



FEW AFRICAN AMERICANS RUN MARATHONS. TONY REED WANTS TO CHANGE THAT BY JOE NICK PATOWSKI

## Equal Footing

THE LONELINESS OF THE LONG-DISTANCE RUNNER IS NOTHING COMPARED TO the loneliness of the African-American long-distance runner. Just ask Tony Reed, a 91-time marathoner and the only black runner to complete a marathon on each of the seven continents. “When I run marathons, I look around to see if there are other

**BREAKING BARRIERS** In June, Reed became the first black runner to complete a marathon on each of the seven continents.

people like me,” says the 52-year-old Dallas resident who warms up to the sounds of Parliament Funkadelic. Often, there aren’t. “I was tired of feeling like I was the only one out there.”

Despite the fact that Africans win most major marathons and road races, there are few African Americans farther back in the pack. To help change that, Reed cofounded the National Black Marathoners’ Association (NBMA), which in three years has grown from 15 runners to more than 500 members in 30 states. “In many black communities, there aren’t safe places to run,” says Reed. “Also, I don’t think distance running is considered a glamorous sport in the black community. We tend to get excited about sprinting in track and field, basketball, and baseball. But not many people do those sports after high school, and I want to show that you can be active and healthy for the rest of your life.”

Reed and many other black marathoners are motivated by a disproportionately high incidence of heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure, and diabetes among African Americans. At age 8, Reed was diagnosed with glucosuria, a prediabetic condition, and told he’d be on an insulin regimen by the time he was a teen. Instead, Reed spent his high school years competing in cross-country and track in St. Louis.

Reed hasn’t stopped running since. He ran while earning his MBA, master’s of accounting, and CPA certification. And kept going while working as an information technology director at Texas Instruments, heading up his own consulting business, and teaching college accounting courses.

In 1982, the 27-year-old completed his first marathon—the Cowtown Marathon in Fort Worth, Texas—and soon after, Reed set a goal to run 50 marathons by his 50th birthday. When he broke that mark in 2002 with three years to spare,

## WARMUPS

he raised the bar, deciding to run marathons on each of the seven continents—a feat fewer than 200 people in the world had achieved.

Reed completed the last of his seven continent races, Kenya's Safaricom Lewa Marathon, in June 2007. "As I looked in front of me, I saw a stream of black runners," he says. "In 25 years of running, I had never seen that many blacks in a distance race. Unforgettable."

### In Good Company

On February 17, when Reed looks around at the starting line of the Lost Dutchman Marathon, he'll be surrounded by 150 members of the NBMA, who will gather in Apache Junction, Arizona, for their fourth-annual group race during Black History Month. The runners will be dressed in black shorts or tights and red jerseys emblazoned with the number 1865, the year slavery was abolished, and the words "Free to Run."



**FREE TO RUN** Reed (second from left) with other National Black Marathoners in Dallas.

Charlotte Simmons-Foster, of Atlanta, heard Reed speak in 2004 about the discipline of running at an accounting convention and cornered him afterward. "I had never known a black runner who'd run in that many marathons," says Simmons-Foster, who, like Reed, had been motivated to run by a family history of diabetes. As president of the South Fulton Running Partners, one of about nine black running clubs in the United States, she thought Reed could inspire others, and together they formed the NBMA.

The NBMA aims to be a presence at road races and establish black running clubs in every state. The group

has also set up a scholarship program for socially or economically disadvantaged youths. "A few years ago, I was running a marathon in St. Louis," Reed says. "As

I ran past housing projects, some black children ran with me. It made me think that race directors may have a positive impact by routing courses through these neighborhoods. And black marathoners may have an impact on these children by participating in those races."

Reed is already looking ahead to the NBMA's 2009 annual meeting on February 28. It will be at the Cowtown Marathon, where he plans to come full circle by completing his 100th 26.2-miler at the place his marathon journey began.

"I think a lot when I run," says Reed, "and one thing that keeps coming back to me is, at 52, I have never taken an insulin shot. A pair of running shoes is cheaper than a month's worth of medicine. It's just that simple." **RW**

## REAL RUNNERS REGULAR PEOPLE DOING AMAZING THINGS



**MARCELO CRUZ: BRIDGE-COLLAPSE SURVIVOR** On August 1, Cruz was driving on Minneapolis's Interstate 35 bridge, on his way to a training session for the Twin Cities Marathon, when the road began to collapse. Cruz, 26, swerved into a guardrail to stop himself from sliding. Cruz, who is paralyzed from the waist down, and his racing wheelchair were rescued before his specially equipped van plunged into the Mississippi River. Local community members took up a collection to buy Cruz, who works in a jewelry shop, a replacement van so he could resume his training. He completed the Twin Cities, his 10th marathon, in October. —GAIL KISLEVITZ

### BRAD ALSOP: 131 DAYS OF MARATHONS

Alsop, 37, ran 26.2 miles a day from the Fourth of July through Veterans Day, November 11, to honor America's military. "It has always amazed me how people volunteer for the most dangerous jobs in the world to serve our country," says the groundskeeper, who raised \$15,000 for the Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund. Alsop logged all 3,432.2 miles on a park loop in Fern Creek, Kentucky, in times that ranged from 3:25 to 5:19. Starting at noon each day, he ran through record heat in August and a nagging case of shinsplints. —G.K.



### BETTE CLARK: RAN THROUGH CANCER

Two months after running her first marathon in New York City, where she qualified for Boston, Clark was diagnosed with breast cancer. While undergoing eight months of surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation, the psychologist envisioned each treatment as just another mile in a tough race and kept running. "Even a short, slow run made me feel better," says the 52-year-old from Yonkers, New York. Last April, she ran Boston in 4:37, and then in November, she ran NYC in 4:02. "It takes me longer to recover after a race," she says, "but it feels so good to be doing what I love." —G.K.

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