

Friday, January 26, 2007

The Rules for Running a 5K

In early January, the staff of Girls on the Run International, along with a few adventurous board members made the trek to Orlando, FL to our annual Girls on the Run summit. This year we partnered the summit with our Team Tiara initiative. Team Tiara is a fun marathon (or half-marathon) training program where participants (both men and women) experience first-hand the comraderie that race training can provide while also raising money for Girls on the Run!

I ran the Disneyworld Half-Marathon on behalf of Team Tiara and proudly wore a tiara. If you had told me thirteen years ago (when I was hard core into racing) that I'd even CONSIDER running a race in a tiara, I'd have said you were crazy. But there I was, joyfully running through the Magic Kingdom, displaying my purple Tiara with "MOLLY" bejeweled across the front.

I crashed and burned at mile 8. Every muscle fiber in my calves and shins cramped up...clearly not enough training. The fabulous part of this story is that I still had fun! I would not have said that thirteen years ago running and racing in marathons and Ironman Triathlons.

Girls on the Run has a mission: to educate and prepare girls for a lifetime of self-respect and healthy living. Thirteen years ago I wasn't living either of the important elements of our mission. Sure I was in good physical shape, but ALL balance had left my life. I was emotionally and spiritually bankrupt and holding onto the last bit of serenity that running provided for me.

I've been a runner all of my life. I started running with my Mom when I was twelve and discovered the sanctuary it provides. My mom started running in her early 50's...a means of running toward the new woman she had discovered mid-life. We would set out in the early morning hours, before sunrise. I vividly remember how the sound of our footsteps created the rhythm of our morning, in sync, she and I, mother and daughter. No words were exchanged but we spoke in the silent space between us with our footsteps, breathing and effort. Time was suspended and for the two of us there were no expectations. We just...were.

At age 15, I ran my first 3 miles. I was the basketball team manager and during their practice one rainy, dreary winter day, I set out focused and determined. I covered three miles on the dirt track at Charlotte Country Day School.

I vividly remember walking back into the gym as practice finished up. The boys noticed me...striped with dirt up the backside of my body, rivulets of water streaming from hair ends, strands of it carelessly tossed about my neck and shoulders. Dirt and grime were trapped on eyebrows, between teeth and behind my ears.

Not a single boy said a word...but their coach did.

“How far’d ya go, Molly?”

“Three miles,” I replied. He shook his head with positive disbelief.

“Amazing,” he sighed.

I felt the most beautiful I had ever felt in my whole life.

After my sixth marathon and third Ironman, running turned into less of a sanctuary and more of an “I should have,” “Molly, you have to,” or “Why even bother if you can’t win,” kind of effort.

The joy was no longer. The exhilaration was gone and replaced by a need for something else: something deeper, more profound...something missing; something that had been missing for my entire life, but had now entered into my one remaining safe space, running.

On July 7th, 1993 while out on a run, I was given the gift of new sight. A way to reclaim the wonder of living and hence began the reconnect with the REAL of running...the wonder of it...the sanctuary and joy of what it provides!

Three years later, the seed that had been planted on that hot July day, took root and in September of 1996, Girls on the Run was born!

I’ve now had ten years of hanging out with 3rd-8th grade girls and not a single day goes by where I do not experience the wonder of running, celebrate the human body and marvel at the spiritual peace running provides for me and the girls we serve. I thought I would share a bit of what I have learned from the 8 to 12 year old girls in Girls on the Run about running in and training for your first 5k:

1. First of all, if your shoelace becomes untied, don’t tie it back. Yes, that’s right. NEVER, EVER tie your shoelaces once they’ve come undone. It’s a lot more fun to just let the annoying lace tangle and distract you from the task at hand, which is to try to cover the three miles without tripping on the darn thing.
2. Why bother with running clothes. It’s perfectly okay to run in your street clothes. This includes cowboy boots, flip flops and platform shoes, mini skirts, fur coats and dangly earrings.
3. Bedazzle your outfit. Sequins and felt monkeys on your running clothes make them a lot cuter. The typical running outfit is too bland so decorate the ones you have with as many small stickers, pins and accessories as possible.
4. Stray dogs want to come home with you. If you are in the middle of a 5k, stop running and chase the dog that is chasing you, grab him and bring him to the finish line with you. Worry about what your family will say later. The stray dog loves you and wants to come

home with you!

