Debut Marathon Thoughts

This week Ollie Evans ran his first marathon and shared his thoughts that we wanted everyone to read.

(long 5+ minute read incoming*)
(Hope I'm OK doing a long rambling post, but here's a mini story about myself, and also my perspective of running with regard to this marathon, and some lessons learned, perhaps relatable to you in some parts as well).

Why would someone join a running club? Maybe to get faster, to get fitter, to meet new people, to run more socially, to find the inspiration and incentive to do a marathon? Well joining the Striders has done all of those things for me. I had been thinking about joining this club for a while, and would've joined way sooner but I wasn't really sure what I was getting myself into, and generally human beings are programmed to fear the unknown aren't they. At first I just ignored my family's encouragements to join a club, because running has mostly been just an unserious hobby to me just like with the rest of us, so why should I feel pressured to turn this hobby into somewhat of an obsession? "Maybe Spa Striders, they'll like you," my dad said to me a few years ago. And my initial response to that.. "Who are they?" I said😬. Long story short I found some courage, stepped into the unknown and joined Striders…

So as some of you will know, I completed my first marathon on Monday, something I can't believe I'm saying and not something I thought I'd say when I got 29 minutes in my first ever parkrun in April 2012 when I was 13, which is why it's kind of a bit emotional for me; to think of the journey to where I am now as a runner; from a reluctant unfit (but still persistent) runner without any real technique, to a finisher of a marathon and club runner who will now pay money to put themself through hell to run on a big stage with big audiences, and would wake up at the crack of dawn train for it. And that first parkrun, and the journey that's followed it, is all I thought about after finishing as I limped around the edge of the football pitch in tears of exhaustion whilst trying unsuccessfully not to swear loads; I mean you would've seen the state I was in if you were there. Obviously I was exhausted, and it felt like my legs were falling off and the aching was like none that I've had before. But it was so worth it, all the training and putting myself through the paces; and you'll struggle to find a nicer more scenic "green" marathon (non-trail) than this one as well, topped off with a goosebump-inducing finish inside MK Dons' stadium. A massive thanks to the cheerleaders in here who supported from the sideline Clare Hinton Matt Leydon Alex Fleming Carolyn Wilkinson and those who suffered with me in the half/full marathons and relays yesterday and helped bring it home Kat Robertson Lauren Turner Benjamin Sebastian Smith Gary Cheesman Gethyn Friswell Ange Moor Reed, Trevor (don't have FB do you?)(wouldn't let me tag some of you)

There was no guarantee that I'd even finish this marathon, so what actually helped me complete it? Might sound like a daft question yes.. Obviously gels, Bloks energy chews and the water stations duh 😕🤓. But seriously what other invisible resources could a not-so-experienced marathoner (compared to many of you) like me extract from thin air to help me get this one over the line? Well the primary answer to that is… Pain, failure and disappointment.. yes those things are actually important. Most of you won't have a clue what I was like when I started running. If you've ever put in a disappointing performance at a run or at something else, or failed a driving test before eventually passing, then good.. I'm not being mean or unkind there I swear 😂, but it goes without saying that disappointment, failure and hitting rock bottom teaches you lessons that the top never will, in any walk of life. I used to get the worst stitches when running at a younger age such was my nutritional naïvety and amateurish lack of fitness at the time. My first ever half marathon was disappointing on my part due to not fuelling properly on the morning of the run, but I learned the right lessons from it quite quickly for this year's Warwick half. I would've been mentally pained and wouldn't have forgiven myself if I'd thrown in the towel on this marathon even when I was fighting demons in agony at mile 22, while my entire legs ached all the way down, and that thought kept me going as I sang/hummed in my head every famous motivational song I could think of, telling myself that I haven't run 22 miles just to give up now. There's a TV advert for the Royal Marines that says "If you think you're beaten, you are. If you think you've lost, you've lost. Success comes from a persons willpower to go on." Need I say more about the relevance that has to monumental tasks such as running a marathon. Set yourself a training plan, and a realistic target and give your all to stick to it, and be sure to listen to those experienced ones around you as well, because ignoring them could come back to bite you. And thank those who have helped you along the way as well. An archer doesn't train for the Olympics just to be happy with hitting the outer white ring..: they want the bullseye instead🏹🎯. Before I was born my dad did London Marathon in 1994, so I wasn't devoid of experienced heads around me, even though he got 4hrs18min but that's just the runner he was at the time, and that was his goal to beat 4hr20min. This paragraph is what I'd say to any young runner looking for a reason to do their first marathon; Redemption and atonement for a disappointment you've had before, and to make the pain you've previously suffered actually worth it, and also not to mention a self-pride like you've never had before.

Running originally felt like a chore to me when I started running in 2012 and it was just a case of "getting through it." I used to have to stay on my dad's or my older brother's tail to get a parkrun PB, but you know why I stuck at it despite not necessarily enjoying it?… because I knew it would be so good and important for my mental health to have something I was good at that I can use as an escape from the stresses of life, as well as actual good physical health. Surely you've seen enough films where the protagonist is hopeless at something at the start of the film and then a master by the end of it. So I just gradually sleepwalked my way up through the gears over time and kept going until BAM! I'm now a sub 19min 5km runner, how did that happen? My dad and brother were the benchmark for

me when I started running, but truthfully I never saw this far down the line. You know that saying “You always feel better after a run”… It’s one of many reasons I joined the Striders. My mum thought I would be daft not to join a club of some kind, and similarly to my dad she tirelessly tried to convince me “join a club, join a club, you’re too good a runner to not be in some kinda club Ollie.” Like calm down mum you’re not in charge of me 😂. But spoiler alert: She was right all along (any mums reading this can probably relate; you’ll win most arguments with your children😂, but sometimes for the better). Your story of events on how you ended up joining the Striders is probably very different to this one.

As mentioned further above^, there was no guarantee whatsoever that I’d even finish this marathon, especially as it was my debut marathon. And this was never gonna be “just a long run” like any other. To me, it’s a seismic occasion and quite often the size of the occasion with all the people watching just gets to me in a way I can’t explain. It’s a commitment: as the day of the run rolls around, the crowds build up and you get in your enclosed start zone and realise you’re firmly in it with 2 feet and that there’s no withdrawing from the run now, as I wonder “Have I bitten off more than I can chew here?” So much goes through your head before and during a run. My time of 3hrs26min wouldn’t have been possible if it weren’t for the great choice I made to join the Striders; all the tempo Tuesdays, track Thursdays, Monday runs, interval sessions, Friday 6@6’s, and the advice and words of wisdom from the experienced seasoned runners throughout the club: All of it has been vital for me in completing this marathon which is a milestone in my running journey and a significantly big deal to me. To those experienced runners in here who have done a marathon or even umpteen of them, I guess I’m probably just reciting exactly how you felt when you completed your first one, yet being autistic I probably just see it all differently to you. Whereas if you haven’t done one, think about this post…

And will I be back to do another marathon in the future?… well I didn’t know the answer to that question before the run, but I do now: Absolutely I will, because a one-hit wonder gets forgotten quite quickly, and this run has now given me a goal/target time to beat. Just think how many times down the years Usain Bolt broke his own records. I can’t say when it’ll be, whether it’ll be in the near or distant future, but yes my body will certainly tackle another 26.2 miles again. Thank you for reading this and happy Wednesday! 🟢🔴🟢

Unbelievably I haven’t yet rewarded myself for the marathon even 2 days on from it😂. Now I need a beer and a big fat burger with an ungodly amount of chips this evening 🍺🍔

#UpTheStriders 🟢🔴🟢