60 years of Olympics history since.

When Zatopek passed away in 2000, for most sports commentators and running enthusiasts, an indelible image of Emil Zatopek remained of him propelling himself along the track, tongue lolling out wildly, eyes closed in the agony of pain and effort, body contorting itself with every stride and his hands pumping in unsynchronized fashion. What also stayed was a memory of a man with a tongue-in-cheek sense of humour. When asked about his unaesthetic running form, Zatopek apparently replied — "I was not talented enough to run and smile at the same time." When journalists continued to direct jibes at his running style, on another occasion he said — "It is not gymnastics or ice skating you know."

Behind the facade of cheery good nature and friendly eyes, lay a steely spirit which would stop at nothing to push itself to the very limits of human endurance. In fact, Zatopek's training regimen at first

glance resembles something so absurd that it could have come out of a Chuck Norris series of jokes. To build lung capacity he would run as far as he could while holding his breath. Once, he did that for so long that he passed out. Another time, on his way to a sports meet, he remained standing on a five-hour train journey nourished only by a meager diet of beef and biscuits. Exhausted, he finally fell asleep on the ride to the track and woke up just in time for the race. He went on to break the 10,000m world record in that race. To prepare for the 1956 Melbourne Olympics he started doing cross-country runs carrying his wife on his back, developed a hernia and the ensuing operation made him nearly miss the Games. He finished sixth in the marathon that year and announced his retirement shortly after.

Zatopek's seemingly unscientific, quack-like training routine had its birth in a simple belief drilled into him by the Czech Army which he was drafted into at the age of 18. Push your body till it can take no more and then, push it some more. This military-drill approach helped Zatopek evolve a training workout which is today a staple of all marathon runners, both professional and recreational — the interval workout. Zatopek would run five reps of 200m, then 20 reps of 400m and finish with five more reps of 200m, all at speed with a rest interval of a minute or so between each rep. He would keep ratcheting up the 400m repeats from 20 to 50, 60 and even 70, as both his training mileage and his manic desire to win swelled closer to race day.

Zatopek's personal life reads quite like a fairy tale out of a Brothers Grimm book, with a

sunny beginning, a tumultuous and grim middle and a quiet, yet joyful end. He met his wife-to-be Dana Ingrova, a fellow Czech and a Javelin athlete at the 1948 London Olympics, proposed to her in the Athletes' village with a gold ring bought at Piccadilly Circus and married her a few months after the Games when they returned home. Dana had finished 7th in the Javelin event and Zatopek had won a Gold in the 10000m, and a Silver in the 5000m, events at London. Four years later, as man and wife, they would win four Gold medals between them in the 1952 Helsinki Olympics, Zatopek winning his three Golds in the 5000m, 10000m, and the marathon events and Dana winning Gold in the Javelin event. He fell out of favor with the Communist regime in his country in 1969 for his outspoken and frank ways. The period saw him doing menial labour, carrying garbage cans, driving trucks and sweeping the streets. He was eventually rehabilitated by the Government and offered a job in the Sports ministry. In 1975, Zatopek was awarded the United Nations' Pierre de Coubertin Prize for promoting fair play in sport. He died a quiet death in Prague's military hospital after being treated for a stroke.

In a fitting tribute, Roger Bannister, the man who ran the first sub-4 minute mile in 1954 called Zatopek the greatest athlete of the postwar world.

A chatty man who spoke six languages, Zatopek perhaps spoke best through his grit, determination and never-say-die attitude on the track, a language which every marathoner, fast or slow, young or old, will no doubt understand. ■

Photos' Courtesy: Internet



OBSTACLE RACE!

The Steeplechase is, in a sense, a metaphor for Lalita Babar's life that has been full of obstacles and her innate and cultivated talent and skill to overcome them all and emerge a winner...

Akhila Krishnamurthy interviews the current Indian national record holder

Photos: Courtesy: Internet

And, finally, I track Lalita Babar — I mean, her number — down. For nearly two weeks, her phone remains switched off. Then, in the middle of a busy, working day, she crosses my mind. It is 4pm. I dial her number. It rings; I'm literally holding my breath. A young woman answers the phone. Lalita? I ask. I'm almost sure I'm jinxed with this story; certain that the fifth person I spoke with pleading for her mobile number has, yet again, sent me a number that is either wrong or not in use. "Haan (yes), this is Lalita," I hear her say and quickly add, "Mere coach abhi aa rahein hain (my coach is coming here, right now)... Let's talk tonight."

I call her, as promised post 9pm. She answers the phone instantly but the network is very poor. She blames it on the signal in her modest hostel — at the SAI (Sports Authority of India) Complex — located on the Mysore Road in Bengaluru that will "perhaps" be her home - and training pad — for the next ten months until the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro in 2016. We schedule a call in the morning. I call again. She is at the medical centre. We promise to talk on a Sunday at 3pm. I skip my weekly Sunday nap. My call goes unanswered.

That night, she calls me from another number. She has stepped outside the hostel and says she is sitting at the university stadium — empty, lonely, under the stars, I imagine — and says she is happy to answer all my questions. I will ask many, I warn her, in Hindi. "Koi baat nahin (no problem), Madam," she says, "Aap poochiye (you ask)."

I can hear her smile. For the last

couple of weeks or so — since her return from the IAAF (International Association of Athletics Federation) World Championships in Beijing (in September), 3,000m steeplechase national record holder, Lalita Shivaji Babar, who smashed her own national record by clocking 9:27.86 seconds in the semi-finals at the Beijing meet before finishing eighth in the finals — admits she has been taking things easy. After nearly a year, she has even been granted permission to indulge her tastebuds. "Bahut dino ke baad, thoda spicy food khaya hamne (after many days, we ate spicy food.)" During training, her regular diet comprises boiled vegetables, eggs, lean meat, and more boiled vegetables.

