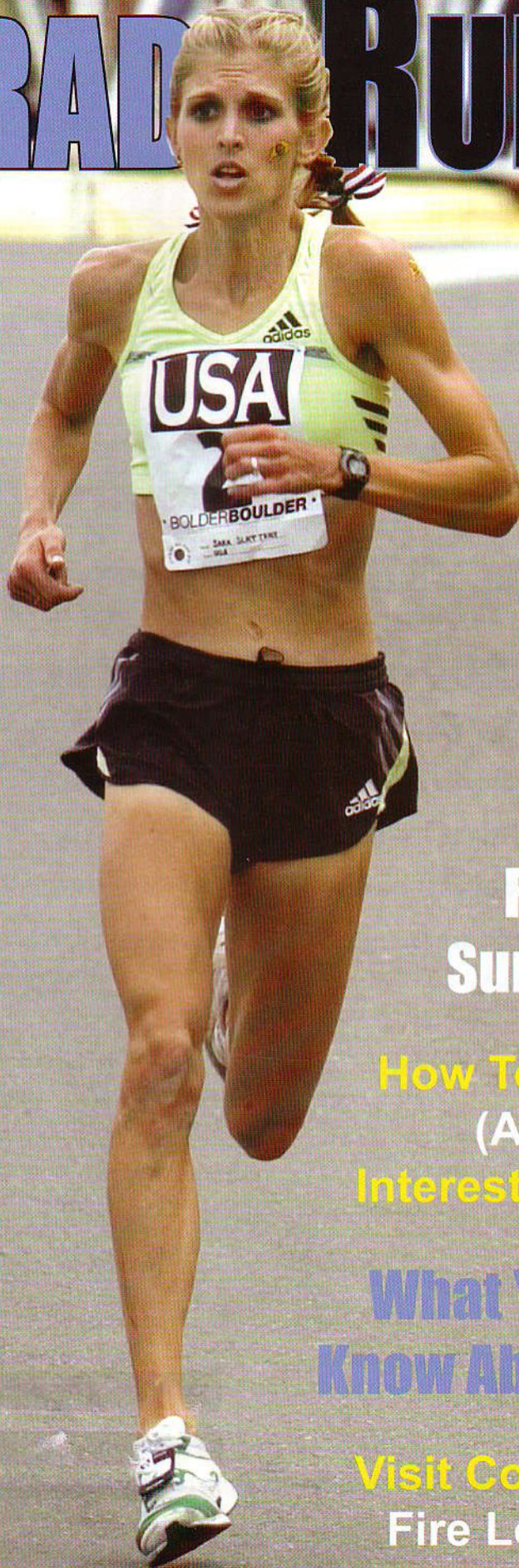


RUNNING

TRIATHLON

WALKING

COLORADO RUNNER



**Slattery
Steals
The
Show!**

**Fuel Up With
Summer Fruits**

**How To Prepare For
(And Run) One
Interesting Marathon**

**What You Need To
Know About Asthma**

**Visit Colorado's Last
Fire Lookout Tower**



Official Publication

Issue 18:

July/August 2006

www.coloradorunnermag.com

\$3.00 US \$4.50 CAN



0 74470 05567 9

HOW TO PREPARE FOR (AND RUN) AN INTERESTING MARATHON

BY FELIX WONG



torted looks of agony on my face - stopped traffic, wagged his finger and hollered at me, "Hey you! There's a tree over there. Why don't you go sit down and rest under it for a minute?" After assuring him that I was in fact okay, I limped and hobbled over to Mile 22, where a co-worker, who had already completed the race, was walking back towards me. Before I could even say, "Oh, hi Chris," he took one look at my awkward gait and offered, "Felix, there's a first aid station right up the road if you need it." I thanked him, declined the aid stop, and ended up finishing the marathon in just under five hours.

Come Into the Marathon Sneezing

In 2002 I signed up for the California International Marathon. A few days before the race there was a minor problem. Apparently, I had caught the flu.

Obviously, one cannot allow a little virus to disrupt one's plans for glory during a 26.2-mile race. Therefore, I tried numerous home remedies for getting over this ailment as quickly as possible, which included imbibing copious amounts of chicken noodle soup, echinacea, zinc, garlic, and white onions. This also had the benefit of keeping others away from me with my pungent breath, lest they get sick too.

Another piece of advice I followed was to minimize the intake of carbohydrates to prevent "feeding" the flu. I am certain about the brilliance of this suggestion, but cannot say if this had anything to do with feeling like I had the energy level of a worm by mile 14. Never fear - I still finished (again in just under five hours), which is evidence that the sick-while-carb-depleted method can work.

