

RUNNING

Getting started

The marathon season is in full swing, and running has never been more popular. Beginning this month, our new column hopes to further this trend, from a writer who has taken up running only recently. By Magandeep Singh

I STILL REMEMBER my first running shoe purchase. I wasn't a runner, and didn't ever intend to be one, not even the weekend kind. I had only recently acquired an iPhone and it had an in-built Nike Plus app. This app was being spoken about a lot — how it tracks your runs, times, splits et al — and how you can gauge your progress over time. I wasn't really interested in all this; all I thought of was how there was a feature on my phone that was about to go unexploited.

Anyhow, I finally arrived at the verdant spread of Delhi's Lodhi Gardens, armed with my new Nike acquisition, replete with an embedded micro-chip. I don't remember my first run, but I do recall that the entire year, I never ran more than two kilometres at a stretch, and at nothing faster than a mild jogging pace. That was then. Recently,

when I completed my first marathon, I sat clutching my medal, with tears welling in my eyes. It had been a long journey, and I was too stunned to believe that I had made it. I was now officially a runner — or sort of.

Modern running is almost a strategy sport. The amount of time I spent studying nutrition and hydration for my marathon probably matched the time I spent on the road and tracks. This column will attempt to explain the various facets of running — from shoes to gear, snack bars to caffeine supplements, we will try and decipher what it all really means. Remember, I am no pro (or even elite, as the uber-category is known) but I do put in a fair few kilometres, and I am respectably rapid.

So, here are the few first lessons:

1. BtS: This stands for Bed-to-

Shoe, and it is that crucial moment that passes between the time you first wake up and decide to go for a run, and when you actually manage to slip on your shoes and get out there. BtS is relevant, because it is that twilight period when one often decides to give in to the body and fall back asleep. Even snoozing your alarm is a sign of wavering from 'the plan'. Reduce BtS, and step on it. Make a plan you can stick with — say thrice a week — and then make sure you are out there as often as you planned.

2. Mental Conditioning: If you think running is purely a physical endeavour, then you are thinking maybe a kilometre or two. Long distances have to be first conquered in your mind, before you can accomplish them on the road. Learn

to make your mind strong, learn to make your reasoning as resilient as a rock. Failing this, you will begin questioning yourself somewhere after the 25th or 30th kilometer, and that is the beginning of an end you will never reach.

3. Strategy: I know I wasn't the best candidate for a full or even a half marathon a year ago. Yet I managed both, and fairly quickly. A big contribution came from planning my gear: the shoes, shorts, hydration packs, and even the music that I chose. I mapped out entire spreadsheets to calculate at what pace I should be running and when. I know that professional athletes don't need any of these, but then we all aren't quite there just yet. A good beat coming on at the right time can do more for your heart rate than any other recovery effort.

4. Group Training: This can be a good way to achieve your goals. It is always easier when you have someone along with you, working towards the same goals.

5. No Plan Land: Know that at the end of the day, no matter how precise your planning and how sharp your training, game-day can always be different. From sudden corns and abrasions to minor sprains and cramps, weather changes to the general newness of the terrain, anything can put a splinter in your step. Know this and remain humbled in the wake of this realisation; it helps to put matters in perspective and take them one tread at a time. Eventually, and before you know it, the finish line will be in sight.

So there you have it. Next month, we shall start looking at all the gear out there, and see how we take it from there. Till then, run along.

ALAMY