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**The Three Stages Of The Marathon** by Richard Benyo, Jonathan Beverly, and Mark Conover

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**Like a Multi-Staged Rocket, the Marathon Easily Breaks Down into Three Distinct Segments...**

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"THE MARATHON," Frank Shorter once said, "is half over at 20 miles." Serious marathoners agree that the marathon begins as a diehard race at the 18- to 20-mile point; the journey to that point is just that: a journey to a battlefield where the runner confronts the remaining distance and his or her own soul. Although what occurs after 20 miles is of extreme importance to the outcome of the race, the condition in which you arrive at the battleground has a profound effect upon the outcome. If you consider the physiology and tactics of marathoning, the race breaks down into three segments:

**The start to roughly 7 miles:** Find your pace; set your position; warm up the muscles, lungs, and mind; hold yourself in control.

**Miles 7 to 18:** Usually the smoothest portion of the marathon, where your deep muscles are warmed and you establish a rhythm, and where it is easy to "blow up" by running how you feel, because you usually feel good through these miles.

**Miles 18 to the finish:** Dig down and go for it.

We've asked three sub-3-hour marathoners to run you through the three stages of the marathon, and it is no mere coincidence that as you move from stage 1 to stage 2 to stage 3, the lower the writer's PR.

## SECTION 1: MILES 0 TO 7

**PACING IS EVERYTHING** by Richard Benyo

There are essentially three things a runner needs to know about approaching a marathon:

1. You cannot run what you have not practiced during the build-up to the marathon. Certainly, the excitement of the race situation pumps you up to the point that you can potentially run the best race of your life, but that which has not been practiced beforehand cannot be applied to the race.



2. There is no such thing as a "bank" into which you can deposit time and miles in the early going that will deliver dividends in the final miles. Actually, the opposite is true: Go too fast too early and you're guaranteed to be bankrupt by the end of the race.
3. The secret to running a successful marathon is summed up in one word: pace.

My favorite story about the converse of good pacing comes via Derek Clayton, the fierce Australian who held the world's marathon record for 14 years: 1967 81 (2:09:36, set in Fukuoka on December 3, 1967, and 2:08:34, set in Antwerp on May 30, 1969). It was the early miles of the 1969 Antwerp Marathon, in which Clayton would break his own world's record. He went into the race with the idea of going very fast, and he went out of the blocks that way, but very much under control. As he went through the 10K split in 30:06, there was an unfamiliar Kenyan with him. Clayton turned to the runner as they sped along. "Do you know what your best 10,000 meter time was?" Clayton asked. "Well, that's it," the unfamiliar runner replied.

Clayton laughed.

"You've got to be in it to win it," the runner said, defending his strategy. "Well," Clayton finishes the story, "he wasn't in it for long, I can tell you." One of the most common laments I hear about pacing, or rather, about the lack of pacing, is this chestnut: "I run like I feel. I've never been able to run an even pace."

Of course, that attitude is ridiculous. "Can't" and "won't" are two entirely different concepts. Running an even pace takes self-control and discipline. If you can be disciplined enough to put in the miles needed to race a marathon, you can call upon that discipline to learn even pacing. The concept of even pacing isn't an alien thing.

Arthur Lydiard, the father of successful modern distance running, lists proper pacing among the 11 essential factors needed for a runner to reach racing potential. Joe Henderson, currently West Coast Editor of Runner's World and in 1970 (when he said this) editor of that magazine, put it this way: "Generally, it's pace that kills, not distance."

"I'm pretty sure one's best race times are achieved as a result of even pacing," Bill Rodgers says. "If I've had any success in racing, this is one of the major reasons why. In my training and in my racing, I've tried to run at a steady, rhythmic pace."

"A factor in marathon racing that is of supreme importance is the even pace," says Manfred Steffny, editor of the German running magazine Spiridon. "In no other sport will you gain so much from an ability to apportion your energy carefully. Poor pacing is disastrous; usually it takes the form of going out too fast."

Jon Anderson, the 1973 Boston Marathon winner, puts it this way: "If one is to race effectively, he must realize what pace to begin the race at this is the key to being able to finish the race effectively."

Even pacing begins months before you arrive at the starting line. Like everything else about running, pacing can be practiced. Since pacing is a matter of running miles in a predetermined time, and since training for a marathon involves running lots of miles, you can practice pacing with every training mile you log.

Unless you are running at a track, where the distances are precisely marked, measuring workout courses accurately is essential to determining pace. Most essential is marking the first mile of each course.

The focus of this article, however, is not learning pacing so much as applying pacing to the early miles of a marathon so you save yourself for the later miles. The point is, pacing is everything. Period.

Let's jog through the first 7 miles of the marathon, beginning with the countdown 30 minutes before the start.

