

Inspired runners cross line

Stubbornness carries many marathoners through 42.195 gruelling kilometres

Dan Barnes



EDMONTON / It only looked as if Joylin Nodwell crossed the finish line alone on a brilliant Sunday morning.

The fact is nobody makes it to the end of a 42.195-km run on their own.

The Calgary stay-at-home mother of three, and women's winner of the ING Edmonton Marathon, sought inspiration in familiar and foreign forms before and during her run. She recounted the advice of her husband and No. 1 fan Keith, who coaches her despite the fact he doesn't really know much about running at all.

On Saturday night, when other Edmonton marathoners chose to nod off, Nodwell did not. She watched the women's Olympic marathon on television, figuring five hours of sleep augmented by a heavy dose of inspiration would be the right mix to buoy her spirits through Sunday's gruelling physical exertion.

"I watched it all. It really inspired me," she said. "They are good role models."

And when she finally hit the streets of Edmonton at 7 a.m., she ran with and for her dad, John Mahming, who died in May at age 71 of bladder cancer. He had been instrumental in setting her on an active lifestyle path. The 38-year-old was a swimmer, gymnast, figure skater and diver long before she turned to running.

Her father died three days before she ran and finished second in the Red Deer marathon. He had watched her race before, but never saw her win. Until Sunday.

"Twish my dad was here to see me, but I know he was watching from up above," she said, fighting back tears.

Laced with emotion and triumph, Nodwell's story is typical of those found at a finish line. I know, because this was my eighth marathon. Oh, I don't run them. I watch. Cheer. Write. It's infinitely less satisfying, or so I'm told by those who have the fortitude to enter one. Or, more accurately, to finish one. While I am content to glean inspiration from observing, there is obvious joy in the doing.

And it matters precious little to you and yours if you do yours in Sir Winston Churchill or Tiananmen Square. Glory is glory. Achievement is achievement. Pain is pain. Angela Broemeling of Edmonton ran her first marathon Sunday, on the advice of a friend, who didn't accurately portray the amount of pain that would be involved.

"No, she didn't. And she's going to hear about it," laughed the 32-year-old

Broemeling, who hit the infamous wall early in the run, aggravating a hip flexor injury sustained in a car accident about 15 years ago. "This is my very first race, of any kind," she beamed. "I'm not feeling too terrible."

Because she got through the wall and she finished. And if you ask anybody, and that's what I do, the finish line cures all that ails you. What hurts a little at 20 km and intensely at 35 km is magically gone at 42.195. Or, in the case of half-marathoners like Kate Johnston, at 21.1 km. She crossed the line in a bulky knee brace and a satisfied grin. The gutsy 22-year-old from Edmonton tore up her left knee at age 17 while playing indoor soccer and has undergone four surgeries, with a fifth quite likely on offer after she did more meniscus damage mere days before this race.

The newest injury wasn't going to stop her from her appointed Sunday rounds.

"It's just so hard (not to race) when you train all the way up to the date. It's your passion. There's so many athletes who play injured. If you're not playing injured, you're not playing hard enough," she said, before limping off to receive congratulations from her family.

"I wish my dad was here to see me, but I know he was watching from up above."

Joylin Nodwell

Carmen Thiessen of Drayton Valley, who was the second female marathoner across the finish line in Edmonton, watched Paula Radcliffe of Great Britain limp around the Olympic course Saturday night. While CBC commentators basically called Radcliffe insane for putting an already injured body through that kind of terror, just to finish 23rd, Thiessen was inspired by Radcliffe's courage and could relate.

"It's the Olympics. It's once every four years. It's understandable (to run while injured). I've done it myself. The first marathon I ran my hips were out at 20 km. I should have quit. I didn't. I was going to crawl if I had to."

I didn't see anybody crawl across the finish line on Sunday. There were some wobblers, to be sure. But there were far more striders and jumpers, sprinters and walkers who hit the line, bowed their heads to accept a medal from one of the volunteers and switched off the grimace to turn on the smile.

"It's the achievement in finishing," beamed 26-year-old Dana Christianson of Edmonton, another marathoner who had watched Radcliffe and been inspired by her struggle to finish the race. "If you go out there, you have a chance. And despite how bad it feels, it feels good."

Especially when it's over.

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PHOTOS BY WALTER TYCHONOWICZ, THE JOURNAL

Joylin Nodwell of Calgary crosses the finish line at the 2008 ING Edmonton Marathon at Sir Winston Churchill Square on Sunday.



Corbett

SUCCESSFUL DEFENCES FOR MARATHON CHAMPS

David Corbett and Joylin Nodwell, both 38, successfully defended their 2007 Edmonton Marathon titles on Sunday.

Corbett, a Running Room store manager in Sherwood Park, crossed the finish line at Sir Winston Churchill Square in 2:35:27 while Nodwell, a stay-at-home Calgary mom, took the women's 42.195-km race in 3:11:02.

Corbett completed the unofficial Alberta triple

crown, after first winning in Red Deer and Calgary earlier this year.

The half-marathon winners were Kip Kangogo of Lethbridge in 1:05:43 and Lisa Harvey of Calgary in 1:19:42.

Over 3,200 runners competed in the marathon, half-marathon, 10-km and 5-km races held over the weekend.

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