

Running the Marathon

Running is a very popular sport. Millions of people run because they enjoy it or want to be in good **physical shape**. A runner does not need a special talent or **equipment**—only **well-cushioned** shoes and comfortable clothes.

Daily running **improves** a person's **physical condition**. It helps **oxygen circulate** through your body and it makes your heart and leg muscles stronger. Running helps you control your **weight** because when you run you burn up a lot of calories. It also helps you **fight off** stress after a tiring day in school or at work.

Many runners take part in **long distance** races. The most popular events are marathons. They are held in many cities all over the world and, for a good runner, taking part in a famous marathon is the **highlight** of a running career. Famous marathons are held in New York, Boston, London, Berlin and many other cities.

The marathon is the longest running event in the world. Its name goes back to the story of a Greek **soldier** who, in 490 B.C., ran from the small village of Marathon to Athens, about 40 km away. He wanted to tell the people there that the Greek army had **defeated** the Persians.

Today, the **official** marathon has a **length** of 42.195 km. The marathon has always been one of the **main highlights** of the modern Olympic Games, which started in 1896.

In the past **decades** African runners have **dominated** marathons all over the world. The Ethiopian Abebe Bikila **ran barefoot** to his first gold medal in the 1960 Olympic Games. He **repeated** his **victory** four years later. Experts think that African runners are better because they train in higher places in their home countries. Their legs may also be stronger than ours and they may have the **ability** to collect and **store** more **oxygen**. Schools are sometimes far away from homes, so children must walk or run many kilometres to get to classes.

There is no **official** world records in marathon races because **courses** are different all over the world. Sometimes a route is flat and runners are faster. **Elsewhere** a course may be hilly with lots of ups and downs. Bad weather with a lot of wind and rain makes it more difficult for runners to **achieve** good times.

The fastest marathon race took place in Berlin in 2003. Paul Tergat of Kenya finished in 2 hours 4 minutes and 55 seconds. The best time for a woman was **set** by Paula Radcliffe in the London Marathon, 2003—2 hours 15 minutes and 25 seconds.

Training

Runners must be **well-prepared** and train a lot if they want to **compete** in a marathon race. For most hobby runners, the marathon is the longest race they have ever tried. They train for months—running up to 100 km a week.

During marathon training it is important to give your body enough time to rest and **recover**. If you feel tired or your muscles hurt you should **take a couple of days off** from running. During the last 2 or 3 weeks before a marathon many runners **reduce** their weekly training.

Food

The right food is very important if you plan on running a marathon. Runners eat a lot of **carbohydrates**, which are turned into glycogen. The body **stores** glycogen and during the race it is turned into energy.

Athletes eat a lot of bread, rice, **cereals** and pasta in the weeks before race. They also try to eat fruits and vegetables and **avoid** fat.

During the Race

During a marathon it is very important to drink a lot so that your body does not **dehydrate**.

You should run at a **steady pace**. Don't start too fast or you will become tired very quickly and can't **continue**. This is called "*hitting the wall*". In most cases runners then give up completely. **On the other hand**, you shouldn't start too slowly or else you won't reach the time limit you want to **achieve**.

After a marathon most runners feel **pain** in their muscles. This is normal and it may take a few days before your body becomes normal again.

The New York City Marathon

The New York marathon is one of the biggest and most famous races in the world. It has taken place every year since 1970. Almost 80,000 runners want to run the marathon each year, but only 30,000 are allowed to **compete**. They are chosen by **lottery**.

The course leads through all of New York's five **boroughs**—starting on Staten Island and ending in Central Park. Over 2 million people **cheer** the runners along the course. They are **entertained** by 40 musical bands **spread** over the 42 km route.

A total of 600,000 \$ in **prize money** are given to the best runners. The winner of the race **receives** 100,000 \$ plus a new car.

Activity

Choose the correct option.

1. In the past decades the marathon has been dominated by

- a. American runners
- b. African runners
- c. European runners.

2. The best time for a marathon is currently

- a. way under two hours
- b. a bit over two hours
- c. two and a half hours

3. In the days and weeks before the race marathon runners should eat

- a. a lot of meat
- b. a lot of carbohydrates
- c. sugary food

4. "Hitting the wall" means

- a. your muscles get tired and you can't continue
- b. you are too thirsty and hungry
- c. you are not running fast enough

5. The marathon goes back to

- a. a Persian tradition
- b. the Roman wagon race
- c. the days of ancient Greece

6. During the last two weeks of marathon training you should

- a. run at least 40 km on one day
- b. try to reduce your training
- c. run as fast as you can

7. There is no official marathon world record because

- a. there are different race lengths
- b. courses are different all over the world
- c. the weather is not always very good

8. Running the marathon

- a. helps you put on weight
- b. makes your heart stronger
- c. helps improve the number of white blood cells.