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#### **MINUS 30 MINUTES AND COUNTING**

Between 15 and 30 minutes before the marathon start, it is a good idea to gently jog a half-mile at a shuffling pace (three to five minutes per mile slower than your planned race pace). This warm-up will begin to loosen the big muscles of your legs, and it will gradually shift your breathing from anaerobic to aerobic, making the initial miles of the race more comfortable.

Between 10 and 15 minutes before the start, shed your outer clothing and either secure it in your car (if it's an out-and-back or loop course) or bag it and stow it on the sweats bus.

From 5 to 10 minutes before the start, do half a dozen 40-yard pickups (easy sprints); begin gently, and then, as your legs respond, increase the speed and power; jog 15 to 20 seconds between each pickup.

Five minutes before the start, find your place in the starting field. Many marathons have pacing standards on the side of the starting field indicating the pace that segment of the field hopes to maintain throughout the race. At other races, the start announcer will give you directions for lining up in an appropriate place in the field based on your planned pace. Unless you are able to run 26 five-minute miles in a row, do not place yourself near the front of the field. If you are unsure about where to line up, ask one of the other runners. It is usually good advice to line up on one side of the field or the other, where you'll have some space to maneuver and not be trapped in the middle of the field.

The ability to get rolling at the start is, naturally, a much bigger problem at megaraces like New York, Marine Corps, Honolulu, or Los Angeles than at the marathons that feature 1,000 runners or fewer. At a big marathon, it will take a while before you even see the starting line, while in a smaller marathon you'll likely cross it in 30 seconds or less.

While you are waiting for the starting signal, shake some of the tightness out of your arms and shoulders; gently lift your legs, one at a time, to your chest (this gently stretches the muscles and tendons); blow the air out of your lungs and take a few deep breaths, filling your lungs with fresh oxygen.

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### **THE START!**

At most marathons, a countdown from the starting area is chanted by the assembled runners, so you will have a good sense of when the race is about to begin. Be prepared to punch your chronograph at the signal of the start, even though you will not immediately move. Your finish time is based upon the time elapsed from the starting signal. In some large, sophisticated marathons where runners are corralled by qualifying times, adjustments are fed into the computer to reflect more accurately the time the specific groups of runners crossed the starting line. And, of course, with the introduction of the ChampionChip, accurate times are pretty much assured for each runner, although the chips are not yet used at many marathons because of the extra expense.

If it takes you more than three minutes to reach the starting line, reset your chronograph to zero and restart it when you cross the starting line. In a large field you'll hardly move at all at first. Then a shuffling begins with some forward movement and periodic stops as the front of the pack moves down the course, opening space for runners coming up from behind to fill in. Don't panic. Move as the opportunity permits. Shuffle forward smoothly. Even when you begin to move somewhat regularly, try to walk fast initially, saving your running muscles.

Once the field moves forward enough to allow you to roll into a shuffling jog, do so, but don't push too hard. If you see an opening in front of you, flow into it. If an opening is ahead and to one side, check to see if anyone else is coming up to fill it. If no one is, move gently into the opening. Take pains to make all moves smoothly and well planned so you don't run into or trip other runners, or be stepped on yourself.

The first mile of any marathon can be rather confusing and also somewhat frustrating; you don't want to waste all your pent-up energy by immediately trying to get into a running rhythm. In reality, the close quarters during the first mile tend to "save" more marathons for runners than ruin them. The tightly packed field makes it difficult for you to get pulled out too quickly. If you are shuffling along on the side of the field, and it is clear for 20 yards ahead, roll into the opening, but don't sprint into it. Conserve, don't waste energy.

Gradually, as the runners in front move farther ahead, there will be more and more space for you to maneuver. Gradually you'll be able to increase your pace. Do not attempt to make up within the first mile the time you may have lost at the start!

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### **MILE 1**

When you reach the first mile, check your time. If you are several minutes slower than you had hoped to be, don't panic, and don't attempt to make up the difference over the next mile. The idea is to get back on your pace over the first 5 miles if the field is not too congested, or over the first 10 miles if it is. Readjust your time goals if it took you an

unreasonable amount of time to reach the starting line.

If you had planned to run at an 8-minute pace, and you reach the 1-mile mark in 10 minutes, plan to run between 7:45 and 7:50 for the next 9 miles. This will put you back on an 8-minute pace by mile 10. If the field is small and you got out smoothly, immediately try to get into an easy rhythm. During the first mile it's better to err on the slow side than to go faster than planned. Considering the tremendous physical conditioning you are in at this point, the first mile may very well seem incredibly pedestrian, but don't give in to the urge to pick up the pace. At 20 miles, your 8-minute pace will not seem so pedestrian, and it may even be a struggle to hold it.