She isn't complaining; only stating facts, that too, only because I'm probing. "To gain something, you have to lose, and lose a lot," she says. Do I sense pain in her voice? I don't, really. She is practical and pragmatic; a realist whose singular focus is the track and her own performance on it. Do you think you could have done better in the finals at Beijing? "Of course I could have done better," she begins to explain, "But for the first time, ever, I was participating and competing with runners from across the world; Asia is one thing, the world is quite another. I ran two competitive races in a matter of two days; it's a first for me. It was an experience... Plus, if I don't lose, how will I learn and get better? Losing allows me an opportunity to re-visit my technique, approach, attitude, everything."

When Lalita was setting her steeplechase record, in Beijing, in a tiny village called Mohi in Mann

taluk in Maharashtra's Satara district, a large group of people gathered around a television to watch their girl create a record. Among the group were Lalita's parents, her brother and two sisters, her Chacha-Chachi (uncle-aunt) and their kids. They were, undoubtedly a very proud lot, cheering for their girl — the only sports person in the family — who is going places and in a sense, single-handedly shouldering the responsibility of her large, joint family, on her tender shoulders.

Lalita's is a family of agriculturists. This year, in Maharashtra, the monsoons have failed and there is a severe shortage of water. Her two sisters are in college and her brother is gearing up to write his board exams (class 12) next year. "Hum gareeb hai (we are poor)," she says, "I wanted to do something for my family; I don't want my siblings to suffer." She is sticking to her mission. For over a year now, Lalita hasn't met with her family but she knows, there is a price to be paid for success.

The steeplechase — an obstacle race, wherein each runner must clear a total of 28 ordinary barriers and seven water jumps — is in many ways, a metaphor for Lalita's life and journey. "Zindagi main," she says, "Mujhe sab cheez ke liye safar karna pada hai." Meaning, in life, "I've had to struggle for everything." Take for example, her move in 2006 from Mohi to Mumbai when she landed herself a job with the Central Railways in the sports quota. She had just finished class 11 and was merely 17-and-a-half. The move was overwhelming for a teenager, who only knew to speak her mother tongue, Marathi.

"In office, I would constantly hang around with a few women



who spoke Marathi," she says, "In the quarters, where there were six other women athletes from across India, communication was a problem. Plus, they were all city girls." But Lalita is, and has always been a survivor. In less than three months, she had learnt a smattering of Hindi, dealt with her fear of Mumbai's local trains and in a sense, figured a way to get by. And then, for a year nearly, she nursed an injury. A shooting pain in her shin prevented her from training. "I would feel terrible to see all the other girls run, and train," she remembers, "So, every time I felt better, I would get back on the track; and soon enough, the pain would start again."

Finally, one day, Lalita decided to listen to her body, and allow the injury time to heal. She patiently tried everything that everyone and anyone suggested — Ayurveda, physiotherapy — and rested the pain. In 2008, she won the Nationals in the 3,000m, 5,000m and 10,000m category and went on to run and emerge winner at the full marathon in Mumbai subsequently in 2012, 2013 and 2014. Last year, O P Jaisha, a colleague of Lalita took away that title; beating her by a few minutes. Lalita came second, but again, she has no regrets.

How did long distance running happen? Did she train specially for it? Lalita attributes that performance to renowned Russian middle and long distance coach, Dr Nikolai Snesev, who joined the senior camp in Bangalore and began training Lalita and a handful of women athletes. Under his mentorship, Lalita began training and clocking mileage and significantly improving her strides and speed. "He is very motivating," she says, "Plus, Ma'm, being a podium finisher at a marathon means good money. I have a family depending on me; they have dreams and desires that I have to help fulfil."

In 2010, Lalita first discovered the Steeplechase; she trained for two weeks and participated in the Commonwealth Games in Delhi. "I loved it," she admits, "But my coach just brushed it aside saying, 'No need now.'" In November 2013, at the Inter-Railways meet, Lalita yet again gave the Steeplechase a shot. She was placed second after Sudha Singh, who was the reigning champion then. In January 2014, Dr Nikolai, yet again, ordered Lalita to focus on the marathon. "I said, Mujhe Steeplechase karna hi hai, aap mujhe karaiye (you make

me do it)."

In March 2014, at the Nationals, Lalita broke the existing Steeplechase record and at the Asian Games in South Korea that September, she won a bronze medal setting a new national record of 9:35; Sudha Singh's was 9:45. The Asian Games also marked Lalita's debut international experience. "It was great," she says, "especially the very competitive atmosphere around. I got to see what my mistakes were and learn from them." At the Asian Track and Field in June this year, Lalita set another national record by finishing the 3,000m at 9:34. And then, at the World Championships in Beijing, she did India proud by creating yet another National record — 9:27 — and landing eighth in the finals.

We've been talking for 45 minutes now; she tells me there is a mild nip in the air but she is used to it; for a significant patch every year, her coach and colleagues go away to Ooty to train in the hills. "Air clean hai, pollution kam hai and high altitude training long distance ke liye achcha hota hai (the air is clean and unpolluted and high altitude training is good for long distance running.)" Nothing else matters! ■



RUN@WORK

Preeti Aghalayam meets three runners from across India, for whom, running and its business, is both cash, and love...

The week starts off, not with a bang, not with a whimper, but with a whine. Monday blues leads to Tuesday gloom and Wednesday hump day and twenty-odd hours later, Thank God It's Friday, and the weekend is here. A weekend to really live; two measly days to undo the damage of the previous five days. A long training run, a race, a post-run breakfast with running buddies, a strengthening/core session at the gym, and perhaps a quick hop to the store to buy socks or shoes or that latest invention in hydration belts — the one that can hold two phones, three Gu packets, and the keys to the entire building, without jiggle.

