

OUTDOORS...

BY FELIX WONG

For Fort Collins Now

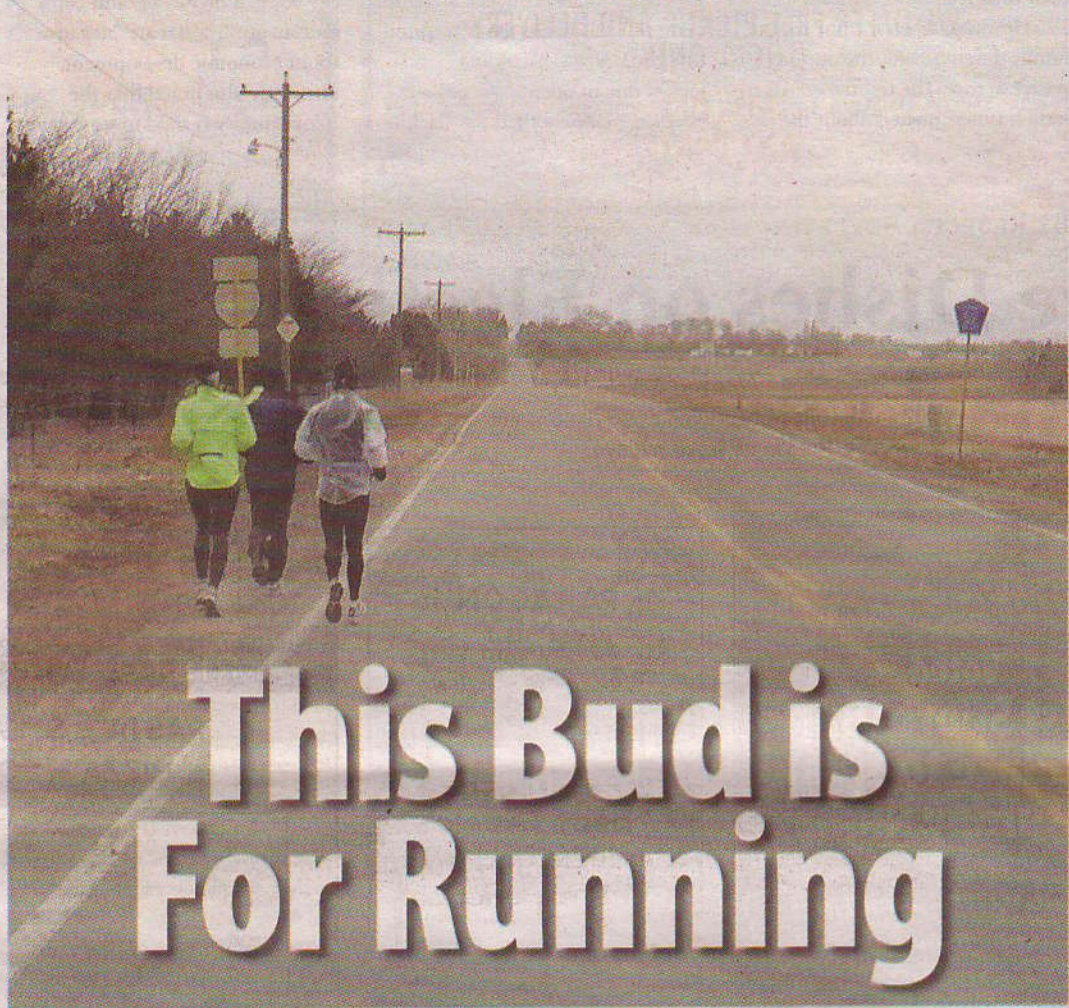
Despite their name, the Budweiser Training Runs are not for Anheuser-Busch employees. Nor are they mere excuses to get sloshed on a Sunday morning with free beer, although you might not have been able to guess that if you saw my friends and I laughing like loons at 11 a.m. with glasses of Shock Top Belgian White in our hands.

