Running the course

Ravi K Sheth, Managing Director of Great Eastern Shipping, on marathons and fitness.

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There is a secret that marathon runners keep from others, especially from those who are all agog about the accomplishment in finishing a run. The secret? It’s not all that hard to finish a course. Ravi K Sheth, Managing Director, Great Eastern Shipping (India) is a consistent half-marathon runner and tries to share this secret. And much to his amazement, very few believe him. “People always tell me, ‘Wow, you ran 21 kilometers? I would never be able to do that.’ And I tell them, they can. Unless you have a heart condition or a medical ailment there is no reason you cannot run 21 kilometers,” he says.

Sheth started running in 2005, when he was 44. He used to play squash before that. He began to find it claustrophobic and impossible to play in the summer.

One evening, his brother-in-law who was training with Savio, a trainer, asked Sheth whether he would like to join them. He did. And ran for two or three kilometers the next morning. That was August 2005. In January 2006, he ran his first half-marathon. Since then he has run in Mumbai, Delhi and Pondicherry.

Sheth is part of a Mumbai-based group that runs three times a week. The longest runs are on Sundays. Age, Sheth affirms, is not an issue. “We have people who are 57 and 60 and they are fitter than I am. Injuries can happen but the probability of that is much less than other sport. In squash, you will have a problem with your back and knees. You start and stop abruptly, bending and twisting. But you are upright when you run. As long as you warm up before and cool down after a run, you should be okay,” he says.

Running in a group is different. One, it motivates you to wake up. When the alarm goes off on Sunday, your strongest instinct is to switch it off and go back to sleep. But when there are people waiting for you, it forces you to get up.

When you are running with a couple of people who help maintain your speed or “give you speed.” Runners build natural rhythms with others and this helps during the run. “Ours is a fun group. On Sundays, after the run we sit around and chat or head out for breakfast. It’s exercise and social activity,” Sheth says.

The first time Sheth ran the half marathon it was reported in his company’s in-house magazine. That led to interest among his employees. Sheth then appointed Savio as the trainer for the company.

Sheth sees running as a great stress buster and an addiction. “If you tell yourself you have to finish, you will. But when there are people waiting for you, it forces you to get up. Second, you can run with a couple of people who help maintain your speed or “give you speed.” Runners build natural rhythms with others and this helps during the run. “Ours is a fun group. On Sundays, after the run we sit around and chat or head out for breakfast. It’s exercise and social activity,” Sheth says.

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When you run, it’s you, your iPod and the road. It gives you time to think and clear your mind.

Don’t run for at least 5 days before the big run. Your legs need rest.

» Detox yourself, don’t drink the night before.

» Eat something before the run, ideally a banana.

» Good shoes are critical. But don’t wear a pair of new shoes. Warm up well before the run.

» Eat a pasta dinner the night before. Load up on carbs.

» Don’t scramble to keep pace at the beginning with those around you. Run at your own pace.

» It’s all in the head. If you tell yourself you can, you will.

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