SPORT-SPECIFIC ADVICE

Born to Run

Chimps Like Us

One step by one hundred people is better than one hundred steps by one person.

LOICHI TSUKAMOTO

Of all the sports I do, running is my favorite. As an ultra-runner I have conquered mountains, but still have some hills to climb. Watching other people run is my favorite pastime.

I learn so much by seeing what it takes for others to reach their goals. Researchers have found that our ancestors' ability to run long distances across the African savanna influenced the shape of our bodies from head to toe. Humans are born to run. We are, in fact, running machines. Interestingly, women and men are equally matched as ultra-runners. This may be in response to our need to travel long distances together on foot. Odds are we evolved to be able to stick together over the long haul as we traveled in bands.

Our bodies have evolved specifically to run as a form of locomotion. The ability to spring through the air is what sets us apart from primate cousins. It is this pogo-stick ability of each leg that allows us to travel long distances and to hunt and gather a high-protein diet, using relatively little fuel. We are very fuel-efficient machines. As our brains grew, so did our prefrontal cortex, the seat of human intelligence, and we became better hunters. Endurance running is, in fact, unique to homo sapiens among not only primates but also all other mammals except for dogs, horses, and hyenas.

Drs. Lieberman and Bramble, paleontologists at Harvard, established that our slender legs, shorter arms, narrower rib cage and pelvis, skulls with overheating prevention features, and the nuchal joint that keeps our heads steady when we run set us apart from chimpanzees. Our uniquely huge gluteus maximus (our butts), the biggest muscles in our body, make us able to run. Dr. Lieberman explains, "Your gluteus maximus stabilizes your trunk as you lean forward to run. A run is like a controlled fall, and the buttocks help control it." Monkeys don't have butt muscles. The scientists compiled a list during the thirteen-year-long study of twenty-six traits that made early homo sapiens specifically connected to running.

I re-lived my ecstasy again and again . . . at the first pale light I got up; and ran, yes really ran, in sandals, far beyond Mustapha; a kind of lightness of the body and soul did not leave me all day.

ANDRÉ GIDE (*SI LE GRAIN NE MEURT*)

Scientists concluded that running improved our chances of survival and reproduction. Although we were not as swift as our four-legged competitors, we could (and still can) outrun and hunt over greater distances than other predators. Lieberman says, "Endurance running may have made possible a diet rich in fats and proteins thought to account for the unique human combination of large bodies, small guts, big brains, and small teeth." Running, it turns out, is another thing that makes us uniquely human.

RUN, BIKE, SWIM TIPS

TIME-TESTED TRICKS OF THE TRADE

You can work at something for twenty years and walk away with twenty years' worth of valuable experience, or you can walk away with one year's experience twenty times.

GWEN JACKSON

Below are some tips on running, biking, and swimming that I've gained doing triathlons:

Running

- *Don't think too much about running. Don't try too hard to correct your gait. Your biomechanics are often set. Try to be relaxed and graceful, and over time you will become an efficient runner and find your natural stride.*
- *Lean forward a bit and shift your center of gravity to catch your fall.*
- *Create torque! Power in most sports comes from torque. Think of a boxer throwing a punch when you run. The arms move more as a unit with your torso. They create an optical illusion of moving more than they are as they rotate with your torso on the axis of your spine.*
- *The wrist is the metronome. Set pace with the snap and pop of your wrist. Remember that your cerebellum maintains rhythm and timing.*