Most of us runners are caught in this seven-day tangle, juggling a confusing mix of feelings, thoughts about running constantly jostling with the other, invariable, put-rotis-on-the-table thoughts that we are forced to think. Thinking, dreaming of a different life, we at The Rundown desk (the metaphorical one, mind you) found, walking amongst us, folks that had managed to get off this rat-wheel, to marry the two things — work and running. 'Wow, is that even possible? That would make life one whole long weekend filled with sunlight, running, running gear, data, and all my favourite things' we thought, our words tripping over one

another. 'Let's talk to them' we said almost in unison.

Here are three enterprising men who are here to tell you how it's possible to put away that engineering degree, those accountant stripes, that MBA, and to say NO to the pulls of the traditional job market, and to latch on to a job, nay, a career, that puts this ultimate love we all share — running — front and center. Three gentlemen from three corners of our lovely country, talked to us about their life and their work, and we tried, despite our wide-eyed awe, to capture these conversations for you in this article....



ARVIND KRISHNAN

Meet Arvind, who is the founder of TFL — The Fuller Life — a company that works on employee engagement projects. Of course you know and I know that they are 'home' to Runners For Life or RFL for short. RFL, who almost discovered this whole recreational running gig for India. RFL, who, with professional efficiency and tight quality control, operate the scenic Kaveri Trail Marathon and the innovative Bangalore Ultra, among other events.

Currently based in Bangalore, Arvind has an Engineering degree from his Mumbai days and a Management degree from his Calcutta stint. Prior to founding TFL in 2001, Arvind worked at Amitabh Bachchan Corporation Ltd., Kale consultants, and Indya.com. Next time you bound over to Bangalore/Mysore for a run by RFL, know that RFL came about in March 2005 as an organic

evolution of the work Arvind was pioneering, at TFL!

How is running integral to what you do, everyday, we asked Arvind. "Running is like a religion, a cornerstone, the thing I keep coming back to" says he. Arvind's running journey started back in school, with the usual dose of sprints and so forth. While college days pushed running back, business school in Calcutta made it come back into reckoning. Back in the mid-nineties, when India was not rife with running events every weekend, Arvind chose to just run in his beautiful campus, enjoying the lakes and the overall experience, and the stage for the love affair with long distance running was set.

What about your friends and family, we asked, totally expecting to hear a long tale of woes! Spinning it all positively, Arvind says that everyone expected him to be an entrepreneur anyway, and setting

up a business around things he is passionate about did not cause any alarm bells to ring. When the running business was slow, Arvind remembers a few uncharitable remarks, but brushes them off saying they had his best interests at heart anyhow! His rushed response speaks not only to the fact that business is good now, today, but also to the very positive character of this awesome runner-entrepreneur!

Well, on our insistence that he thinks about the challenges he has faced, Arvind lists a couple of them, primarily the slow growth of RFL. "My brain is protecting me by blocking out those memories" he says, and we don't push him to explore them further. Cash flow, people not 'getting' it, customers not seeing the true value of what they have to offer, these are there, no doubt, but what business is devoid of these? But work is fun, Arvind loves his team, they are

all super energized on Monday mornings, there is so much to accomplish, and so much laughter in the office, so it's easy to forget the bad and forge ahead!

Inspire our audience, we tell Arvind, and he passes on three

important life tips. Hope you are taking notes!

1. Don't overthink it.
2. Life is too short to regretfully tell your grandkids, "I was thinking of doing X, but...."
3. Look at 1 in case of any doubt.

We leave you with one more, very handy line from our interview with Arvind Krishnan, founder, The Fuller Life & Runners for Life: "As long as you like Mondays, all is okay. If you do not like Monday mornings, change the job or change your expectations." >>>



Photo Courtesy: Karthikeyan Guruswami

GOPINATH SARGUNAM

For a 25 year old, Gopi is remarkably mature. He is just out of college (well, not exactly, but it feels like it from my old age vantage point), and I wonder how the interview is going to play out. But when I get off the phone with him, I am quiet, just blown away. Gopi is a good friend, yes, sure, but he is 'good friend' to SO MANY people in the city, and it is really only after this heart to heart that I understand why. It is obvious.

Graduating as a Mechanical Engineer in 2011, Gopi worked for a couple of years at John Deere, mostly in Pune. One fine day he quit his job and returned home to Chennai, started running alongside

preparing for competitive exams, just as a release from the study stress. Belonging to that rare breed of overly energetic people, Gopi also signed on as a short term intern for Chennai Runners, assisting in the organisational details of The Wipro Chennai Marathon, held in December 2014.

Currently, Gopi is Business Manager at Running Lab — Chennai's first and only running speciality store. He assists customers in making the right choice in footwear and gear, and believes that being a runner himself is critical. He understands the pain and the pleasure the customers that visit his store suffer, even when they cannot express it clearly. His training

and preparation for the job (he admits to continuing to educate himself everyday on various topics) were important and he is strongly committed to being known for his honest & helpful recommendations.

If we calculate, we figure that Gopi has really only been running for less than two years now. Post-college weight gain made him think about exercise, and out of curiosity he showed up at a Chennai Runners chapter run, his first outdoor experience. Gopi says that the collective energy of the group rubbed off on him very positively and before he knew it he was signing up for a half marathon (Coimbatore, 2013). Since then, he has taken part in many events,



Photo Courtesy: Karthikeyan Guruswami

quickly graduating to a place where running is casual and fun. The only time we hear a twinge of regret is when he admits that events are difficult to manage nowadays as business at the store is most brisk over the weekend!

An informal run in Kolli Hills in 2014, where he accompanied Ram Viswanathan, founder, Chennai Runners, for 6 hours, was a major turning point, with the seeds of an internship with Chennai Runners sown. With a supportive family, and the entire local running community behind him, Gopi transitioned into his current job and career quite effortlessly, earlier in 2015.

