

Running A 26.2 Mile Marathon Is No Easy Task

"Rejoice, we conquer," is what the Greek messenger Pheidippides said in 490 B.C. after carrying news of the Greeks' victory over Persia. Pheidippides, after having run 25 miles from Marathon to Athens, fell to the ground dead. Little did he know his 25-mile jaunt - to become 26.2 miles at the 1906 Olympic Games - would become the ultimate challenge for runners.

RUN 26.2 MILES?

Running a marathon is no easy task, believe me. (This past Saturday's Charlotte Observer Marathon was my 11th and I plan to do 30-40 more.) However, the rewards are numerous for those who elect to. Researchers have found that compared to non-exercisers, marathoners -

- have a lower percentage of fat
- weigh less
- have lower blood pressure
- exhibit better heart-lung function
- have lower cholesterol and triglyceride levels
- have hearts that beat more efficiently
- live longer
- demonstrate better tolerance to stress
- suffer fewer heart attacks
- enjoy better blood circulation

Are there other reasons for running?? Of course. Mattie Mitchell and Gwen P. Harvey both competed in the Charlotte Observer Marathon. Not the 10K (6.2 miles) but the 26.2 mile

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tour of southeast Charlotte. I had the opportunity to speak with these marathoners and a synopsis of our conversation follows:

MATTIE MITCHELL, age 35, has been running for seven years. With an average of 30-35 miles of running per week, she was able to traverse the Charlotte course (both of her marathons were successfully done in Charlotte) in five hours, 1 minute, and 59 seconds.

She says she runs to relieve stress and enjoys the self-fulfillment running provides. When asked to comment on the individual whose only exercise consists of lifting a beer can, she responding by saying he or she is "missing life" and should get off their tail and start working out.

Not content with having run two marathons, Mattie wants to compete in either the New York City or Marine Corps Marathons. She has come to the realization that exercise is a lifetime commitment - just like eating and breathing - and she plans to "run

forever."

GWEN HARVEY, age 33 years of age, began running five years ago and, like many other runners, cites a "sense of accomplishment" as her reason for going to distance. With a time of three hours, 57 minutes and 58 seconds for her first marathon effort, we can expect much from this lady.

Gwen prepared for her first marathon by running 50-60 miles a week. It was this strong base that allowed her to pass many "brothers" in the final miles, she believes. With the 1986 Charlotte Observer Marathon well behind her, Gwen is focusing on running it again in 1987. She does not hasten to add she has not ruled out running

the Marine Corps Marathon later this year.

I asked Gwen the question she will hear from the non-runner over and over again; why run 26.2 miles? Her answer? "It's fun when it's done!"

(Note: Marathon runners know the 26.2 miles run is really two races in one - a 20 mile race followed by a 6.2. Almost any runner can run 20 miles. But the last 6.2 miles are something else - almost like another 20. Your muscles ache and fatigue seems so severe that you will want to quit. You will find yourself angry, grumpy, and very irritable. To continue to run those last 6.2 miles takes more mental toughness and discipline than the

non-runner could ever imagine.)

MILESTONE

Mattie and Gwen, like marathon runners around the world, have obtained a significant milestone - they have run 26 miles, 385 yards. I know that you join me in congratulating them, and others whom I could not contact, for a job well done. They are unique. Over 220 million Americans have never run that far. They are truly heroines who can proudly proclaim, "Rejoice, we conquer."

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