

The Long Road to Success

By CAREY MAY

THERE must be as many different articles written on marathon training as steps taken along the way. With that in mind and the fact that there is such a diverse range of people who need different advice according to their specific goals and abilities I thought I would take a little different approach to the subject of marathon training.

Over the past four years I have taken part in 8 marathons and, for one reason or another, have prepared differently for each one of them with different measures of success. The following is a brief account of each marathon, the preparation, circumstances and description of each will hopefully suggest guidelines of what or what not to do before a specific marathon.

My first taste of marathon running was in August, 1980. For the previous two years my activities consisted of playing hockey and taking part in orienteering events and hill running. It is to the latter two sports that I think I owe the greater part of my endurance ability, having built up stamina and strength from long hill runs. During the summer of 1980 I competed in Europe and Scandinavia in various orienteering competitions and then spent a month in Denmark training with the National orienteering team. So over the summer I built up a good foundation of mileage on which to work. It was only two weeks beforehand that I decided to run the Ulster marathon. The fellows that I had been training with from the orienteering club were going up to Letterkenny to run the marathon and as I had been running consistently with them I thought there was no reason why I couldn't try the distance too. Another major reason that inspired me to attempt the marathon was that I remember as a child watching the Olympics and being amazed at seeing men running 26 miles and wondering if I would ever be able to run that far. In effect that was all I was doing, I wanted to see if I could finish a marathon.

Ten days before the race my training companions decided I should do a '20 miler' to see if I could handle that, maybe for fear I would make a show of them. Anyway, during a trip down to Wexford, I was put out of the car in a little village called Ballycanew and told to run the rest of the way. With this successfully under my belt I felt reasonably optimistic about going the full distance. We travelled up to Letterkenny the day before the race and our final preparations consisted of eating a horribly greasy meal and spending the night at the local fairground getting dizzy and sick! Not the most ideal of preparations but a reflection on how seriously we were taking it. The race day turned out quite warm and

windy, the course consisted of two and a half figure of eight loops, with the town of Letterkenny being the central point. Anyone familiar with the town will know the hill that had to be encountered each time we came to the Main Street. One thing that sticks out in my mind from this race were the five mile splits, they were very consistent at 6.30 mile pace, I remember thinking that this was too fast for my first attempt at the distance but found the pace comfortable; going any slower or faster would have used unnecessary energy and in the end would be detrimental. I finished in 2 hrs. 53 mins. and achieved my goal, to finish a marathon.

My next outing was in the inaugural Dublin City Marathon in October 1980. I looked forward to this event with relative confidence being one of the few Irish women to have run a marathon, and, although my previous time was pretty humble by today's standards, I found myself in the somewhat pressured position of being favourite for the women's title. This did not particularly bother me because I knew I was in the race mainly for the challenge of it rather than the 'glory of winning', marathon running was in such early stages for women in Ireland that I had no idea what it would be like to be competitive for 26 miles and was content with seeing how much I could improve my time by. Since August I had continued doing steady mileage with some fartlek training added.

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This, along with the excellent advice and encouragement I got from Eddie Hogan, brought me to this race with a little more serious attitude than the previous one. It was my first experience in a large marathon and found it an exhilarating and emotional experience. The crowds were very uplifting and fellow runners were always full of encouragement. I think it was for these reasons and my extra confidence that I owed my improvement of 11 mins., lowering my time to 2 hrs. 42 mins.

During the winter of 1980 I ran cross-country and also a few track races early in the 1981 season. At this stage I had my mind set on running in the Avon Women's International Marathon to be held in Ottawa in August but to qualify, it was necessary to run in the first women's Irish National Championships. This was held in Cork in June. I had been doing consistent

long runs leading up to this race. Once a week I went out with Eddie McDonagh my coach in Dundrum A.C. for a brisk 20 miles, my other runs during the week were shorter and faster, ranging from 5 to 10 miles, some also being fartlek runs. About 30% of this mileage was done in the hills around where I live. I think these runs greatly added to the stamina and endurance I built up over this period. I did not ease up much for this race and in fact ran a 20 miler on the Monday previous to it (the race was on a Sunday). The conditions for the race were appalling – windy, cold and wet. The course did not add much to the enjoyment of the event, it was straight out and back along a straight road. With the small number of entrants it meant that I ran most of the race alone, this was one of the least inspiring races I have run, the most significant thing I can remember is wanting to get back to the finish line as soon as possible. Despite the circumstances I finished in 2 hrs. 42 mins., a few seconds outside my best but I had done what I needed and qualified for the Avon race.

With the prospect of a top class marathon I wanted to make sure I left nothing out of my training during the summer. I ran a few more track races but lacked the speed to do particularly well as my training was based on long steady runs and hill training. I felt that everything had gone to plan and left for Ottaway with a week to spare before the race. I spent the

week trying to acclimatise to the hot humid weather. I think a big mistake I made when I was there was that instead of sticking to my own training schedule I got caught up with the organised training runs that were put on for us, these tended to be a little longer and at a slower pace than I should have been doing and subsequently I think I lost my rhythm and feeling for pace a little, most of my training beforehand had been done alone and I find this the best way to develop a good steady rhythm that suits me over long distances. The race day turned out very hot, the course offered a no shelter from the sun and I fell victim to the heat. At 10 miles I was already a minute down on the pace I should have been running and things didn't get any better. After suffering from an upset stomach and blisters (both I think were a result of the heat) I finished 16th in 2 hrs. 49 mins. Not the best of ex-

periences but one I learnt a lot from.