What drives you, we ask, expecting to hear about money or fame or limelight. “Responsibility” says Gopi! “I want to contribute to the community, and this role is a great responsible one, where I am helping people avoid common mistakes and get the best running experience” he adds. Never one to worry about people’s expectations of him, Gopi is a guy who loves his job, is passionate about running, loves people, specially runners, and firmly believes that “Running is the great equaliser” — in a running Tshirt and shorts, we are all the same — doctor, engineering, college student, home maker — says Gopi and we go quiet inside.

Okay Gopi, some tips for our audience, we insist. “Don’t be bogged down by looking at others around you. Running is a journey, especially for newbies, it is important to take things slow and give your body time. Do not ramp up too fast, just because of the social media hype. And People, People, People – that’s what running has given me and what it can give you — if you are patient and learn to enjoy the process” he winds up the call and we dutifully jot it down in his own words and report it here....

Go visit Gopi at Running Lab, Alwarpet, Chennai and who knows? Some of his magic may well rub off on you... >>>



VENKATRAMAN PICHUMAN

Venkat is a very well known figure in the Indian running events scene. Perhaps you know him by his other Facebook name “You-TooCanRun” — YTCR for short. If you meet him on the street you would probably think of him as a kindly, elderly, retired gentleman. For sure you wouldn’t think him capable of authoring an entire series of blog posts entitled ‘Vaseline on my nipple’ — which is though, in all seriousness, a set of articles aimed at introducing newbies to the wonderful world of long distance running, title an obvious nod to an oft encountered challenge of the sport, i.e., chafing.

By qualification, Venkat is a Chartered Accountant and has had a long rich career in accountancy, investment banking, and BPOs. He has been founder CEO of an outsourcing business which was bought over by an international company, and is still running very successfully in Pune. The numbers of clients, projects, and data Venkat has handled over the years (decades) are overwhelming, and my pen cannot move fast enough to capture it all as he tells me. ‘People call me a Serial Entrepreneur’ he

says, adding that now he is tired of playing the Saraswathi vs. Lakshmi (goddesses both) game, and has decided to only work on things that he is passionate about and which have a social impact.

Talk to us about running, we say to him. ‘Running saved my life’ he says and we think it is one of those usual things everyone says. In 2007, Venkat had a cardiac arrest and underwent open heart bypass surgery. Venkat, who lives in Mumbai, joined the running bandwagon in 2003, when the Mumbai Marathon came to town. Trudging through the (then) 7Km Dream Run in the first year (and coming up with that evocative blog post), he continued to keep at it. If not for this regular exercise, Venkat is convinced, he would have had a massive, possibly fatal, coronary. Today, he is fit as a fiddle, and runs ‘a Half Marathon every month’, maintains his weight very steadily, is vegan (and rather vocal about it), and yes, running, did genuinely save him, and gave him a second lease on life!

If we list all the things Venkat and the technology company he founded and heads does, we would need reams of paper. Suffice to

say that they are a ‘One Stop Shop’ for all things related to a running event. Registration, bib printing, pacing teams, timing, results, even the bib distribution expo, are all offered as a package to race organisers from You Too Can Run, with the additional promise of Venkat’s personal presence (invariably also as a 3 hour pacer) at the expo and on race day, to personally ensure tight quality control.

Venkat is a living breathing example of how to grow, expand your horizons, and include your passion into your work in an intimate, seamless manner. Driven purely by his love of all things running, Venkat, ably supported by his family, is an inspiration to all of us, to think about our choices...

And there it is. Three men — from Bengaluru, Chennai and Mumbai – who have taken the bull by the horns, and have carved out lives and careers on the knife’s edge that is the nascent Indian running scene. In recent years, many more have joined the fray, and we wish them, and Arvind, Gopi and Venkat — lots of miles, tons of success, and oodles of fun! ■



TRESPASSERS WILL BE RECRUITED

BY RAVI MUNDOLI

It's four in the morning. Per usual, a small band of dedicated Chennai Runners is out and about on their "Mellow Monday Machaans" loop from Tondiarpet to Tambaram and back. Monday mornings is when they decide to take it easy and start a little late, allowing themselves a good snooze till half past three. A little treat for the exertions of the previous weekend. Plus the late start means that the light is better, and they can spot bits and pieces of themselves that fell off their disintegrating bodies during the weekend long run. The 3M run is a time for easy chitchat and banter, a time of

connecting and catching up with their fellow beings, united in the camaraderie and good fellowship of their shared tribulations and triumphs, on the journey of self-actualization that is Running. It's like a social network for iliotibial bands and patellae that send each other updates on their respective conditions, "The pain is only comparable to fingernails being pulled out with pliers by Donald Trump #FeelingBlessed".

This is also the time when the powers that be get a chance to discuss plans for Chennai Runners. Vital decisions of great consequence

are deliberated upon: What events to plan for, how to publicize, whether this column should be continued, can we get Milind Soman to sign on a stamp paper that he will take off his shirt every time he's in Chennai etc. For any club, membership is a critical issue, and our beloved CRs expend quite a decent bit of energy in trying to figure out how to sign up more victims members. What follows is a conversation that we overheard. Who are we kidding; by chance only us lazy sods get up before 7. What follows is a conversation that we like to think happened.

Politburo Member 1 (PM1): Dei, the Chennai Marathon is in 3 months pa, we should try to get at least enough runners so that when the Mumbai guys read about the headcount, they don't die from laughing. It's a humanitarian mission.

PM2: Ha ha. Very funny. Please be serious, PM1. I think we need at least enough runners so that when we print the photo on the cover of the next Rundown, it won't look like a handful of prisoners of war on a forced march.

