

To Run or Not To Run (Reprinted with permission of the Baton Rouge Bar Association)

BY REBECCA WISBAR



Oprah Winfrey, Keith Richardson, George Bush, Heather Cross, Will Ferrell, Terrel Thomas, Jennifer Sims, Julie Baxter, Stephen Whalen, Craig Watson, Valerie Bargas, Nicholas Sparks, Jordan Faircloth, Bill Lowrey: What experiences have they all shared? Each of them is a marathon runner. While they may not have simultaneously shared the identical marathon route, they have shared similar running experience.

Reasons you should not run a marathon

Let's begin with my non-marathon runner question: "Certainly there are reasons not to run a marathon?" The most consistent response is: There is absolutely no reason not to run a marathon. However, there is an "escape clause": Don't run a marathon unless you have trained for a marathon. With that aside, here are encouraging thoughts about marathons from our legal colleagues.

Adventure vacations and training

A marathon commemorated the run in 490 B.C. of Pheidippides from a battlefield at the site of the town Marathon to Athens. According to legend, he delivered the momentous message "victory," then collapsed and died. The current Athens marathon course is recognized as the original marathon route. It is the same route that was used in the 2004 Athens Olympics. Until the 1908 Olympic Games in London, a marathon race was 24.85 miles. At that time the distance was changed to 26.2 miles to cover the ground from Windsor Castle to White City Stadium. The additional 1.35 miles were added to provide that the race would finish in front of the royal family's viewing box. As today's marathon runners push through those last 1.35 miles of pain, they can thank the British royal family.

In 2014, there were over half a million U.S. marathon runners. This constitutes a group exhibiting dedication, perseverance, self-discipline and joy.

BRBA member Keith Richardson experienced that joy while running on the original marathon route in November 2014. Interestingly, as Keith followed in the footsteps of history by running in the Greek marathon, he mentally noted that the beginning of the route reminded him of the landscape of San Diego. Eventually, Keith ran past an ancient church in the Greek rural setting. As people exited the service on the warm Sunday morning they cheered for the runners, and a Greek woman reached toward

Keith, handing him an olive branch. As he ran, he accepted the tribute, carrying it with him throughout the race, and finally home. The size of the marathon crowd increased as the runners approached Athens. Upon entering the Olympic stadium, the runners received more accolades and a golden medal. Years earlier, when Bill Lowrey ran the Greek marathon, his runner's number was printed on cloth instead of paper, as is done today. While running the original marathon route was unique, the runners' experiences were similar to that of other marathon runners on different routes. Both Keith and Bill shared many of the same thoughts that were verbalized to me by other runners.

Terrel Thomas' running experiences began when her neighbor suggested that they begin a morning run. Initially Terrel declined, but 11 marathons later she is now an enthusiastic advocate of marathon running. Every morning she runs with a group of three friends who choose one marathon a year as a destination site. Training and traveling with the same group of friends has created certain traditions. One tradition is the marathon breakfast of a bagel topped with banana and peanut butter. Another travel tradition is a "marathon packing list," which includes items such as a throw-away jacket, gloves (just in case) and food items, such as a power bar and GU, an energy gel well known among long-distance runners.

The physical demands of running more than four hours require that runners remain hydrated and fueled with healthy food. GU is an easy to carry mix of carbohydrates that promises to deliver long-lasting energy. According to Terrel, the mixture's taste and consistency is best compared to a melted gummy bear. This was the most favorable culinary review from any of the runners.

Heather Cross has raced in many marathons. While running in the Vancouver marathon last spring, she enjoyed seeing the city during her 26.2 mile run. She commented that when you are on foot, you really see the city as opposed to driving through a new area. She advises aspiring marathon runners to choose a spring marathon, as Louisiana provides the best training weather through the preceding cool months.

Julie Baxter recently completed her first marathon, the Louisiana marathon on Jan. 18, 2015. In addition to the recommendation that you train consistently, Julie offers a recommendation learned the hard way. She developed plantar fascia as a result of running too many training miles in the same pair of shoes. Accordingly, Julie recommends: "Don't skimp on replacing those old shoes!"