Prior to this race I had accepted an athletic scholarship to Brigham Young University and travelled to Utah following the race. The women's track coach, Patrick Shane, was aware of my interest in marathon running and following my first cross-country season where I was placed 2nd in the National Collegiate Championships he arranged for me to travel to Arizona to compete in the Fiesta Bown Marathon. This course had a reputation for being fast because of its long straight roads and slightly downhill manner. Because of the type of training we had been doing for cross country, I was more used to a faster pace, I had been doing hill intervals and quite a bit of fartlek training. My time of 2 hrs. 36 mins. in this race I am sure was a direct result of the change in training. I had a good base of mileage built up over the last year and the switch to a faster rhythm during training enabled me to hold a faster pace for longer. Naturally I was very pleased at the improvement over my previous best time but felt I could have given a similar opportunity. However, this was not to come in my next race although I feel that in the circumstances I ran better this time. The Avon marathon in San Francisco came on the weekend following our National Collegiate track championships. I had been training primarily for 5 and 10,000m races on the track, this training basically consisted of two track sessions a week working on speed, endurance while keeping a good base of approximately 60/70 miles a week.

Our track season ended with two collegiate championships, one two weeks before the marathon was held in Texas where I placed 3rd in the 5,000m then back to Provo for the NCAA championships where I placed 8th in the 10,000m, this was on Wednesday, I left for San Francisco on Saturday and arrived that evening. The race was at 7 a.m. on Sunday morning. Because of the track races I had not had too much time to think about the marathon and went with the attitude that I would like to do well but wouldn't be too disappointed if I didn't. The course was hilly which slowed the pace down at the start. Being used to the faster rhythm of track running, I felt very comfortable running with the leaders and stayed with them through the half way stage where Lorraine Moller started to pull away, I 'played safe' and stuck with Laurie Binder in 2nd place, if I had known how strong I would feel at the end I would have gone with Moller. In the end I pulled away from Binder to finish in 2nd place in 2 hrs. 38 mins. These last two performances gave me confidence for the European Championships in August where I knew I would face a very competitive field and would have to put out everything to place well.

My training during the summer was based on mileage consisting of long steady runs, hills and fartlek. I ran a couple of road races and lowered my best 10 mile time from 59 mins to 56 mins, this was a good indication that training was going well. I had had the benefit of an earlier look at the marathon course in Athens during an



[Pic. by Jim Dowling]

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International trip that summer, so I knew what to expect, it was one long hilly road mostly through the dusty countryside with the last 6 miles in the city. We arrived in Athens about a week before the race so final preparations took place there. The hazardous conditions made this a little difficult, the roads were very bad and heavily trafficked but we had to make the best of it. The race was scheduled for 5 p.m., half an hour after the men's race started. The first 5 miles went well but after that things went from good to bad. I missed the first water station and at subsequent stations was unable to get water. With the heat and humidity it was vital to get liquid early on but my failure to do this led to problems, in desperation I took anything I could drink in the absence of water, I don't know what I drank but I know one thing for sure, I'll always stick to plain water in the future.

Well, I had intended at the start to put everything into this race, but little did I know that I would have to do this just to get to the finish line. It took a couple of days before I wanted to look back at what went wrong. Basically, I don't think my preparations were at fault, although I have realised now that track work and intervals should always be included for fast pace work. I think it was caused mainly by the conditions and mishaps on the day. One thing I learnt is to provide my own drinks even if it is only water.

I returned to College for another successful cross country season, I had accepted an invitation to run in the Osaka marathon in Japan in January of this year. This time I wanted to get things right, my coach red-shirted me for the indoor season (this meant that I didn't compete for the college) so that I could concentrate on getting ready for Osaka. Over Christmas I put in quite a lot of mileage, one 100 mile week and a couple of 80 and 90 miles. Starting in January we introduced some speed work, I ran two indoor races, a 1500 and 3,000m, two weeks before the marathon, getting a PB in the 1500m. About 10 days before the race I ran a hard 15 miles then started to ease back. Due to the huge time difference between America and Japan, we planned my training out accordingly, based on the fact that it is supposed to take one day to adjust for every one hour time difference. I started to go to bed earlier and get up earlier each day for a few days before leaving so that I wouldn't be so out of synchronisation when I arrived. This worked well, but meant that by the day I was due to leave, I had to get up and train at 4 a.m. that morning.

My last weeks training was just easy running, I felt good about my training and felt that I could run a good time. My plan was to go out and stay with the leaders and let the time look after itself. My coach was confident that I could break two hours 30 mins but I wasn't so sure. The course was quite flat, more or less out and back with a few loops. The atmosphere in the stadium and all along the route was tremendous, there were thousands of people out to watch, it was a fabulous experience to run in front of so many people. Initially I was afraid I had got carried away and was running too fast in the first half of the race, but found I could maintain the pace with not too much extra effort. I had broken away from the others after about 9 miles and although I hadn't expected to be in this position, it felt good and by 20 miles I knew I could hold off any challenge if it came. The atmosphere and emotion I felt when I got back to the stadium was indescribable, it was one of those moments you want to hold onto for a long time. I finished in 2 hrs. 29 mins. 23 secs.

I am now training for the World Championships in Helsinki and am looking forward to it with anticipation. Although it is not a team championship we will have a good squad with Deirdre Nagle and Regina Joyce also running. I hope we are all able to compete as well as we want and do Ireland proud!