

Yell Completes L.A. Marathon, Reaches Goal Despite Injury

Hello, my name is Tyler Yell. I am 17 years old, a junior at McNary High School (in Salem, Ore.), and a 2003 L.A. Marathon finisher.

Let's start at the beginning, shall we? After the marathon on March 3, I've been asked the burning question of, "Why did you run the marathon?"

For one, I'm not built for any of those contact sports the school provides for us, standing at a towering height of 5'6" and tipping the scales at a weight of 130, who would be? But now when I'm asked, I say, "I did it for my family."

To me, at least lately, it seems that I'm not one to really be noticed around my family. I have my moments, of course, but nothing special seems to stand out and now, after my run, I can say, "I ran a marathon." To me, that's more impressive than winning a million dollars.

I also did it to show all of them that I could accomplish something I've worked hard to do. We all have our accomplishments. This is mine, and it's something that not even 1/10 of 1 percent of the population will ever do.

At the beginning of the year, I signed up on the marathon team with 28 other students. While running the marathon was our goal, Mr. (Paul) Shuirman, our coach, wanted to instill the importance of school with those goals.

We were required to keep our grades at a passing level and if they weren't, he would inform our teacher and the student that he would give us three weeks to show improvement, or a will to improve, or we were cut from the team.

The team was a great source of confidence. Each one of them had their own unique trait that they brought to the marathon team. Sadly, personal life, schoolwork, or a lack of dedication pulled out 20 members of the team, leaving only eight, or maybe seven. I was the shaky last member.

You see, I've always had a problem with math. No matter what I do, the numbers just don't seem to click and I hadn't been putting much effort into math this year. Another requirement to participate in the marathon was to have passing grades at the semester. My math grade was a very low D; the final exam would decide my fate. If I didn't get a 61 percent or higher, I wouldn't be going to the marathon.

I pulled together this great study guide and stayed up late the night before

the exam in a desperate attempt to cram the last information into my noggin. I did everything possible to eat a good breakfast and get enough sleep, but even now I don't remember if I did or not.

My alarm rang that morning and I was up like a bullet, throwing clothes on, eating whatever was at hand, and rushing to school. I got my friends to pump me up before the first-period bell rang. "You're so going to pass this test. That marathon is waiting," they told me.

To make a long story short, I went to class, took the test, and came back after school to see if I had passed. My teacher told me that I passed with a 68 percent. I could hardly stand. I had a chance to go to the marathon. But the qualifying 18-miler stood in my way.

We had about 5-7 races during the year. The last one was the Cascade Half Marathon, a 13.1-mile run through the farmlands about 13 miles outside of Salem I felt good that day, aside from a slight kink in my knee. I was ready to run and I did, quite well actually, until the turnaround. The kink had grown from an annoyance to a problem.

"You're running too fast," my body was telling me. "Slow down!" I didn't. I ignored my knee and ran a continuous four miles with two 30-second stops. I got a good time, but my knee, or IT band as I found out later, was in shambles. I could hardly walk.

I went to the personal trainer the next day and she advised me to do a stretch that would loosen up my IT band so that I could run without pain. I did this stretch as much as I could. If I was talking to someone, I was stretching. If I was watching TV, I was stretching. It was an obsession.

By now, a bad throat cold was going around at school and I got it. It was three days before the 18-miler. I was para-noid, drinking water, taking every medicine known to man, sleeping well, eating. It wasn't good enough, I was just too sick.

By Sunday, the cold had let up some and I got up early to run. I ate something hot to maybe burn the virus out of my throat, but it didn't work. When I met up with the team, I was feeling okay and when the run began, I was actually keeping the pace I had before.

The run went on and the stretching proved to do nothing. My knee started hurting, my sides ached from my breakfast, and I was limping at the back



Tyler Yell (third from left) and the McNary High School marathon team members who completed the L.A. Marathon, plus Coach Paul Shuirman

of the team, trying to keep an upbeat tone. One thing I learned from this marathon is don't push your body. It'll stop when it wants to stop.

I sat down on a bench to have something to eat and try to do a stretch or two so that my knee could keep the pace I was at. When I tried to get up, I couldn't. My knee was tense and it wouldn't straighten out. I tried more stretches, but I couldn't walk, let alone stand.

That meant I couldn't finish. Now, if you didn't finish this race, you weren't allowed to go to the marathon. I had worked so hard to get so far and then to be shut down by a knee injury – I was crushed. I couldn't even look at my fellow team members as I passed them by in the car going home. I cried like I had just lost someone, like I was all alone now. Until then, I didn't know how much it meant to be on that team.

Later that night after I had finished my long cry, my coach called. I figured that he wanted to tell me he still had my clothes and to pick them up on Monday, but he surprised me with two options.

"You can either try the 18-miler again," he said "Or you can come to L.A. to be the manager of our team and keep the kids in high spirits." He told me that I was the heart of the marathon team, that I was the "special one" who came along every once in awhile, plus the team, and his wife, convinced him to drop the rules and let me go.

I said I would gladly be the manager and I would try the 18 again. I never did,

though. He said that it would be better for my knee if I just tried my best at the marathon than to risk further injury.

So to make a longer story shorter again, I went to the marathon. This time, my **other** knee started to give me problems and from mile seven on, I walked. Since you use different muscles for walking and running, I was aching. I had never walked so far in my life.

But when I rounded the corner and could see the finish line, my eyes filled with big goopy tears and I saw my mom and my grandma standing on the sidelines, screaming for me to go, to go and finish the marathon. My knee stopped hurting and I ran to the finish and let them put a medal around my neck. There I was, standing in the middle of L.A. with a gold medal around my neck, wondering how I did it.

People ask me now, "What was your time?" and I reply, "I finished, that's all that matters." What I enjoyed most about the past six months is the strong bond I had with my team. Each one of them gave me a big hug after they saw me in the lobby, trying to stand up. I was proud of each of them. They helped me finish and I hope I helped them some way too.

I can't tell you much about what I learned afterward, except that I can do anything now. What do you think you might learn after you've finished a marathon? Try it, then get back to me. Believe me, you can do it.