If you reach the first mile a bit on the fast side, immediately slow yourself to what you feel is the proper pace. Don't slow down below your planned pace to average out your first two miles so they equal your planned pace. Just put the few extra seconds away and forget about them. If you ran a 7:45 first mile, for instance, and you planned to run 8:00, plan to reach mile 2 at 15:45.

If you took more than three minutes to get to the starting line and you reset your chronograph to zero as you crossed the starting line, run the race according to your chronograph and not according to the official time. Your first goal, after all, is to complete the marathon safely.

If you had set a specific time goal that now seems impossible because it took you so long to reach the starting line, you have two options. Accept that you cannot regain the lost time and run on your own chronograph, ignoring the official clock. Then you can still strive to achieve your time goal. Although the published results won't reflect it, you'll know what you did. The second option is to try, if you are feeling good when you reach the final 10K, to regain some of the lost time.

It's not worth jeopardizing your entire race by attempting to make up more than three minutes within the first 10 miles. This inability to get to the starting line quickly in a megamarathon is a prime drawback for the first-time marathoner.

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## **MILES 2 THROUGH 7**

Late in the race, it becomes almost impossible for many marathoners to do even the most simple math. This is not the case during the initial 10 miles, so take advantage of the segment by settling in, finding your breathing and running rhythm, and do the necessary math and pace adjustments you need to get into your planned pace.

You'll find yourself running the same pace as many of the runners around you. If you are shooting for a popular time goal (3:00 or 3:30 or 4:00), there will be whole clumps of runners rolling along together. They are attempting to feed off one another and to stay on pace to reach their goals.

If during the first 7 miles you want to join such a group mirroring your target pace, that's fine. If you do join them, run at the edge of the group. Its leaders will typically change periodically. If you are a new marathoner, don't lead and don't get absorbed to the point where you feel hemmed in or where you become lulled by the group mind. If you are sensitive to it, and if the group you are with is an experienced one, you can feel the energy coursing back and forth. It is always easier to run the initial 7 to 10 miles with one or more other runners than it is alone, especially if headwinds prevail.

However, there is a tendency when running in a group to allow the group to dictate your pace, seemingly relieving you of the responsibility of staying on top of your planned race. But you need to continue to monitor your own pace at each mile marker. If the group begins dropping behind or getting ahead of your planned pace, gradually leave them and get into your own groove.

Some groups converse as they roll along. Don't join in. Save your breath for later in the race. If someone addresses a question specifically to you, answer as simply and precisely as possible. If it's your first marathon, it's fine to add, "This is my first marathon so I want to listen and learn," but don't become engaged in a conversation.

You want to stay on top of all of your body systems, so monitor your physical condition from head to foot at least once a mile: How's my breathing? Can I hear my footsteps, or are they silent? Am I drinking enough? Could I urinate right

now if I wanted to? Am I too hot or too cold? Should I remove a layer of clothing now that I'm warmed up so I don't overheat? Am I using my arms as I practiced at the track? Is that a passing twinge I feel on the outside of my left knee or have I experienced it before? If I move to the other side of the road, will the different slant of the road alleviate the twinge?

Begin taking fluids from the very first aid station onward. When you approach aid stations, slow down, take your fluids, and walk briskly through the station area as you drink. Do not attempt to drink on the run; fluid splashed on your T-shirt won't do you any good. Walking gives your running muscles a temporary break, and, more importantly, you remain hydrated.

Drink, and then flow out the other side of the aid station and roll back into a run. Eventually you'll catch back up with your group or get back onto your pace. (If you are running in a group, make sure that you're not hemmed in as you approach an aid station you don't want to miss your chance to grab a cup.)

If it's a cold day, drink one cup of water at the first aid station. If it's a hot day, drink two cups at the first aid station. You want to begin taking fluid as early as possible, since it takes about 45 minutes even for plain water to be emptied from the stomach and properly processed through the body where it will do some good. Even if it's cool, your working muscles are using a tremendous amount of fluid to cool themselves. Don't be lulled into dehydration just because you are enjoying cool weather. You are still perspiring. You need fluid during a marathon no matter what the temperature.

Don't use electrolyte replacement fluids during the first 10 miles take only water. You don't need other fluids yet, and if you take electrolytes too early, the sugar in them could interfere with your body's attempt to switch to using a greater proportion of fatty acids from the bloodstream.

Once you get beyond 10 miles, your body will begin lusting after sugar in as simple-to-process a form as possible, both to fuel the working muscles and to keep the brain, which requires tremendous amounts of simple sugars to function properly, stable. Here, between 7 and 10 miles, is the place to begin taking electrolyte drinks. You can drink it alone or, if the drink is too concentrated, drink a cup of water to dilute it.

By the time you reach 7 miles, your muscles should be warmed through and through, even to the middle of your dense thigh and calf muscles. Within the next dozen miles, you should experience some of the smoothest, most effortless running of your life. During this period, however, you must be careful not to succumb to the urge to run the way you feel, which usually means running too fast because you feel so good. In real estate, it's location, location, location; in marathoning, it's pace, pace, pace.

