

INJURY AVOIDANCE 101

My second marathon (*Red Hill*, Jan 2006) and at 30km the time is looking great, but the wee legs are starting to hurt and that “mental toughness” lecture is a distant memory. The lovely Fish Hoek RC lass I was “getting to know” since 7km is surely picking up the pace. Mind racing ... If I walk the drinks table she hasn’t beaten me ... I’ll catch her up ... the next 12kms are feeling longer with every plod. I walk the drinks table. Reluctantly lifting tired legs to run again my right knee burns and just won’t bend where it ought to.

10 months later I’m convinced I’m an anatomical freak, VOB runs are a thing of the future (hope, hope), I’m limping along with the odd 8km “long” run on a good day. So here’s what happened in the gap, what I learnt and why you should sometimes listen to those oh-so-wise, hardened runners.

I walked about eight of the last 12kms and finished *Red Hill* in a 30 minute PB (yep, the first marathon was pretty amateur too). Along the way I was diagnosed by a passing runner with ITB (Illio Tibial Band Syndrome, for those lucky enough to have remained injury free to now). “**T**heresa (listen to physio’s) confirmed this while lounging around at the finish and strongly suggested I take a very long break from running. So I did. I took a week off and did Gerry’s 20km run the next Sunday. It still felt bad so I took another long break, for over a week this time. More of this saw me well rested for the start of the *Peninsula Marathon* where **JoJo** was kind enough to lend me her phone to organise a lift home from the 10km mark (hey, I’m not boasting here, she was taking it really easy).

Convinced of the necessity my long breaks got longer, but eventually the frustration that this was never going away had me jogging on an orthotist’s treadmill with the video camera rolling. Fame at last!! The conclusion ... “Your shin bones bend in at the bottom so we have to

use an orthotic to tilt your feet outwards to realign everything. You won’t be able to run far without them and if you weren’t so skinny you’d have been here much sooner.” Incidentally you inherit your shin bones from you mother – thanks Mum. A week later I’m the proud owner of my very own orthotics, and feel fully qualified to tell you what they are. It’s a spongy insert moulded to the shape of your foot designed to give you blisters in strange places, make your laces appear shorter and give your takkies a low-cut, unstable feel. Apparently they can also help weight distribution over the sole and realign the joints so that anatomical freaks can work up a real sweat once more ... but not too soon.

To minimise blood loss through blisters, orthotics need to be run in slowly – 1k, 2k, 3k, 4k ... etc. At 7k with several stop-starts for flu (each time going through the blister management cycle) my seriously and continually-knotted right butt seemed to indicate I should go back for another checkup ... “Hmmm, did we check your leg lengths?” Nope. Ah, all this time later I discover my right leg is way shorter than my left. No worries, stick some more spongy stuff on the right orthotic and I’m off. More butt pain, and everything feels wrong, so having given it adequate opportunity, I go back and explain what’s not working now ... grind a bit off here, flatten it there and I’m off, again. Now don’t say this too loudly, but there appears to be some light at the end of this tunnel. Tonight’s run was comfortable, my butt’s not knotted (the girls are welcome to check this), and the blisters are gone. The perfect evening ... had I not promised Aarnout an article for *Imbaleki* by midnight!!

So to save you 10 months, here are the lessons in a nutshell:

- Have your running style and alignment checked by a specialist before you’re injured.

INJURY AVOIDANCE continued

- When you're injured, listen to the old-timers. A long rest means more than a week.
- Put soap on your feet before/during a run to prevent blisters (this really works).
- Help at club runs to keep your spirits up when you're on the bench.

Happy running ... and watch out for this wonky legged, listing runner on the comeback trail!!

Mark Wright

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