PM3 Who Is Here Only To Beef Up Stats In His Garmin: Guys! How about we speed up to 5:27.32 for the next 3.738 k.m. so that when we finish, within an 85% likelihood with 3.3 sigma spread we will have a 5:30 finish? What say, eh?

PM1 (aside to PM2): Romba mukkiyam...

PM1: Hey, you go ahead pa, we'll catch up and give you the minutes of our discussion.

PM2: So how do we do this? Haven't we already recruited pretty much anyone who has a pulse?

PM1: Hmmm...I don't know. You know how we keep hearing about how they fill up these election rallies? Maybe we should offer some sarakku, cash and one biryani packet...

PM2: Yuck. How can you say that? Is this something we can even think of? It's beyond contemplation... We'll never find the money.

PM3WIHOTBUSIHG: Guys! In 47.2 seconds we will have hit the 37.6 delta barring an untoward 373.17 pi. Super show, keep going! maintain pannu...

PM1: Super da machii, nee maintain pannu... (to PM2) Why do we keep asking this guy again?

PM2: Don't look at me. Just because you want to make frandship with him so that you can drink his single malts... Anyway, that is not important. Back to main issue... How to get more gumbal?

PM1: How about we ask our chapters to sign up more people during their regular runs? Anyway they will only come across the types who are up and about in the mornings, this is the demographic we want to go after also.

PM2: Do you really think that a

sweaty gang of runners accosting morning walkers is the best way to go about this?

PM1: Why? I'm sure it'll work. Wait, let me show you. I'll go and ask that guy...

PM2: That's an EB junction box.

PM1: Oh! We really shouldn't start running this early, I barely saw him...It.

PM3WIHOTBUSIHG: Guys! We're on the bridge, let's run backward fartleks at 2.247 ding dongs per...

PM1 to PM2: Grab his legs, grab his legs!!

PM3WIHOTBUSIHG: Noooo... what are you doing...put me down!!!

[Splash]

PM1: I've been wanting to do that for 5 years.

PM2: You do realize we reduced our membership count by one...

PM1: Sigh. It's OK. The important thing is to be able to run in peace. ■



FORGET CALORIES BUT REMEMBER TO LISTEN TO YOUR BODY. Why? Because calorie calculations are far from perfect. Try this — how many calories does 200 grams of avial contain? Let's say you guessed X. Now, how will this X change based on where you eat it? Avial at my house could contain more carrots and the one at your house could be loaded with coconut. Her avial may contain 2 tablespoons of coconut oil but his avial might be light on the oil but rich in yogurt. Even something as simple as an apple can vary anywhere from 80 to 120 calories a piece. 40 calories isn't much but what if you ate 10 apples per week?

Basically, calorie calculations are gross approximations at best and not something you should trouble yourself with. Instead, eat wholesome food rich in macro and micronutrients, eat when you're hungry, stop eating when you're satisfied but not full and feel free to skip a meal when you're not hungry.