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## SECTION 2: MILES 7 TO 18

### **Managing the Middle Miles** by Jonathan Beverly

If the marathon is a 20-mile training run followed by a 10K race, we need not waste time on a separate section for the middle miles. We can view them simply as an extension of the first 7 miles, with the marathoner's only task to endure the accumulating time and distance. Accepting this model, one of my friends calls them "the stupid middle miles."

Repeatedly, however, I have been surprised at the crises of body and mind that occurred during these "stupid miles." I found myself shocked and unprepared when the ragged edges of fatigue surfaced through my veneer of cool composure. More than once I wanted to call "Time Out!" somewhere around mile 12. Like life, however, the marathon allows no time outs, so I have always pressed on, trying to manage these crises literally on the run.

The difficulty of the middle miles is this: They are neither the beginning miles, where control is the clear priority, nor the final miles, where the mandate of survival lends crystal clarity to the task at hand. The middle miles are a transition, where elements of both the beginning and the end exist concurrently, where ideals meet harsh reality, and where the runner must make critical decisions and commitments.

If, as Fred Lebow used to say, the marathon is a metaphor for life, then the marathon's middle miles can be compared to the middle years of life. Like the middle miles, these years may seem benign and unimportant compared to the formidable demands of childhood or the struggles of old age; research and literature on the life's span devote the majority of their attention to these bookends. Yet the middle years fill the bulk of one's life, and the skill with which

they are managed determines the satisfaction of the final years indeed, the success of a life itself.

The crises of the middle years start when we begin to doubt our life's direction. This internal ambiguity is unavoidable as we age. While in our youth we drove forward with clear goals, we now find ourselves divided and uncertain. Part of us wants to continue to explore and expand the limits of our world, while another wants to settle and establish continuity and community. We enjoy the authority and confidence of age yet fight to maintain the energy and recklessness of youth.

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### **BALANCE THE CONTRADICTIONARY**

Our natural reaction is either to ignore these problems or to try to solve them by fully embracing one side and disregarding the other. "The serious problems in life, however, are never fully solved," Jung wrote. "If ever they should appear to be so it is a sure sign that something has been lost." We must learn the trick of balancing seemingly contradictory concerns and priorities.

Similarly, we find ambiguity and conflicting priorities in the marathon. Like the life challenges they mirror, they cannot be solved, but must be balanced against each other. The first of three challenges stems from the marathon's demanding length.

#### **1. Establish a Rhythm While Avoiding Stagnation**

By the middle miles of the marathon, we begin to fully understand how long it is. We barely remember the start and cannot yet imagine the end. To survive and succeed, we must develop strategies to pace ourselves physically and emotionally. But we face a danger of falling into a rut and losing contact with the markers that guide us toward our goal.

By our middle years, life also feels interminably long: days blur into months, tempting us to stagnate in a well-worn routine. When the big picture eludes us, we must establish disciplines that enable us to endure less inspiring days, to pay attention to details, and to care about excellence in our work and relationships.

The marathon also demands a few clear disciplines. We need an efficient stride that consumes miles with minimal effort. Maintaining regular fluid intake should be second nature; the ability to sustain a steady pace must be as sure as a musician's scales. We can only develop these disciplines during the hundreds of miles leading up to raceday.

On raceday, ideally we want our legs to maintain the same rhythm over the entire course. But the distance betrays us: the same muscles repeating the same motion will fatigue before the day is through, requiring us occasionally to vary our efficient stride. On a hilly course, practice altering your stride going up or down. When running the Jersey Shore McMarathon, a very flat course, I switched to a higher knee lift for a few hundred yards when I felt muscle fatigue, then settled back to my low, marathoner's stride.

### **CONSERVING ALL ENERGIES**

Success in the marathon, however, requires that we conserve more than physical energy. As in life, the mental and emotional demands of our days drain us deeper than any physical tasks. We must also learn the discipline of running on cruise control, relying on our practiced form to carry us forward while we reserve our emotional energies for the demanding miles to come. This "autopilot" mode gives us the freedom to dissociate and enjoy the event while it monitors the level of effort and ensures all needs are being met.

Personally I have little difficulty going on autopilot, sometimes achieving this state even during the middle of a workday. During more than one marathon, however, I let the autopilot run too freely and found that I had gradually lost pace throughout the middle miles, arriving at the end too late to push for my goal. On a few occasions the autopilot has pushed too hard, like an absent-minded driver with a lead foot.

Since the autopilot can sabotage our goals as well as preserve them, we can't fully "check out." We have to balance the need to tune out with the ability to monitor our progress. I like to imagine this as a program running in the background that flags me with any problems while I run in energy-saving "suspend" mode.

