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sports

Marathons can be a pain

By Doug Levy
Of the Emerald

It is not worth it — that's what I kept telling myself as I trained for the 1983 Portland Marathon.

I had decided to try the Oct. 2 run more than a year ago. I had finished the 15-kilometer Cascade Runoff physically intact — my first marathon was the next step.

"You must be mad," said one girl when I told her of my plan.

In July, I clipped a three-month marathon training schedule out of a running magazine. At first, the running wasn't a hindrance at all, but the sheer drudgery of long runs every day overwhelmed me.

Soon I began to take days off. Then I took a week off.

Still, the thought of finishing a 26-mile run had become a concrete goal. "Once you finish that first marathon, you're hooked," said one summer training partner, a veteran of four previous marathons.

I wondered though. After my first (and only) 150 minute jaunt, my legs were so stiff I could barely walk. A friend and I ran 75 minutes the morning after the stint.

"People don't understand how much time and training go into running a marathon," my summer partner said. "They think we just go out and run one."

One night I ran 70 minutes, felt a sharp twinge in my right leg, and walked home.

Fear set in. What if I pulled a muscle right before the marathon?

Exercising caution, I waited a week before running again. It was Sept. 28, just four days before the big event. I was nervous, but mostly I was scared.

I logged a 75-minute run, then three 30-minute runs. Runners are supposed to scale down time training the week before a marathon.

Another rule for marathoners is to load up on carbohydrates, curb fats, and watch a strict diet.

I won't claim I was a saint, but I did watch myself. About a month



Graphic by Shawn Bird

before the race, I stopped eating red meat.

What hurt the most was cutting out alcohol. I spent a month minus beer, gin and tonics, and inebriation. *That* hurt.

Finally, race day beckoned. Oct. 2 — the day I'd yearned for and dreaded at the same time — was here. I was scared that I hadn't run enough miles, scared that I might buckle and hit the infamous 20-mile "wall."

The first five miles went well. I ran side-by-side with Rod, my high-school buddy. I'd hoped to run at an eight-minute mile pace, which converts to a 3:28 marathon, and we were running 7:51s. Adrenalin flowing, legs

churning, I felt great.

Five more miles passed, and we remained strong. I remember hearing a guy call out 78-something at the 10-mile mark. This isn't so bad, I mumbled to myself.

At 12 miles I passed my parents, still going strong. They were not expecting me to pass them so soon — I whizzed by before my mother could get a picture of me.

I felt powerful. I kept thinking how amusing it was that I worried about my endurance. I predicted I wouldn't hit a 20-mile wall. My time at the halfway point of the run was 1:43.

Fifteen miles. Medical experts say the body begins to tire at this point. Sure enough, I slowed — but not much. The legs continued to propel me, the body continued to sustain me, until 18 miles. I was still running at an eight-minute pace. Perfect.

Then the roof caved in. Suddenly I didn't want to run another step.

My earlier prediction about missing the 20-mile wall was correct. I encountered the 18-mile wall.

By the time I reached 21 miles, I was running about as fast as most walk. Volunteers told me there were five miles left. "You're almost there — the homestretch," they shouted.

They couldn't know that this five miles was eons tougher than the other 21. Although I never walked, I stopped and stretched my shins frequently. My dream of three and one-half hours had evaporated.

Days later (it seemed so), I saw the finish line and sprinted 200 yards. The clock ticked to 3:58.02.

Yes, I finished a marathon. I am glad about that, although I'm not glad about limping and avoiding stairs.

I was gravely disappointed with my time. Everyone else I ran with or near was in the 3:30 range. I had limped in 28 minutes later after running my last 13 miles in 2:15. Old ladies passed me by. The winner, Monte Brothwell of Idaho, burst home in 2:17.

Yes, I will run another marathon. At noon Sunday, I seriously doubted I would say that. Funny as it sounds, I want to run past a 26-mile barrier again, if only to achieve my 3:30 goal.

Madness is addictive.

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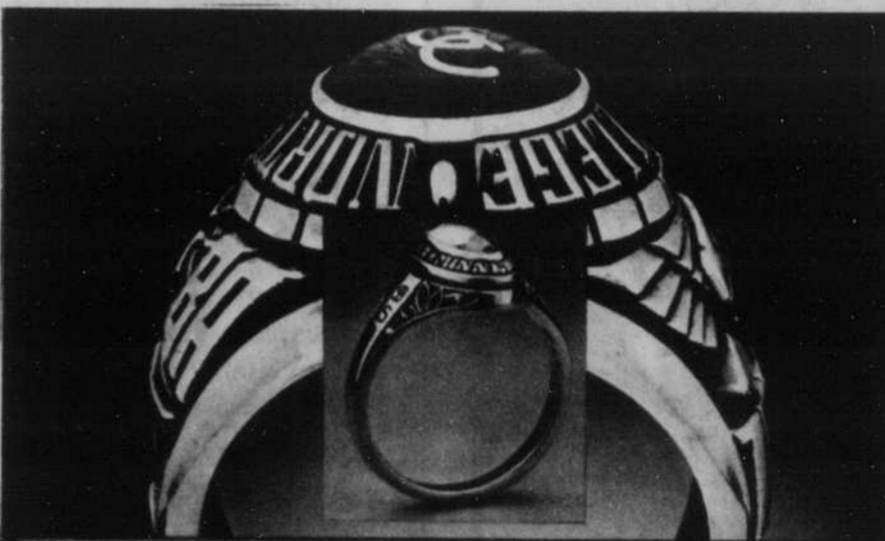
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