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# WE ARE WHAT WE ARE

By Rob Maxwell, M.A.

This article is sort of a story. You can take from it what you will. I add my own perspective. But I think the story has value to all of us who run and train. Actually, it is quite entertaining.

I was not pleased with the outcome of my HOPS marathon, for which I trained long and hard for. I was over-trained, but I spent all of last month speaking of that, so I won't bore you further. Because I wasn't pleased, I wanted to jump into another one. So I jumped into the Ocala marathon about a month later. I didn't train much in between. I just recovered. What I was most unhappy about with HOPS was how much training I did. This goes against what I preach, so I wanted to do one with much less training. Granted I really can't count that, since I really was still trained from HOPS.

However, an employee of mine, Courtney, was not "trained" for a marathon in the prototypical way. You may know her from races, formerly Courtney Shook, now Courtney Dunham. At work, one day, I said "court, why don't you jump in Ocala with me?" She thought I was nuts. Her running was currently centered on staying in shape and being 5k ready. She wasn't really training for anything in particular. Her long run was 8.5 miles, one she does from the Port Orange Y to the beach and really enjoys. She goes to the Spruce creek High School track every Tuesday because she likes to work and get the "social" component. And in a typical week, she gets in one more run of about 4 miles. So how could she jump into a marathon? That was the point. I knew she could. I know (just don't always follow) that the biggest key for success in racing is being fit— aerobically and anaerobically. She was. And distance races—what does that matter? I was convinced that her longest run (in about a year) of 8.5 miles was plenty. She figured, "What the heck? I'm game!" I was surer that she'd find success than she was. She's done a marathon before, in Jacksonville a year ago. She trained hard and long and followed a very distinct plan of increasing her long run every week. She did well. She ran a 4:26 and was happy all of her 20 weeks or so of prep work for Jacksonville paid off.

So she jumped in and did Ocala, winged it. No long training run to speak of. How'd she do? 4:16 on a hilly course. She set a PR by 10 minutes! This speaks volumes. Am I saying don't follow a plan? No. Plans are great, especially when we're trying to learn what helps and what doesn't. And I'm not saying to quit running long. Some people really enjoy running long, and for that reason alone, it makes it great. My point is, maybe we over think and over do our training when we would find the same success with much less.

Number one, I think we have to understand that we really are what we are. Genetics determine how much capacity we have at a sport. The perfect plan won't make us

March, 2003

something we're not. I bring this up because it's my guess that this is why a lot of people obsess over a brutal training plan. Runners have to understand that a "great" plan will help you get better, but it won't take you to another level. And "perfect" training won't make an average age grouper into a world class runner. IT will make you better. I believe we put a little too much emphasis on the "training schedule." Now don't get me wrong. I put people on plans. But the plan is meant to help be there best, not transform them into somebody they're not.

Rob says don't train, right? Not at all. I'm saying don't take yourself or training too seriously. We're all in this to stay in shape. Why stick to that 20 miler if you hate to run long and chances are it's not going to make or break your race? Genetically, I'm a fast-twitcher. I can do all the LSD runs in the world and I'll never look or be like a marathoner, but I love to run and cycle. I have the most fun doing these things. And it challenges me to be my physical best. So I train hard and long at times, but most importantly, I enjoy the lifestyle and competition. And I totally understand that whether I do 80 mile weeks or 20 mile weeks leading up to a marathon, it not going to dramatically affect the outcome of my race. I've found there are other areas that affect my success far more than my training parameters. For example, being at an ideal weight for me affects my racing. If I'm over my ideal weight, I'll have trouble running a 21 minute 5k. At my ideal weight, I've run a 19:37, and either way this has nothing to do with training miles. It has to do with eating miles. Another factor totally in my control that affects my racing is being rested. If I go into a race physically spent, it shows. Another variable especially true for long races is race day nutrition. All the "perfect" training in the world won't help you if you forget to eat during a marathon. So I tend to think more about these than the current state of my weekly miles.

To conclude, Courtney demonstrated all of this. She does enough running to stay in shape and have fun. She understood what she had to do nutritionally come race day. She jumped in and did great. The experience of doing a prior marathon cannot be discounted. She knew what to expect and that was important. So how did I do? At HOPPS, 60 mile weeks or so of running 3:57. At Ocala, with a month of so of nothing-3:56. Big difference, huh? You are what you are.