Many race factors can serve as flags for our mental program: Play mental games with splits, updating the formulas and recalculating each mile. Pick landmarks on the course map and use them as checkpoints. If you ran the first miles correctly, you should be catching other runners when you find yourself behind the same group for several miles it often means you are slowing down, and that fact should wake you up. Thank a volunteer: it will break your trance and make someone's day. These mental breaks provide an opportunity to evaluate and adjust our strategy during the middle miles, which is the second challenge.

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## 2. Adjust to Realities While Overcoming Obstacles

The strategies of the middle miles are dependent on several factors: raceday conditions, the results of the first miles, and your physical and mental toughness. Since none of these can be completely known in advance, evaluation must be conducted and decisions made in mid-stride, requiring you to balance honest appraisal with courageous resolve.

The middle years also inspire a time of evaluation and reckoning. We realize that we cannot be everything we thought we could be at 21 that the choices and circumstances of our lives have set a course, and we must either adjust to these realities or consider starting over, perhaps at a disadvantage.

Some say this process begins the day we recognize our mortality. In the marathon it begins the moment we realize, "This is going to be work!" If this happens earlier than expected (and it always seems earlier than expected), it may cause a crisis of confidence. Whatever goals we carried to this point are threatened. We naively dreamed that we could cruise through this without difficulty.

"We wish to hear only unequivocal results," Jung wrote, "and completely forget that these results can only be brought about when we have ventured into and emerged from the darkness." The darkness begins with the doubts of the middle miles, which must be confronted before the deep darkness of fatigue sets in.

Often the first hints of darkness are not an indication of impending doom. Many marathoners report having bad patches when an easy pace suddenly becomes ragged and strained, when something hurts, or when we lose focus and motivation. Learning to ride out these bad patches is a mark of a successful marathoner.

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## RUN THROUGH THE ROUGH SPOTS

Compared to a 10K, where one bad mile is a significant portion of the race, the length of the marathon weighs to the runner's advantage during tough miles. If we don't panic at the first sign of difficulty, we can back off a notch and ride through it. A mile or two reveals whether it is serious, and when the rough spot passes, we will have lost little. Sometimes all that is necessary is an internal adjustment to the increasing difficulty as the miles add up.

The marathon does, however, require a blunt and thorough evaluation: "Have I overextended myself in the first miles?" we must ask. "Do the conditions (heat, humidity, wind, crowds) necessitate altering my goal? Am I injured? Sick?" The marathon does not permit delusions past the middle miles. We may ignore the signs that we should adjust our goals and strategies, but we will pay for it later.

Some indicators are concrete and non-negotiable. The temperature in the 1993 New York City Marathon climbed to the mid-70s before I reached halfway. A year earlier I had run in similar conditions in Pueblo, Colorado, ignored the early signs of dehydration, and suffered debilitating cramps as my reward. Having learned my lesson, in New York I cut the pace enough to allow me to finish strong: not a record, but far ahead of my stumbling Pueblo debacle.

Any pre-existing condition will resurface by the middle miles, often forcing the most difficult choice: to drop out. I spent the night before the 1982 Maine Coast Marathon drenched in a fever sweat. Even though on a PR pace at mile 18, I stepped off the course rather than face the last 8. A friend went into the 1997 Boston ignoring a knee pain that had plagued him for six weeks. He reported afterwards that he "came through 10 miles in 60:08 [his goal pace] and then had a nice walk along the marathon course from mile 12 to 17." Both of us decided that the cost of ignoring these conditions was greater than the reward of finishing this race.

The evaluation that continues throughout the middle miles balancing the necessity of adjustment with the courage to overcome difficulties requires both emotional control and competitive will. Learning to balance these emotions is the third challenge.

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### 3. Stay Calm While Gearing Up

A marathoner enters the middle miles tightly controlled and emotionally detached casually observing and monitoring the body to keep it from pushing and wasting energy. At mile 18, the same marathoner emerges an aggressive competitor poised to attack the last 8 totally committed to the task, pushing farther and reaching deeper than at any point in life. The middle miles are a grey continuum of both.

Again the marathon parallels life: we find in the middle years the imperative to plan and save for our final years but do not want to arrive at the end with reserves that should have been enjoyed when we had youth and energy. We want to burn brightly but are afraid of burning out too soon.

In the marathon, we need to balance control and competitiveness. Erring on either side leads to disaster or disappointment. At Boston's "100th" celebration, the cumulative adrenaline was overpowering. After 7 miles of holding back, I surrendered to the energy within and around me. I'd rather not talk about the final miles. In contrast, at the 1995 Vermont City Marathon, I found myself running a careful, controlled pace at halfway, but over two minutes behind my goal. I made an instant transition to competitor, running a negative split PR, but was left with tantalizing questions of what might have been.