Run Short, Run Fast, and Forget Long

By 2004 I decided to train a tad more seriously with the new goal of beating George W. Bush's best marathon time of 3:44:52. I even evaluated one of Hal Higdon's intermediate training plans but dismissed it thinking, "45 miles a week? Who has time for that?" Appalled, I formulated my own strategy which I call "Run Short, Run Fast, and Forget Long." Its underlying theory was that if I was comfortable doing numerous short (say, five mile) runs at seven-minute pace, then running a full marathon at eight-minute pace would feel trivial regardless of how many long runs I did (maybe one or two).

Indeed, on race day I trotted through the first half in about 1:42, meaning that all I had to do to beat the President's PR was cruise through the second half in about 2:02. However, by Mile 18 my legs felt like they had been machine-gunned as I moved increasingly stiff-legged like a robot, really wanting to run, but barely able to jog any faster than a mule carrying 200 pounds of flour. I fell short of W's best time by five minutes but at least I have never forgotten the sinking feeling of watching precious minutes tick by as I remained helpless to pick up the pace even one iota.

Sign Up For a Hilly Marathon Without Even Knowing It

In 2005 I still had the goal of bettering Bush's PR when I signed up for the inaugural Knoxville Marathon in Tennessee. I even did a few long training runs this time, including a 22-miler. The race web site provided assurances that this was just a "moderately rolling" course so I did not bother to examine the elevation profile.

I was bit surprised, then, at Mile 7 of the race when I encountered an uphill of about a mile-and-a-half in length. Subsequent roads were not as steep but none were even close to pancake-flat. As the course kept undulating, my pace steadily faltered and by Mile 21 I had given up on the idea of even approximating the President's time. Now I was merely shooting for four hours. Imagine my dismay when at Mile 25 the four-hour pacesetter whizzed by me at a meager nine-minute pace, and I was entirely powerless to keep up for more than three seconds.

After the race I asked a 71-year-old finisher how difficult this marathon was compared to the other 98 he had done in his lifetime. "It was the third hardest," he stated matter-of-factly, still gasping for breath. "The only ones harder was a marathon going to the top of Black Mountain in North Carolina, and one I did in Antarctica."

Party Hardy the Night Before

Most people would try to get a full night's sleep before running an early-morning marathon. At least that was my initial plan before this year's Colorado Marathon, especially since I had to wake up at 3:15 am to catch a 4:00 shuttle. How I found myself going bar-hopping through Old Town with several (non-runner) friends at 11:00 pm followed by a midnight snack at Old Chicago is perplexing.

Nevertheless, despite being sleep-deprived and having a slight hangover, I ran a 3:35 marathon with the second half just two minutes slower than the first, being one of the races I would have finished before the President. Clearly, Fat Tire is the true breakfast of champions.

Conclusion

The next time some expert suggests that you follow a structured training plan that requires you to run insane mileage per week or incorporate lung-busting intervals and fartlek workouts, just say, "No, I know of a better way." The preparation strategies outlined above will ensure that your marathon will be memorable (even if slow) and entertaining (if mostly for witnesses and bystanders) while expending minimal time and effort.

If Oprah tells you otherwise, just ask her if she has beaten George W. Bush lately.

Felix Wong is a mechanical engineer in Fort Collins with a passion for running, ultra-cycling, and Ironman triathlons. His best marathon time is 3:29, which surprisingly was not achieved using any of the techniques in this article. His personal web site is <http://felixwong.com>.

There are plenty of so-called experts out there (Hal Higdon, Jeff Galloway, Oprah Winfrey) who will tell you how to prepare for a marathon. Invariably, their advice amounts to running five days a week with a long run of up to 21 miles starting at least 13 weeks out from the race date - i.e., the Train Your Butt Off approach. While this method may work, there are alternative ways to prepare for the big day without neglecting your kids, spouse, and job by training 50 miles a week. What are my qualifications to tell you this? Years of experience, innovative thinking, and general laziness.

Here, then, are my top five unconventional strategies to have interesting, unforgettable marathons; techniques that have been tried-and-true for actual races.

Relax About the Long Training Run

For some reason, most people running their first (or fifth) marathon insist on working up to a long run of, say, 18-21 miles. Let me tell you that is completely unnecessary. Witness my first 26.2-mile race - the 1999 Silicon Valley Marathon - in which my attitude was, "I have done 15-hour, 200-mile bike rides plenty of times, so running four or five hours must be easy!" and hence did a long run of a mere seven miles.

I also felt it was unimportant to run at all during the two weeks prior to the race, so I went on vacation with my then-girlfriend to Italy, where we subsequently broke up. It turned out that running a marathon the morning after enduring a 12-hour, jetlag-inducing flight home was just the ticket to put my woes and broken heart behind me. This is because emotional troubles were supplanted by physical ones.

Here's what happened during that race. By Mile 17, I was already walking. At Mile 20, I was strolling through an intersection when a police officer - who may have noticed the con-