

TILLMAN'S DISNEY MARATHON TRAINING PROGRAM

I'm fortunate to coach Debbie Tillman. Her results have made me look good! Debbie, the Daytona Beach Track Club secretary, has earned a great honor of late. She was selected as one of "Florida's Finest". Florida's Finest selects out of the applicants those that they deem to be the 4 top female and 4 top male runners in the state. Two of the male and female are "open" and the other two are masters. What an honor! DBTC must serve some good water at the races, because Deb joins a list that includes Heather Butcher and Sue O'Malley, both whom were selected in the past and were DBTC board members. So if you want to be one of Florida's Finest, join the track club and drink the water! Just kidding... I figured if our president, Richard could tell bad jokes in his articles, then so can I! So getting back to what I was saying, an athlete that is as talented as Debbie makes a coach look awfully good. Those who know me know that I won't take credit for her success, just as I wouldn't for the success of any talented athletes I coach and train. Her ability and talent got her to be one of Florida's Finest. My job as a coach is to steer her in the right direction, and kick her butt to make sure she does what she NEEDS to do. Other than that, I get out of the way—literally, because she runs me over at track.

Florida's finest is not just about perks and an honor. They do expect something back in return. Debbie will receive a comp Disney Marathon entry, theme park passes, and free 2 day hotel stay. And yes, she and her FF pals even get bused up to the start, so they can stay warm in the bus and jump out when they're ready to warm up. Trust me, this is a nice perk—the Disney Marathon gets cold! But she has to give back—big time! She has to perform. She was chosen because the selection committee wants a good time out of her. They want her to make them and Florida look good. Her goal for Disney is to be in the top 3 overall, and more importantly, under 3 hours. I'm convinced Debbie will do this. In one of our "pre-season" races (Micanopy ½ Marathon 2 weeks ago), Debbie ran a PR 1:22—that tells me she's well on her way and is "starting" in great shape.

So what will Tillman do? Again, my biggest role (just ask those I coach) is to kick the good ones in the butt. One thing I've learned is that the better the athlete is, the more you need to push them—and some of them are flat-out lazy! Sure they'll give you 100 mile weeks if you ask (which I don't!), but to get them to really turn up the turbo charger and to push themselves to new limits, you have to ride them the entire way. Yes, I use my education, which I think is important. I think this is lacking in the coaching industry. I see so many plans and so much advice that goes against what we KNOW in exercise physiology that it makes my head spin. But I'm usually able to convince an athlete early on how to train, and then the challenge is to get them to do what they need to do.

We're not actually starting from scratch with Debbie for Disney. My philosophy is to keep an athlete in great shape year round. And she has other running and triathlon goals, so she already does this. So now we simply focus more on the marathon itself. So what changes in her plan? We've already been building up the long day, because she already had the goal of trying to win the Gold Medal at the Paul deBruyn 30K this year. So we will continue to build up the long day until I'm confident that she has reached as much endurance as she can on the long day. You may be wondering how much, but again, that's not my coaching style. Training preferences are different with everybody. For many, a long run of 20 miles for the marathon may be ideal. I've

seen athletes successfully meeting their goals on less and more with the long run. I believe in taking them up as high as they can and still get results without breaking the body down. In the past, 2.5 hours has worked well for Debbie, but again, we'll see how she's responding. I'm not a big fan of the templates that list exact numbers---they really defeat the purpose, and the athlete never really learns what they're trying to achieve on that day.

It's the other training where she'll make or break her goal. It's the AT-raising workouts that will determine what speed she or anybody else will run. We know she can run 2.5 to 3 hours on a long run, but what does that prove? It's all about building the pace. AT stands for anaerobic threshold. It is THE factor regarding how fast you can be (all things equal—weight/VO₂). The marathon has to be run just below the AT. When you cross it, you blow up! Period. This is fine in a 5K, but not a marathon. So say the AT heart rate is 155 HR, and at that HR you can run a 7:15 mile. In this example, if you go run a marathon and start out at a 7:00 mile, what's going to happen? So your pace better match your goals. So if your goal is a 3 hour marathon (7 minute miles), then you have to train your AT to boost it so you can. So, in this case, we raise the AT to 164 and that corresponds to a 6:55 pace—perfect. It really is that simple. So how do we boost the AT, and how will I be boosting Debbie's AT? The same way we always do—speed work. You have to work hard to get faster. Runners are always looking for another answer. “What if I run 7 days a week? What if I do more long runs? What if get my miles up to 80 per week?” Why do people think this way? Don't stone me, but—IT'S EASIER! It's hard to HURT. We all know that. Trust me, I'd rather (if I go by how I feel) go for a 7 mile easy run every day than go to the track and run a mile all out to where I feel like I'm going to puke. Going hard hurts. It's no different than when I was body building. Many body builders would prefer to work out easy every day and do a million sets per workout than train hard and train right. Same reason, training hard hurts. Do you get my drift? Debbie will be training hard to reach her goal. She knows this and she works hard. There have been many workouts in which she was very mad at me at track for pushing her so hard, but she always says thank you later. At the time, it's hard. Afterwards, it's gratifying. We do all kinds of intervals at the track. The important element is that she keeps her pace sub 5K (just sub). This way, she's always above her AT. And as she gets in better shape, I extend the interval and shorten the rest. It's that simple. With her other running, she'll do another form of speed/tempo on Thursday, and she will at times do a 4th day of easy running, but mostly just a little cross training (pull-buoy swim and easy bike) on her “off days”.

One more thing... Debbie will be working her butt off with weights. Yes, weights will make you faster (done right). Sure you have to knock them out a month or so before the marathon, but they should be a part of your training until then. And again, we just don't play around. Debbie does one full body workout on her own and she comes down to my gym on Wednesdays for a personal training session. Just like at track, I am not her favorite person while she's there, but she knows the only way to see results is to be pushed beyond her comfort zone, which is what I do best.

Of course we watch her nutrition the entire way and make sure she's making the best food choices, but other than that, there is Debbie's general marathon training plan for Disney. I know she'll do great. And, I/we the track club are very proud to have Debbie on our team!