"Corn stalks kept flying at me!" exclaimed Celeste. While such a comment could be fully expected of someone in a drunken stupor, Celeste actually had not downed her first beer yet. The rest of us also did not question her claim since all of us, at one moment or another, were nearly bowled over by tumbleweed the size of beach balls while running earlier in the morning.

In fact, unusually strong winds plagued the first runs of the Bud Light Colorado Marathon Training Series. This series consists of free runs open to the public to help runners train for the upcoming Horsetooth Half-Marathon and Colorado Marathon. The bi-weekly outings commenced on Feb. 17 and start and finish at the Budweiser Tour Center in Fort Collins.

At each of the runs, prizes from Runner's Roost are raffled off and there's a whole spread of free food, much of which is home-baked by members of the Fort Collins Running Club. And yes, the Budweiser Tour Center happily hands out beer if you are so inclined—preferably after you have already run, not before.

All these incentives were enough to get me out of bed early on a weekend despite the weather guessers calling for overcast skies with high temperatures in the low 30s and possible flurries. In fact, I was motivated enough to run over to the Budweiser Center instead of driving, getting in three "extra-credit" miles before the actual



This Bud is For Running

Training sessions at tour center help prepare athletes for marathons

event.

The "official" run started innocently enough. Despite the low temperatures, it didn't feel too frigid because most of the 60 or so participants dressed appropriately with long pants or tights, wind-breakers or fleece jackets and warm hats. Most runners decided to run one of two routes marked with orange cones: an eight-mile lap west of Interstate 25, and a seven-mile loop east of the highway.

My friends and I started running the eight-mile lap together, although I fell behind while chat-

ting with a pretty, young woman named Megan. It turned out she teaches Spanish at Colorado State University, so we talked in *español* for seven out of the eight miles. Our delightful and interesting conversation helped the miles go by much quicker than if I had been running alone.

After the first lap, I said goodbye to my new friend and rejoined my buddies, who began running the other lap not because this was required or even suggested, but because they are *locos*. This is when I started noticing the weather was

getting progressively worse.

I looked at my friend Eddie, who was wearing a clear plastic rain jacket, long tights, but no gloves.

"Dude, aren't your hands cold?" I asked, reflecting on how mine were despite wearing two pairs of gloves.

"No!" he replied. That was his last word before he started running like a man possessed.

The gale forces had become strong enough that while running east or west, I had to do my best impression of the Leaning Tower of Pisa to keep from falling over.

Photo by Felix Wong
Participants in a Budweiser Training
Run fight cold, windy conditions.

Hay bales and tumbleweed started whizzing by just a few feet in front of or behind me. Yet—and despite having over a half-marathon in his legs already—Eddie seemed to be picking up speed, or maybe I was slowing down.

Actually, both of our paces became mule-like while running north toward the Budweiser plant. This is because the wind was now pummeling our bodies at more than 50 mph, and making a sharp right turn onto Busch Drive was like running into a chain link fence. My legs were turning over like the Road Runners', but at the rate I was going, Wile E. Coyote could have easily caught me.

The last mile "was almost like walking," observed Eddie after we had safely returned to the tour center, conceding that he did pick up the pace prior to Busch Drive because he "just wanted to get back as quickly as possible."

"That was about as epic as training runs go," I mused while munching on a delicious piece of banana bread and trying not to think about how I still needed to run another three miles home.

Indeed, despite the weather, it was a memorable Sunday morning, with plenty of miles (21 in my case), food, drinks and great company.

The next Budweiser Training Runs are on April 16 and 30. Let's just hope the winds are not quite so blizzard-like again. Otherwise, I think I will drink two glasses of Shock Top Belgian White after the run, followed by a Bud.

Felix Wong is an avid outdoors enthusiast in Fort Collins. His personal blog is at felixwong.com and he can be contacted at fcn@felixwong.com. More information about the Budweiser Training Runs can be found at <http://www.fcollinsmarathon.com/training.html>.