



Anyone can run a marathon, but it takes meticulous training

BY JEFF WEBER • STAFF WRITER • DECEMBER 28, 2010

Tara Zimliki's job as owner of Tara's Boot Camp in Branchburg and Flemington is to motivate and train people to achieve a wide range of fitness goals.

One of the most popular goals exercise enthusiasts make this time of year is to run in a race, be it a 5K or a grueling 26.2-mile, full-length marathon. Zimliki has experienced them all — especially the 26.2-mile variety, running in 16 of them.

Zimliki says that anyone can run a marathon. She knows — she ran in a marathon while eight months pregnant.

"So often I hear, "This year, my resolution is I am going to train to run my first marathon," " said Zimliki, who will turn 31 in about a month and has two children. "However, not everyone accomplishes this goal because most people just do not know how to begin."

Zimliki says there are 10 steps a prospective marathon runner should take to prepare, the first two of which are simple: find a marathon and then list why you want to run a marathon and what your goal is.

Zimliki advises identifying a marathon that is 10 to 12 months away and one that features a "mid-level elevation," especially for first-timers. As for the list, keep it at the ready as you embark on the training process, which is step three.

"The most important thing about training for a marathon is to start early. Race day is the culmination of months of training and preparation. However, don't be scared or hesitant by the commitment you are about to make, a marathon is one of the greatest personal accomplishments," Zimliki said. "Hire an experienced marathoner and ask for a customized marathon training schedule. This is not a "one-size-fits-all" goal, as everyone is at a different fitness level, so a training schedule is important."

The next step is to make sure you are fueling your body properly with nutrient-dense food to fuel your training and race-day runs. Meeting with a professional nutritionist isn't a bad idea, Zimliki says.

Step five is to track your progress daily, including rest days. Zimliki recommends resting two days per week because they are "just as important as running days, as your muscle fiber needs time to heal and rebuild."

Getting in the proper amount of practice prior to marathon day is of paramount importance, Zimliki says. Taking this step means running other races, such as a 5K, 10K or half-marathon.

"This progressive race training will help you to be prepared in both body and mind for race day," she said. "You will also have an opportunity to gauge the approximate time you will finish your marathon.

Be sure to tell your friends and family about your marathon goal, too. You can never have enough support, Zimliki says. It also is crucial to cross-train, which helps avoid injury. A boot camp, such as the one she runs, is a good way to build endurance and core strength — the ultimate goals of cross-training.

At this point, eight steps have been completed, and the marathon is right around the corner. Step nine is to stay mentally strong. Zimliki says that running a marathon is 70 percent running and 30 percent mental.

"Think of a few mantras to repeat in your head when you are running long runs. One mantra that works for most of my clients is, 'I deserve this,' " Zimliki said. "I remind my clients that they are running this marathon with their health in mind and we all deserve to be **healthy**."

Then, once the big day has arrived, it's time to run your first marathon with a smile.

"As you are running, your body secretes endorphins (produced by the pituitary gland and hypothalamus), which are happy chemicals. This is also known as the "Runner's High," " said Zimliki, who finished in the top 5 percent for women and top 10 percent overall in the 2010 New York City Marathon with a time of 3 hours, 28 minutes. "There are times when you will feel so incredible in a run you just want to smile. So go for it."

First-time experience

Rahway native Jeff Drylewicz knows all about the "Runner's High," experiencing it for the first 15 miles of the 2008 New York City Marathon before hitting a wall and walking over the Queensboro Bridge.

He then regained his stamina for miles 17 through 24 before hitting another wall and having to fight through the final 2.2 miles for a time of 5 hours, 35 minutes, 17 seconds. If not for Drylewicz's training regimen, which started in April for the November race, he might not have made it.

"My goal the whole time was to just get more endurance," said Drylewicz, 30, who lives in Union with his wife, Amy, who has run four New York City Marathons, with a best time of 5 hours, 17 minutes, in 2004. "The highest I ran before the 26.2 was 18 miles. It was all about running 3 to 4 miles, three times a week, then doubling it on the weekends and gradually working my way up."

Drylewicz also stressed the importance of eating lots of protein — putting peanut butter, a banana and some milk in a blender was his snack of choice — and pushing himself on days when it hurt to run.

"Running (the marathon) was awesome, but the training was tough," said Drylewicz, who when told that Zimliki had run a marathon while eight months pregnant, quipped: "I kind of felt like I was eight months pregnant when I ran it." "It's definitely worth doing as an accomplishment. Having finished it was huge."



Branchburg resident and boot camp instructor Tara Zimlik runs in the 2010 New York City Marathon. (SUBMITTED PHOTO)