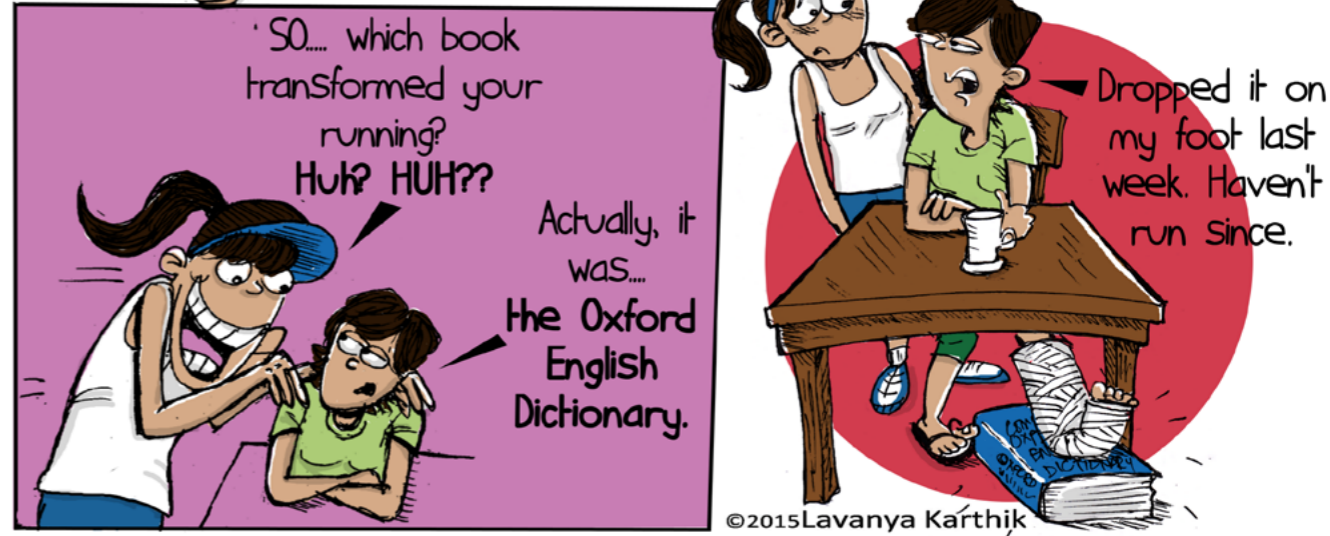
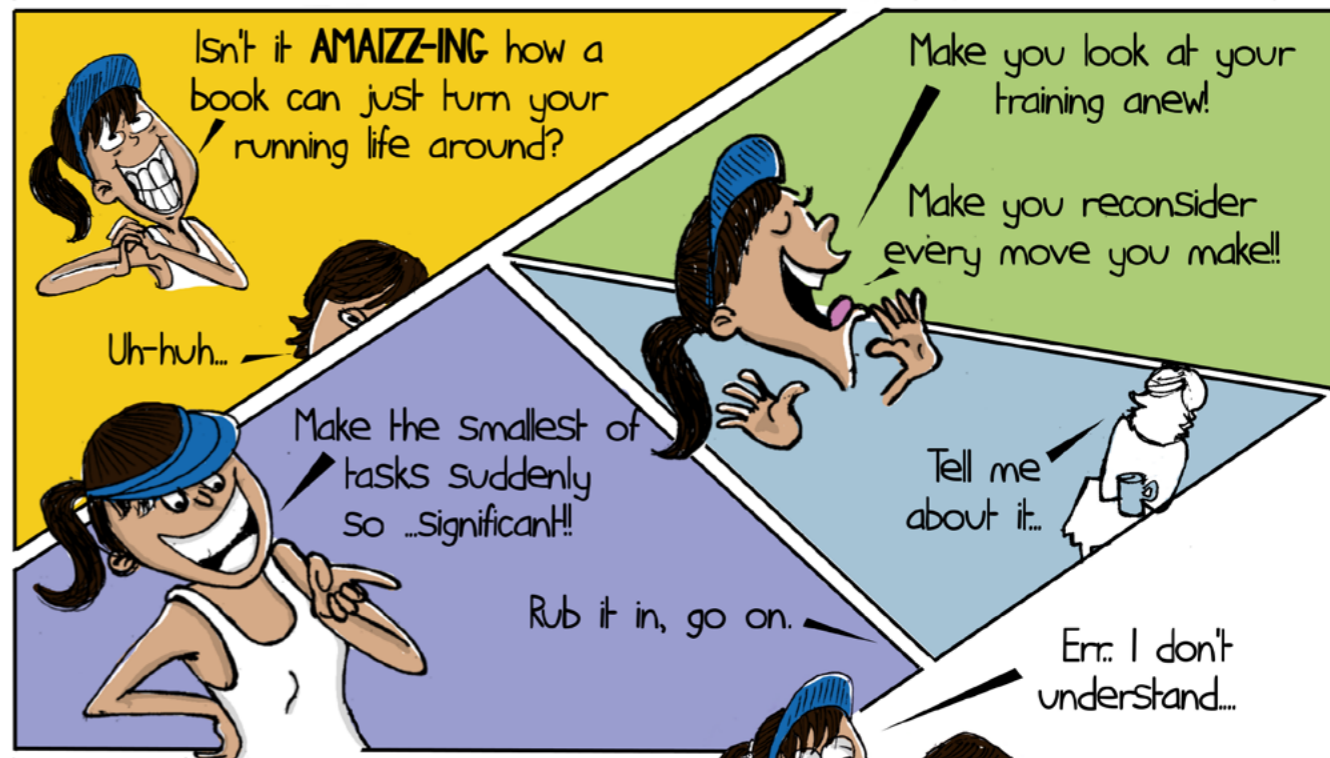
BUILD YOURSELF FROM THE INSIDE. Betterment comes from within and that's something every athlete needs to come to terms with. While working on running technique, mileage and speed will result in short-medium term performance improvements, working on nutrition will build the system (your body) at the cellular level

and will result in medium-long term performance and aesthetic improvements. Fuelling your body right will improve synergy across the body, fix hormonal and mineral imbalances and optimise energy utilisation. These improvements, on the inside, will create a favourable and safe environment to increase mileage, speed and frequency and intensity of training without risking injury.

So if you are truly looking to become a better runner, stop living like a hamster and start thinking like an athlete. There is practice, hard work, consistency, intensity and technique. And bringing all this together beautifully is the secret sauce called nutrition. ■



The weight of the written word
by Lavanya Karthik



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STRETCHES LIKE YOU!

Pre-run or post-run, that, *Dr Madhu Thottappillil* says, is the question, shedding some light on why a pre-warm warm-up routine helps boost performance, in the long run

Before or after! That is a common question doctors are often asked with regard to medication. Before food or after food? Since I am a Sports medicine specialist, the question of the hour is with regard to running. Is it better to stretch before running or after running?

I spent most part of my career advising runners and athletes to stretch after a gentle warm-up, prior to running or taking part in sprints and endurance running events. However, over the last decade, there has been a lot of data published from around the world on the role and efficacy of stretching as a part of the pre-run warm-up routine, and it has resulted in the creation of Sports Medicine specialists like me who have to base our practice on evidence-based medicine to make a more or less U-turn as far as stretching advice for runners is concerned..

Current research, especially the Meta Analytical Studies, seems to conclude that static stretching reduces strength in the stretched muscles with the impact increasing in people who hold individual stretches for 90 seconds or more. Explosive muscular performance also drops off significantly, implying that the performance after warming up with static stretching is likely to be worse than if they hadn't warmed up at all even though most of the findings from newer studies primarily apply to people participating in events that require strength and explosive power, more so than endurance sports.

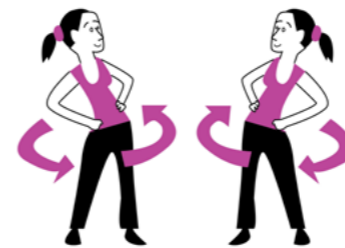
Hence, we can infer that a dynamic warm-up routine which would focus on the muscles that will be called upon in your workout or running would be a better choice in place of static stretching, which by itself is not recommended as an appropriate form of warm-up.

A dynamic warm-up coordinates all the muscles, ligaments, and joints — by challenging your flexibility, mobility, strength and stability all at once.

PRACTICAL GUIDE TO A PRE-RUN ROUTINE...

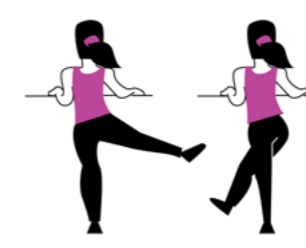
Always start with an easy jog or a walk routine to warm up the muscles involved and hence increase the lymphatic and blood flow. The pace of the warm-up can be gradually increased and it can last from three to 10 minutes.