5. Wearing fairy wings to your 5k makes you run faster. Fairy wings make a great addition at any time of your day, actually. Yes, fairy wings are great at work, driving carpool or for just generally “hanging out,” but they are particularly effective in any sort of running event...especially if they have lights on them!

6. Carrying a sequined purse is good. You never know, over the course of a 5k, when you might need your lip gloss, gum, a photo of your dog, or some extra change or small rocks that are jingling in the bottom of it. The bigger the purse the better. Okay...so it may be a bit annoying draped over your shoulder while you run, but the need for a mint break at mile two overrides any discomfort you might feel carrying the sequined purse.

7. Wearing as many hair accessories as possible holds the hair in place better than one ponytail holder. A pony tail is just too...well...too mundane. Putting as many Goody's hair accessories in your hair is a good thing. You might also consider antennae, antlers (at holiday time), Santa Hats, cat ears, a tiara (of course), crown or Dr. Seuss Hat.

8. Painting the hair pink, green or purple is a good thing. The sweat it makes is really cool. It looks like the stuff that comes out of Michael Jordon and Mia Hamm's body when they sweat in those TV ads.

9. Carrying cheese puffs, candy or mints (see sequined purse reference in number 7) in a baggie and eating them whenever you feel like it during a run is a good and sound nutritional plan. The more non-nutritive the better. Finishing your run with a blue tongue, orange lips and red teeth makes for a great photo finish.

10. Being last is cool. Riding in the “sweeper” police car makes you famous...among your peers. If you are really nice the officer might even give you a cool shiny badge Also, if you are in middle school and show up at the finish line in the police car, your parents will be extremely worried. Smile and wave at them as you exit the car.

11. Throwing up at the finish line means you have finally arrived! Every year at our Girls on the Run 5k event here in Charlotte we give the “Throw-Up” Award. I mean...COME ON! Every true runner has experienced nausea at some point during a hard effort. Instead of feeling shame over this, CELEBRATE IT, sister! Proudly proclaim yourself the winner of the “Throw-Up” Award. This means you are now a legitimate runner!!!

12. Watching and waiting for the bunny to come back out in someone's front yard is fine, (during a race) even if it adds 15 minutes to your 5k time.

13. Reading a large, hardback illustrated picture book is good while running. Multi-tasking is an important skill to develop. What better time to practice than during a 5k run. If reading a large book isn't enough while running, feel free to add, music, a dog and your little sister. This is a great way to practice being a mother.

14. Bringing your pets to the track motivates you and your teammates to run faster during your workouts. Dogs and cats are good...but even better are bunnies and mice (cage and all). The little critters enjoy being carried by your teammates, as they run their laps.

15. When in doubt...when you just don't think you can finish...do what any normal person would do...LIE DOWN. Yes, it doesn't matter where you are. Major intersection, parking lot, a stranger's front yard. Do it! If you are tired during your 5k event and you need a little break, what better to do than just rest a few minutes, totally flat on the pavement.

16. Be sure you know how to spit before you actually try it. The alternative can be yucky for those around you.

17. It's okay to hold your friend's hand across the finish line. So is cart wheeling, hopping, doing a disco dance, crying, screaming or doing a somersault. As a matter of fact you don't have to cross a finish line to do these joyous actions. Anytime you feel the need to celebrate, go for it! Do a somersault, cart wheel or dance at work, school or in traffic. This is food for the soul and provides joy to those around you.

18. Be grateful for even the smallest of your body's accomplishments. For example, Body odor is a good thing. This means you are growing up and becoming an adult. Little kids don't get body odor.

19. Taking off uncomfortable underwear or undergarments is fine at any point during your workout or race. If you've never worn a bra and decide that wearing one for the first time during a 5k event would assist with your traveling the distance, go ahead and wear it. However, should the straps and underwire begin to aggravate you and the bra should rise up to around your neck, feel free to just remove it and carry it over your head like a flag while continuing to run the remaining miles of your event, free from its bondage.

20. And of course, wrapping all of these into one final "Rule of Running" would be the adage, "If you smile, you will enjoy yourself over the course of your run."

This is actually a very good rule to live life by.

Since I started Girls on the Run, that rule is now joyously implanted in my thoughts. I now, with great delight, head out the door at 4:45 a.m. for my morning run!

Go on...grab joy.

Molly B.

P.S. Don't forget to watch Real Simple TV based on the magazine by the same name. They are doing a significant piece on Girls on the Run during the week of January 27th.

Check local listings for exact times and stations. You can find a link to your local station on the homepage of our website, www.girlsontherun.org.

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