

# Beginner's Pluck

From the July '99 Port City Pacers PaceLeter

Mo and I just started coaching our newest Leukemia Society Marathon Team, and it's always entertaining to hear the kinds of wide-eyed questions beginning marathoners ask their coaches. Not the "What should I eat?" or "How much do I need to train?" variety, but the really off-the-wall stuff that can only come from the mouths of babes--and novice athletes.

And it's perfectly alright to look, sound, and be a beginner--if you are a beginner. But after a few races, fast or slow, you'll want to blend in with the old pros. And to do that you have to know what they know. The following will help you to look, sound, and eventually to be one of those crusty old racers who know exactly when to change the ol' Odor Eaters, and how to find the shortest path to the beer kegs after the races:

**Learn the Lingo.** Nothing will help you to blend in faster than learning the *lingua franca*. First things first: No, you can't buy shin splints at Ward's; racing flats are not the result of stepping on a tack in your Nike Air trainers; and black toenails aren't the latest Goth fashion statement, like tribal tattoos or tongue rings. And how about a few words you do need to be familiar with (and you don't even have to know what they mean!) Sprinkle the following liberally into your pre- or post-race conversations: Threshold, Gastroc nemius, Fartlek, and best of all, VO2 max.

**Coordinate Your Logos.** Nike? New Balance? Reebok? It doesn't matter. And neither do the colors. But you don't see Bill Rodgers wearing Etonic shoes, Nike socks, Brooks shorts, a New Balance singlet and an Adidas hat, do you? That's why they call 'em uniforms, now isn't it? So stick to your brand--even if it *is* Etonic.

**T-shirts? Older Is better.** We love our race sponsors. And we should proudly display their names on our shirts. But you never, ever see the top racers wearing the the race T-shirt on race day, do you? Let's say you're at the 2000 ATR. Sure, you'll see thousands of 2K ATR shirts. But what will the top runners be wearing? The 1999 Holiday Half Marathon shirt. Or better yet, an ATR shirt from, say, 1981. If it's your first race and you want to look cool, three words: Goodwill Thrift Store.

**Identify, Then Ingest.** The longer the race, the odder the stuff they'll try to give you along the course. During a 5K all you're likely to see is cups of water. 10K you may see Gatorade or some other sports drink. But in a marathon there's no end to what people will try to give you to keep you going. Beer, oranges and candy are common, and easily identifiable. But you'll also be offered "Green Magma," raw vegetable juices, or Vaseline--none of which should be considered edible. Look like the veterans: Very few marathoners eat Ben Gay a *second* time.

**Be a Seasoned Spectator.** As Mo will tell you, "You're almost there!" is *not* what veterans yell when they happen to be watching a race. If you're ever at a track meet or on the side lines of a road race and don't know who's who, just fake it. No matter what distance race, and no matter who's running, male or female, I always yell "C'mon Eddie! Go Eddie!!!" The louder you yell the better. Everyone thinks you must know somebody out there *really* well. Heckling is also acceptable and will make you look very knowledgeable (e.g., "You're almost there, kick now!" at the 1-mile mark of a 5K, or "Quit now, you're never gonna make it!" at the 3-mile mark.) Just avoid getting *too* personal. Although runners *rarely* stop what they're doing to punch you in the nose, it does happen....

If you follow my advice, you may not run any faster, and it probably won't hurt any less if you do, but at least you'll *look* like you know what you're doing. And that way all the other beginners will be asking *you* where the beer kegs are.

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