I asked each of the runners for their thoughts on barefoot running. All responded with a resounding applause for anyone willing to do that and noted that they had no desire to count themselves in that number. Julie added that, as a girl who grew up watching Olympian Zola Budd run in South Africa, she had nothing but admiration for anyone who could run barefoot.

Craig Watson and Bill Lowrey have run marathons in each of the 50 states at least once. In fact, each has run marathons on almost every continent. Craig has run 220 marathons since 1996. Among their shared marathon experiences was the Two Oceans Marathon, a 35-mile ultra-marathon in South Africa. The runners traverse the route between the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian Ocean. According to Bill, another memorable marathon was in Medoc, France. In addition to the water stops found throughout all races, Medoc provided wine stations.

Jennifer Sims notes that physical preparation, more than mental preparation, is the key for long-distance running. In preparation for her marathons, she runs four to six miles approximately three times a

week and then weekend “long runs” that vary from eight to 20 miles. Jennifer, like many runners, trains with a running partner or partners a majority of the time. Occasionally, her running partners are her daughters in their stroller. She hopes that her daughters will be interested in running with her one day. Jennifer ran in the Sonoma Water to Wine half marathon. The route took the runners through beautiful vineyards. In addition to the picturesque run, participants had a sampling of wines past the finish line.

Jordan Faircloth recommends “having a plan and sticking to it.” He also recommends having a training partner. He noted that a training partner keeps you accountable and makes long training runs bearable.

Most runners found that having a partner was key to their preparation and truly increased the enjoyment of race day. During a race the majority of runners experienced their greatest challenge at the time they “hit” mile 21 or 22. (Remember to thank the British royal family for those extra miles.) Runners call on different motivations that enable them to push on when they hit that wall. For Faircloth it is “usually the old guys that would otherwise pass me. I can’t let that happen!” Additionally, there is the anticipation of the first cold beer at the end of the race. For Heather, the challenge of making it to the finish line motivates her. Stephen Whalen finds that it’s the sense of personal accomplishment in finishing a marathon. Jennifer Sims finds motivation in seeing people along the route and hearing them cheer for the runners. Julie found encouragement from many people along the route, particularly in the signs held aloft by viewers. She remembers one sign that read, “Most people don’t even drive 26 miles on a Sunday.” Stephen recalls running the New York City Marathon, where “The prestige and crowds are hard to beat. There are thousands of fans when you enter Manhattan from the Queensboro Bridge.”

Benefits of long distance running

Each and every person noted that running is time away from cellphones and email. As Terrel noted, running time is time distinctly belonging to you. Valerie Bargas treasures that time, running four days a week for five to eight miles at a time. She notes that running, like litigation, requires endurance and stamina. All runners noted the benefit of clearing their minds during a run, a benefit treasured by runners whether they train alone or with a running partner. Running provides a break from the demands of work or home. Each runner noted the ability to return to those demands with a better perspective after a run. Each race is an opportunity to compete against yourself, your last time and your last experience. In a legal practice that includes a significant amount of competition, the opportunity to improve a skill solely for your own benefit appeals to each of the attorneys.

Many of the long distance runners have discovered that they favor the half marathon over the marathon. Valerie, Stephen and Heather noted this preference. Valerie’s marathon experience to date has focused on half marathons. One reason for the popularity is that half marathons do not require as much training and preparation time, but still provide most of the benefits of a marathon run. Surveys show that half marathon popularity has soared in the United States, with 1.85 million people completing them in 2012.

The benefits of training for a marathon or half marathon are myriad. Actually running in the race provides a sense of camaraderie and the knowledge that you have successfully reached your goal. There is also the distinction of being part of an elite running group. Not everyone is a runner, and, of course, not every runner is a marathoner. The added bonus to these rewards, depending on your race choice, is the wine or beer festival on the other side of the finish line.