Ideally, we want to maintain an even pace and gradually transition our mental state to meet the changing demands of the task. One of the keys is to break away from friends or other runners that we have socialized with during the first miles. While companions can help in the early priority of keeping the tone calm and easy, they can distract you from the task of preparing for the final miles miles that everyone must face alone.

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### TALK TO YOURSELF REALLY

Accomplishing this transition requires changing how we talk to ourselves. Over the course of the middle miles, our words of calm ("Relax. Have fun. I am in control. This is just a long run.") transform to statements of affirmation and determination ("I am fast. I am tough. I am smooth. I am prepared for whatever it takes.")

If we are going to succeed in this challenge, we must know and believe in our goals. The mind requires a persuasive reason to depart from its natural tendency to avoid pain. If we wait until the moment, we will have trouble convincing ourselves that the cost is worth it.

Well before the marathon days and even weeks earlier we must mentally work through the full race, deciding why we are running, what we wish to accomplish, and what accomplishing this will require, that is, the "cost." Once we have settled the cost and prepared ourselves to go the distance, we wrap this raw desire with a smooth shell of emotional calm to preserve it for when it is needed. Thus prepared, the strategy in the middle miles becomes the task of gradually removing layers of calm control to reveal the solid core of resolve with which to face the final miles.

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### SECTION 3: MILES 18 TO 26.2

#### 18 -- Perhaps Your Lucky Number by Mark Conover

The final 8 miles of the marathon will test you in ways you can't imagine. Only after you get there will you know how you'll feel. And only after you know how you feel will you know how to react. The way your mind and body react during the final 8 miles may not always be pretty, but chances are once you've finished and assessed the race, you'll be satisfied. I will provide examples of what you may experience from mile 18 to the finish based upon personal experience. In all instances, there is a definite cause and effect.

The previous two authors have already prepared you for the ride along the way to the 18-mile mark, discussing a possible cause (impatience) that may result in a rather dismal effect (simply known as "hitting the wall"). I will discuss this scenario first since this effect is what one tries to avoid, but which you will most likely face more than once during a marathon career.

My example comes from my third most memorable marathon, which was actually my first-ever marathon, the 1976 Livermore Marathon, which I ran as a high school junior.

The running boom was at its peak, and as a result, people of all ages were running lots of miles. In California, schoolboys were breaking nine minutes for two miles on a regular basis, mostly because these guys were already doing college-type mileage and intensity. For a schoolboy to run 80 to 100 miles a week wasn't unheard of then as it is now. Even the less genetically gifted were pumping out the miles. How cool, then, for this undeveloped youngster to join the craze and run a marathon. . . .

I had finished my second cross-country season as a varsity runner, becoming the number one runner on our team. I had five weeks to go for the marathon, so I immediately upped my weekly mileage from 50 to 90 miles. I reached 108 miles two weeks before the marathon, then rested for a week. My longest run was 14 miles.

I remember how easy the marathon felt until about 8 miles. I was running sub-6:00 miles and realized early on that I was no longer taking in the scenery or feeling giddy and euphoric with the flow of endorphins that had lulled my body earlier in the race.

By the half-marathon, I was a mask of ultimate concentration: furrowed brow, oblivious to the beautiful green pastures surrounding the flat country miles. I was feeling like a gnarled old tree trunk trying to run a 6:30 mile.

You see, at that age, I had yet to consider pacing for 26.2 miles. I was happy to pass pre-Algebra, so why should I have to figure out that to run a 3-hour marathon, which was my goal, I needed to run consistent 6:55 miles, not the 5:40 to 6:00 miles which I had begun to lope through as soon as the gun went off?

By 22 miles, I was oblivious to my own feet striking the ground. The only thing I recognized were other runners passing me like I was standing still. Hell, by 23 miles, I was standing still, hunched over with the worst side stitch I've ever experienced.

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### **THE DEATH MARCH**

I walked nearly a mile, then started jogging it in, looking ahead on the long, straight, tulle-fog infested road for any sign of a finish line. My legs were reduced to moving bones with muscles so depleted of glycogen and so laden with lactic acid that it's a wonder I was able to finish at all. My mind was numb, kind of like what happens if you have to listen to a jackhammer all day long. Actually, my whole body felt like a jackhammer a shattered one.

I reached 25 miles and had the wherewithal to know I would break 3 hours, but I wouldn't look good doing it. As I trudged to the finish at the Lawrence Livermore Lab, where at one time work had been done on creating the atom bomb, I felt like the physicists must have left one bomb behind, and it fell on me right around the 18-mile point in the race.

I ran 2:54:51, tired, sore, and downright ornery: "Hell no, Dad, I ain't walk-ing to the car. Go get it and pick me up while I lie here on the sidewalk "

One of the hordes of more intelligent marathoners on that day who whipped past me looked a lot like a young guy my age. You can imagine how delighted I was to find out that it was a 14-year-old girl who set the national age-group record with a 2:52.

