

# Southern Comforts

From the February '98 Port City Pacers PaceLetter

Having just returned from the Bermuda Marathon, the obvious topic for this month's column would be the importance of hill training as a running- and walking-specific strengthening exercise. (But when have I ever been obvious?) Bermuda was very hilly, and hills should be a part of anyone's training, but after seeing some of the crazy things athletes were ingesting, rubbing on, inserting into their... well, selves... before the race, I'd like to switch gears and address the use of nutritional and other supplements by runners and walkers.

I'll side-step the ethical implications of using performance-enhancing "ergogenic aids" (although aren't training, and the ingestion of air, water and carbohydrates all "performance enhancing?") and stick to looking at what the "dopers" are using, and what we Pacers should consider taking to improve our 10K times.

I've heard some pretty far out stuff: One walker told me "You're crazy if you don't take shark cartilage!" Other walkers and runners swear by bee pollen, chromium, and coenzyme Q-10--as if our ancestors were dropping like flies from coenzyme Q-10 deficiencies. And one of our Team in Training members actually ingested Ben Gay during a marathon-- although I think that may have resulted from an unfortunate misunderstanding.

Most of this stuff is probably worthless, and will probably wind up killing you eventually, but there must be a "magic bullet" out there somewhere, mustn't there? Great runners have always relied on their own closely-guarded "secret potions" for success: Lasse Viren's Finnish reindeer milk, and Coach Ma's Chinese turtle blood and caterpillar fungus soup come to mind. What makes these concoctions work? Perhaps they do have tremendous endurance-boosting qualities as claimed. But it's more likely that there's a strong placebo effect at work here: Your coach gives you a secret formula, endemic to your homeland only, and convinces you that it works and you're the only one who has it. What do you think is going to happen? You're going to run faster!

But what about us? What do we have here in Lower Alabama that we can use against our unenlightened competitors? I swear by PopTarts and Cap'n Crunch, but everyone can get these tried-and-true performance-boosters. How about these southern favorites:

- 1. Grits. Of course!** Non-southern runners wouldn't put a fork within a 1 mile of a bowl of grits, and they may actually be a good source of carbohydrates. But I wouldn't know...
- 2. Oysters at Hooters.** They may not necessarily make you run fast, but you'll surely be chasing something by the end of the night!
- 3. Moonpies.** I certainly wouldn't recommend eating them, but jumping out of a Mardi Gras crowd to catch them is a great pliometric exercise.
- 4. Margaritas.** Loaded with vitamin-C!
- 5. Red beans and rice.** Hey, the Chinese and Mexicans are great runners and they eat loads of rice. And we all know how those beans are instantly converted to rocket fuel in the lower digestive tract...
- 6. Black-eyed peas.** Ditto.
- 7. Jambalaya.** There's so much stuff in there something has to work for ya.
- 8. Krystal ("Gut Bomb") burgers.** As my good friend Fred Nietzsche used to say, "what doesn't kill me

makes me stronger..."

Okay, so maybe our secret concoctions don't have the mystique of Kenyan rhinoceros horn, but until they start selling RC Colas in Nairobi, we've got the leg up on them fer'ners. And if they can't stomach our southern fare, or just can't find it in their homelands, there ain't no way they can take us at the ATR, right? Whatever it takes. Forget the altitude training and 120-mile weeks: Just load up on chitlins, collard greens and corn bread. Ya gotta believe.

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