The next step is the dynamic stretches. The key here is for runners to target the muscle groups used for running. Hence, the focus should be the flexion and extension of the legs, and lateral movements followed with the warm-up and dynamic stretches focussed on the hips, where the hip flexors, psoas, and quads and hamstrings are targeted. These are some of the dynamic stretches I would advice:



HIP CIRCLES

Stand with your feet hip width apart with your hands on your hips, rotate your hips in circles in a clockwise and then counterclockwise pattern, repeat ten times in each direction.



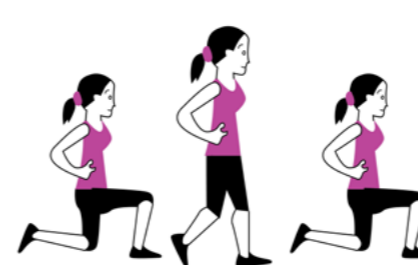
LEG SWINGS

While holding onto something stable, swing one leg to your side and then back and across your torso. Perform the move 10 times each side.



BUTT KICKS

Walk forward slowly while kicking your heels in towards your glutei for a total of 20 kicks (10 kicks per leg).



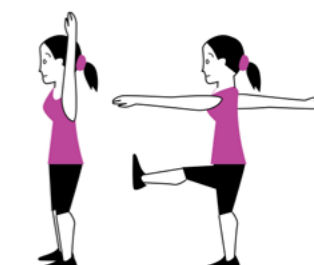
WALKING LUNGES

Step forward with a long stride while dropping your back leg towards the ground. Focus should be on keeping the front knee over your ankle and performing the lunges in a slow and flowing motion.



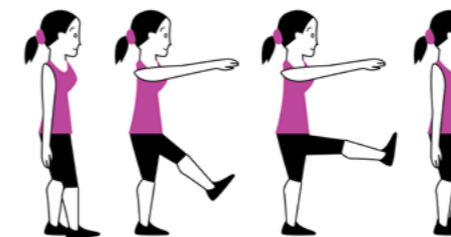
RUNNERS TOUCH

Balance on your right foot and hinge forward, allowing your left leg to extend back. Touch the ground with your left hand. Return to standing. Do 10 to 12 reps, and then repeat on your left leg.



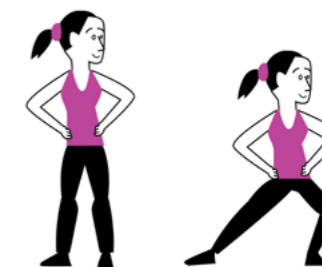
TOY SOLDIER

Without bending your knees, step forward and kick your right leg out and up to the waist level while extending your left arm at the same time, as if to touch your foot. Release, switch sides. Do 10 reps on each leg.



MONSTER WALK

Keeping your torso tall and erect, walk forward while lifting your legs straight in front of you. Repeat 10 times on each side.



LATERAL LUNGE

Stand with your feet parallel, hip-width apart. Step to the right, and then shift your weight toward the right foot, bending your right knee and pushing your hips back. Your left leg should be as straight as possible. Reach for your right foot with your left hand. Push off with your right foot to return to starting position. Do 10 reps on each leg.

A dynamic warm-up routine prepares your body for the demands of running by improving range of motion, increasing the core body temperature, and boosting blood flow to the big muscles which are predominantly

used while running namely the glutei, quadriceps and the hamstrings. It also has a role in improving quadriceps strength and hamstring flexibility, which in turn translates to an improved running performance. ■

HEAR'S WHAT I'M LISTENING!

Harish Lakshman picks the best from the rest in the world of headphones for runners

Music while running is a great motivator. While there are several runners who talk about the pleasure of running in silence, a vast majority of runners love that music — regardless of a short jog or a half marathon.

Headphones are an important accessory to enjoy that blissful run. This article looks at different types of headsets and what is ideal for runners. If you are the type who is not really fussy and don't want to spend any money on headphones, the standard ones that come with your phone or mp3 music player should be fine. However, most times, these are not waterproof and sweat-proof. So, in addition to being average in quality, they also probably won't last you long.

For any runner who regularly listens to music while running, I would recommend buying a pair of waterproof and sweat-proof headphones. There are plenty of options available. The next decision you need to take is — do you need wired headphones or wireless bluetooth ones? In the past year, bluetooth headsets are getting more and more popular. If you are the type who uses your phone as the music player, this is something you might want to consider. These are definitely more expensive than a wired pair but then they are definitely more comfortable.

Here you go...

WIRED HEADSETS

If you are clear you want a wired headset, the next decision is the design. Do you want wires with earbuds that go directly into your ears or do you want a neckband design. I personally prefer the neckband for two reasons. I find them more comfortable but more importantly, it is easy to put on your ears and slip them onto your neck when you don't need the music. So while running, if you bump into a friend and want to chat while running, these are definitely more comfortable!

Sennheiser PMX 686, Philips Actionfit, Sony Active Series MDR AS200/D are all great products. The Philips and Sony models are great if you're on a tight budget. The Sennheiser PMX 80, which is slightly more expensive, is one of the best headsets I have used and would definitely recommend those. Unfortunately, it is no longer in production and has been replaced by later models like PMX 686. If you are lucky, you can still find them online. Yurbud, is another good brand to check out.