Yes, while this tale may attest more to the impetuosity of youth, I've seen many seemingly sound adults ignore proper pacing in the early stages of a marathon. As a result of bad pacing, you can still finish your marathon, and you may even reach your time goal, but the price you pay will be a visit to hell, especially during the miles beyond 18.

You'll have no glycoqen for fuel because you will have used carbohydrates from storage too early to meet your intense

energy needs to deliver oxygen to the working muscles.

Along with depleted glycogen will come the formation of lactic acid, the only way your body will have left to attempt to secure oxygen for the working muscles an avenue that produces whole tanker trucks full of this evil byproduct.

Other effects from stupid pacing or rather, lack of pacing range from zero blood sugar, which will impair your ability to concentrate, to postmarathon depression and injury. In the wake of your disappointing marathon, you may not feel like running for months. In my case, I became injured and couldn't train or race again for a long time. I ended up missing my junior year of high school track with sciatica, which I attributed directly to my first marathon.

Aside from having to drop out, the experience I related is one you should strive to avoid at all costs. I have never had such a tedious 8 miles since then. But my next experience typified the majority of my dealings with miles 18 to the finish, save one special marathon, which I'll discuss later. For now, I'll discuss a race strategy and circumstances during the race that are commonplace and result in relatively predictable feelings after mile 18.

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### **WITH KNOWLEDGE COMES GOOD PACING**

By 1987, I had become a seasoned veteran, nearly becoming one of those nine-minute two-milers my senior year in high school (I never ran more than 70 miles a week after that ill-fated Livermore Marathon), a national champion collegiate runner, and an Olympic Trials qualifier at 10,000 meters on the track. My new goal was to qualify for the 1988 Olympic Trials in the marathon. I chose the California International Marathon in Sacramento as my qualifier.

Not only had my body accumulated a wealth of strong training miles since my first marathon in 1976, but my mind had also accumulated a wealth of knowledge about pacing and preparing for the marathon. Thus, after three months of weekly tempo runs and a few 20-milers, I felt ready for a sub-2:20 marathon, the time needed to run in the Olympic Trials four months later.

The day before the race was stormy. The morning of the race was even worse. I remained calm and realized that my prerace plan of starting conservatively was going to be everyone's plan. On a day with driving rain and gale-force winds, surely no one would go out at a suicidal pace. Even if they did, I wasn't going to follow.

As a pack of 25 or so went through the halfway mark at a modest 68 minutes, I felt very relieved and relaxed. Just as I had hoped, my breathing was easy, my mind focused, and my legs fresh. At about 16 miles, an Irish runner made a move, and the field was suddenly down to six lead runners, including myself. I was beginning to feel less comfortable as I entered the zone where the real racing begins.

At 18 miles, my legs were heavy, a sign that I was probably savoring my last few miles of glycogen. From there on I would have to focus on remaining efficient and economical with my stride. I made a conscious effort to make sure I latched onto one of the other runners, thinking to myself that if I treated the last few fatiguing miles like a hard tempo run with a training partner who was feeling a bit more chipper than I was, I could at least get pulled to a solid finish.

Thankfully, my intuition paid off, because by 21 miles, I had entered a zone where I could still run efficiently, but my mind wasn't as focused and my ability to consciously be aggressive was waning a classic sign of blood sugar and glycogen depletion.

Now it was up to whatever mental resolve I had left in order to latch onto someone and run, robot-like, simply focusing on putting one foot in front of the other in tandem with another human being.

The Irishman who made the move at 16 miles fell off the pace at 21 miles, and a Canadian who was a marathon veteran seemed to be running away with the race. But a Kenyan about 5'3" became my running buddy, and off we went in tandem, running for second place. With each passing mile, my brow became more furrowed, and my concentration focused on merely being able to concentrate, rather than concentrating on how to win my race against the Kenyan. My legs began to get that pounded-like-a-jackhammer feeling. But I hung onto the diminutive African runner, memorizing every contour of his muscular shoulders, to which I had become attached like a limpet.

By 25 miles, I wasn't thinking very clearly, but I knew I only had a mile to go. At that point, I lost much of my mental resolve, and as my head lifted against fatigue, the Kenyan pulled away to beat me by 10 seconds. I placed third, but

more importantly, I ran 2:18 to earn a trip to the Olympic Trials.

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### **THE "DREAM" RACE**

I was very satisfied, but I realized that with the marathon, you are bound to feel heavy-legged and unfocused from 18 miles to the finish. It's the degree of heavy legs and cloudy mind that determines whether the whole race falls apart or whether you salvage a respectable performance.

And as this article preaches, it's how fast you run the earlier miles that will determine this degree. But there's no getting around it you're going to fatigue after 18 miles or are you?

