

How to mentally prepare for a marathon Words by Pat Carroll

Tackling and conquering the marathon is ideally a desire that comes from within. It comes from your heart and soul.

Nothing stood in my way when I was scheduled for a training run. I would be conscious of the physical workout I would miss, inclement weather or a social event ***never stood in my way***. Knocking over every planned training session to the best of my ability was proving to myself that I was "tough" and I was not going to give in to any festering weaknesses.

It's during your campaign and preparation that you bank thoughts as to how much you will apply yourself come race day. Visualize yourself running strong through various stages in your 42.2k challenge. You'll be able to call on these thoughts (as well as remind yourself of a challenging training run) when the going gets tough.

Initial 5k: This is all about settling in to your goal pace. You may find the initial few km's a tad erratic however the closer you get to 5k the more you should be locked in to your goal Marathon pace. At this point you should also find yourself in a cluster of runners travelling at the same pace. Feed off the energy from the runners in your group. Reflect on all the accumulative km's that have been banked by everyone in your pack.

5k – 21.1k: Ideally you'll be chafing at the bit to pick up the pace given it's early in the race however you need to be mindful that you don't want to be on "all fours" at the 35k mark. Running a great Marathon is very much about pace judgement – it's about respecting the distance. You will only have so much petrol in the tank and ideally you'll be running at an even pace throughout, perhaps just a tad faster in the first half. You could aim to pass half way 1-2 minutes faster than what your predicted finish time would be if you halved it.

21.1k – 32k: This is all about setting yourself up for the business end – the final 10k. Each time you land imagine the constant beat of a drum. Your speed is locked into the beating drum and you are carried along at this pace in a trance. Relax your shoulders, keep your unclenched fists just below chest height and try your best to reduce excessive puffing. Running in a relaxed state, but at the same time remaining very much focused, can often deliver a great result. Simply saying the word "Relax" or a similar manta can work a treat.

To pass the time you could simply look at the back of the singlet of the runner in front and imagine there's an elastic band connecting the two of you. Realise that if you drift back too far that this band will break. Taking in the cheers from the crowd will spur you on. Even if the cheers are not for you, take in the encouragement.

32k – Finish: Your energy stores will be slowly depleting however remind yourself the end is drawing closer and the job is almost done. Monitor how your body is feeling and possibly adjust your stride slightly if muscles are starting to twinge. You will be gradually engulfed in an overall sense of fatigue, almost as if you could fall asleep. Not dissimilar to a massive dose of jet lag. Don't reflect back on how far you've travelled (30 odd km's), reflect on km's that you have left to run; 8k to go, 7k to go and so on. You've run numerous long training runs during your preparation so tell yourself that 8k (or less) is something you can easily master. Visualize crossing the finish line and seeing your goal time on the clock. Visualize meeting your family once you leave the recovery area.

You only have to stand at the finish line of a marathon to witness runners only just making it across the line. A few steps later, the mind relaxes and a slow walk is all that can be managed. This is a clear indication runners have milked every last bit of energy out of their bodies. The mind is a powerful tool and will be a driving force in helping you achieve your goal.