

It's All in Your Mind

Henry Ford once summed up the human condition perfectly: *If you think you can, you're right. If you think you can't, you're also right.* He understood better than most that the strongest part of the human body is located squarely between and above the shoulders.

Back in school at the start of track season, when Coach would send everyone on a six-mile conditioning run, I hung back with the other sprinters. While we dutifully headed out with the distance runners, we rarely ran more than a mile or so, eventually cutting across pastures to a connecting road where we would lie down under the trees and wait an appropriate amount of time before returning. We couldn't see any sense in doing all that running if we were only going to run a few hundred yards in competition.

The fact is, I probably never ran more than a mile at any one time until I was in my 30s. By then I had begun to run to lose weight and control stress, but it was only a couple of miles here and there. I didn't run road races because I honestly wasn't sure if I could run 3.1 miles without looking like a complete idiot. And people running a 10k were on a different planet as far as I was concerned. A marathon? Not even a close question – that was where some fool dropped dead after running all that way.

Finally, I broke down and entered a 5k. Because I didn't want to be in anyone's way, I started at the back of the pack. Not just the back of the pack, mind you, THE back – next to an overweight, gum-chewing woman carrying a transistor radio and wearing cut-off jeans, pink hair curlers and brand-new K-Mart aerobics shoes. Absolutely frightening. But it was fun passing all those people in front of me.

A 5k? At last I could say that I'd been there and done that. It was the best experience of my (young) running life, but run a 10k? Forget it.

Soon afterwards, however, while on a trip to Texas, the only race in town was a 10k. Well, hell – at least there was beer and barbeque at the finish.

A 10k? Been there, done that. It was the best experience of my (still young) running life, but run the La Luz Trail? Forget it.

Surely I was out of my mind. I hadn't run nine miles on flat ground, let alone up the west face of the Sandias. And yet here I was, part of the colorful Chinese dragon of runners snaking up the switchbacks.

La Luz? Been there, done that. It was the best experience of my (still relatively young) running life, but run a half-marathon? Forget it.

Of course, it wasn't long before I lined up for the Duke City Half-Marathon, if only because the route went out Rio Grande Boulevard and within two blocks of my house near the 6½ mile mark. If I crashed and burned at least I could walk home.

A half-marathon? Been there, done that. It was the best experience of my (not so young) running life, but run a marathon? Forget it.

Last Fall, with a daughter living in New York, the thought of running across all five boroughs of the Big Apple was both daunting and intriguing. But eventually the entry was in, the mileage was up and before I knew it I was standing at the starting line on Staten Island with a Scot, a Canadian, a Guatemalan, an Italian, a Swede and an Irishman. *I guess I'm going to run a marathon*, I thought to myself.

And what a marathon – slapping hands with

kids in Brooklyn, taking oranges from cheering, flag-waving fans in Queens, water from an old man in the Bronx, listening to a gospel choir in Harlem and gaining strength from half of Manhattan on a run through the world that I will never forget.

A marathon? Been there, done that. It was the best experience of my entire running life, but run Boston? Damn straight.