That's the beauty of the marathon. You prepare as best you can and run the race. You get to see what happens. What happened to me in my next marathon, the 1988 United States Olympic Trials in New Jersey, is the stuff of which we runners dream.

By the time I reached the 18-mile mark, I was leading. Not only was I leading, but along with Ed Eyestone, I was pulling away from the field. I was actually feeling better from 18 miles to the finish than I felt earlier in the race.

As we reached the 20-mile mark, I was completely focused, my mind very alert and cognizant of my surroundings. I remember looking at my reflection in store windows, doing a "form check." I was telling the motorcycle cop in front of us to give us more room. In other words, I was feeling like I was on an easy 8-miler rather than battling it out in the biggest race of my life. Why did the latter miles of this marathon run so smoothly compared to other marathons I ran?

I can think of several reasons, all of which you can learn from and take with you to your next marathon.

First, in the months leading up to the race, I didn't train like an idiot. I didn't do too many long runs (a mistake we all make in our preparation), fast runs, miles, or races. I trained with extreme moderation. I knew I had built up a tremendous base after I was able to run 2:18 in lousy, early December weather in Sacramento.

Instead of immediately gearing up for the Trials, I took a month off, not running until after Christmas in preparation for the April Trials race. I never ran more than 85 miles a week. I ran one long interval workout a week, a shorter, quicker interval workout every other week, five races from 5K to 15K, and only four runs longer than one hour and 45 minutes. With a one-week taper, I came to the Trials eager, nervous, and ready to see what would happen.

My legs felt fresh, my mind clear, my stride efficient, and my glycogen stores intact. I never felt any discomfort until after I was finished. Only then did my muscles ache with lactic acid and my intestines grumble with whatever physiological trauma they bore the brunt of after running 26.2 miles at 5:03 pace per mile.

Another saving grace for me was my ability to negative split the race. I ran my fastest 10K portion from 20 miles to the finish. I hadn't planned on this, although certainly every marathoner dreams about it. I think the combination of a manageable pace through 18 miles coupled with being undertrained allowed my legs to stave off any formulation of excessive lactic acid. My body wasn't torn down before the race even started, as is often the case for most marathoners.

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### **USE FAT AS FUEL**

This allowed my body to run efficiently for a longer time compared to my other marathons. The pace and condition of my body were sufficient enough to allow less energy-consuming fat to be used as fuel by the muscles rather than carbohydrates, which, once tapped into in the form of glycogen, means your fuel and energy meter are running on borrowed time. Start the meter too early and you'll begin to shut down, which is what often happens from 18 miles to the finish. Remember the jackhammer feeling of pounded legs? That's the sign that you've run out of glycogen.

I've had several other good marathons in my career, but none so thrilling and exhilarating as the 1988 Olympic Trials. Never again have I been able to enjoy the final 8 miles of a marathon. I'm almost positive this is because since then I've showed up at the starting line as "damaged goods" a person whose body was already torn down before the race

even started. In these instances, glycogen reserves were spent early, meaning that I had to dig deep mentally to salvage a good race during the last 8 miles.

Overtraining is one reason we become damaged goods. Too many miles without proper build-up, too many hard workouts, and too many races can cause overtraining. If you feel excessively tired, especially mentally, then you are probably overtraining. In my opinion, too many long runs over too short a period of time will bring you to the start as an overtrained marathoner.

Long runs, like the marathon itself, exact quite a toll from the body. Unlike going into the marathon, runners don't usually go into their long runs rested. Thus it's like getting the jackhammer effect at 18 miles every single week! The body can't stand such constant stress. My suggestion is to wait until about two months out from your marathon before you run longer than 17 miles. I would run only four of these, one every other week. Never exceed 20 miles. Do your last long run two weeks before the marathon. If you do too long a run every week, especially from too far out from your marathon, you're not going to give yourself a fighting chance once you hit 18 miles in the race.

Hopefully, we all get to experience a euphoric final 8 miles of a marathon. If not, we settle for the next best thing, which is the ability mentally to persevere and tell ourselves to finish strong in spite of having a weakened mind and even weaker legs. The thing to avoid is the complete "bonk," where mind and body succumb to the adverse physiological effects that can take their toll during the final 8 miles. The degree of unpleasantness at the end of the marathon is directly proportional to the degree of the bonk. Slowing to a walk, for example, isn't as bad as having to stop altogether.

Our bodies are amazingly resilient and intelligent (despite what nonmarathoners say). Reasonably fit people have internal mechanisms that will prevent them from doing irreparable damage after the bonk occurs.

We know running the marathon won't kill us. Thus, we take on the challenge, immersing ourselves in the training process that is meant to guide us through a satisfying marathon. By paying close attention to the process, which begins months before the big day, and by heeding that most important word patience you will come through the final miles with flying colors, bound for glory.

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