WIRELESS HEADSETS

While there are several bluetooth models available, the truly popular ones for running are only a handful. They work with both Android and Apple Phones. Most of them

also have the ability to make and receive calls. Volume adjustments, skipping songs, etc. can be done directly from the headset and you really don't need to pull out your phone. The battery life is about six to eight hours and the music quality is excellent. The most popular models are Jaybird X (as we go to press, they have launched the X2), Plantronics Backbeat FIT, Powerbeats2 by Beats and Leap Wireless by Yurbuds. My top two picks are Jaybird X2 and the Backbeat FIT and if you are looking for the best value for money — Backbeat FIT will come on top. ■



Philips Actionfit



Sony Active Series MDR AS200/D



Jaybird X2



Plantronics Backbeat FIT



Powerbeats2 by Beats



Leap Wireless by Yurbuds



Sennheiser PMX 686



Photos Courtesy: Internet



FULL CIRCLE

“I don’t know what tomorrow will bring but today, I’m healthy, and running,” writes **Michelle Sharma**, from Malta, who made Chennai her home a few years ago, and shares with us her very personal, and very inspiring story

Running! I hated it the first time I tried it. I was 17, studying in America, living on fast food, busy gaining weight and my boyfriend (now husband) asked me to give it a shot. I just didn't get it! How and why would anyone want to unnecessarily torture himself/herself, aimlessly running from point A to point B going through shortness of breath and the effort used to get to that place especially when the same thing could be done with a leisurely stroll... I couldn't run. Not even for 50 meters. I hated it. So I stopped running even before I started...

I moved back home, to Malta, and my boyfriend moved to India. We had a long-distance relationship and after four years, we decided to get married. I wanted to look good and surprise him by losing some weight. Well, the things we do for love! So, I started — yes, you guessed right - running. I made it a point to run at least five times a week. I started with really short distances, mostly walking and running in between, and finally I was at a point where I could run a 5km straight, without a break. And you know what? It felt good.

I was slowly getting addicted. Every run brought with it a sense of freedom; I felt a sense of calm and a deep desire to do better than I did the day before. Plus, I was actually losing weight. We got married and I moved to India but the running didn't stop. I joined a local gym here, in Chennai, and I ran on the treadmill as I found it tough initially to run on the road in what was then a strange country.

Things were great until my ankle started to ache. As the distances got longer, I would have a dull pain

in my ankle throughout the day. I did a bit of research and reading, and sought some expert advice. The intervention helped me fix my stride, posture and thereby better my running. I was totally hooked! I wanted to get better. I wanted to run faster and longer, and I made up my mind that I would run a half marathon.

And then I got pregnant. But the running never stopped. I kept running until I was eight months pregnant. Of course the distances got shorter as the pregnancy progressed... Both my pregnancies ended up in C sections and I really do feel that staying fit throughout helped the recovery process and reduced the time I had to wait to get back into running.

I did run a half marathon after all. Several, in fact. I even went on to win The Wipro Chennai Marathon (TWCM) in the half marathon category in 2012. I loved being fit. I started to cross-train a lot. I started dancing and added a bit of weight training to go with it; I ensured I stretched a lot, and I felt wonderful in general.

And then, in June last year, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I mean how could it happen to me, right? I did everything by the book. I breast-fed my children. I exercised. I was fit. I was only 36. I was sure they were mistaken. I had opened up my own dance studio just the week before. This could not be happening. But it was!

The following year was one of the biggest challenges my body would probably have to go through. I was told that the tumor they had found was one of the largest they had seen in a long time

and that it had perhaps been there definitely for over a year. The doctors were surprised I had not felt it earlier and if I had, why I had not gone to the doctor earlier. I guess we all think we are invincible until something slaps us so hard in the face and makes us realise we are not.

I will never forget my doctor's words before going in for my first chemotherapy session. He said that I should thank my running and my active lifestyle because that had helped my cancer from not spreading to other parts of my body. It was a big tumor and I was fortunate that it hadn't.

Throughout my treatment, I tried to keep fit. I went through seven chemotherapy sessions, three surgeries, 28 radiation sessions and a bad case of dengue. My body has taken a huge toll and I did try to keep running but at times it proved to be difficult. I could not run more than a 3km or a 4km and I preferred to do things like Pilates.

The first time I thought I was fit and tried running again, I was so disappointed to see how much fitness I had lost compared to 'before'. I could not even finish a 3km. It was too hard and all I could do was cry.

But I'm happy to say that my treatment is over and I've made a full recovery. I have learnt so much throughout the last year. I have stopped comparing myself to 'before' and I'm back to working on my fitness. I have a long way to go but I have reached my 10km mark, so I know I'm headed in the right direction. I don't know what tomorrow will bring but TODAY I'm healthy and still running... ■



At times, people will ask you

*ennama neenga
ippadi odureengale*

Just tell them *Maa..!*
Marathon da... Chennai da...



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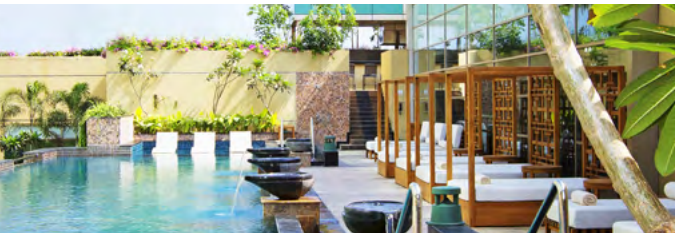
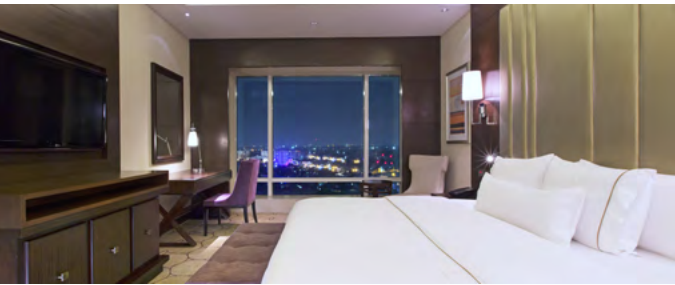
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