


# Episode 147: Training for a marathon is more than feet to pavement

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From the grueling workouts to the euphoria of crossing the finish line, discover what it takes from experts and newbies to conquer the marathon distance.

**ALEX LASSITER:** Hello, lovely people! It's Alex Lassiter.

**CECI HEINEN:** And Ceci Heinen with The Minnesota Daily.

**LASSITER AND HEINEN:** And you're listening to In The Know, a podcast dedicated to the University of Minnesota.

**LASSITER:** I used to run long-distance in high school. As part of a 10-day summer excursion to Colorado, our very eccentric coach made us run two half marathons as part of our training. It seems excessive, but when you consider that this was the same guy who threw a dead snake into one of our tents as a prank, his extreme training methods start to make a little more sense.

**HEINEN:** I have limited running experience, just 2 years of middle school cross country, where I basically finished last in every race. But, surprisingly, it is in my blood because both of my parents have run marathons.

So, I have seen the training process up close, cheered for them as they ran, and saw the aftermath of race day. From what I have observed, marathon training is extremely grueling, and it shocks me that so many people love it and run marathons for fun.

**LASSITER:** Despite my vigorous training in high school cross country, I'd never actually run a full marathon before. To see what all the hubbub was all about, I joined a marathon running class at the U for one of their workouts. There's just one problem: outside of running as a part of my cardio workouts, I hadn't run long-distance since high school.

To compensate, I invited a very special guest to join us as the second-and-a-half host of today's podcast. As the episode continues, you'll be hearing from my very good friend who is also me, Marathon Alex. Every time you hear this music in the background: you'll know it's him speaking. In fact, let's see how he's doing right now.

**MARATHON ALEX:** Hey y'all, it's Marathon Alex today. Just got to the building. Cautiously optimistic. I'm recording this on my phone because I didn't want to bring a very expensive piece of recording technology on this run with me. Cautiously optimistic because I felt a lot of wind on the walk from my apartment to the gym.

So, we're gonna be running across the Stone Arch a little bit into St. Anthony area and then looping back around and coming back. Should be about 8k, so we'll see how it goes. I'm a little bit optimistic and a little bit nervous because this is my first distance run since high school. So I will see you guys on the other side.

**LASSITER:** Christopher Lundstrom, the professor who teaches the class, was unavailable for comment because he is in Paris scouting out the Olympic marathon course for a runner he's training.

**HEINEN:** While Marathon Alex was working hard at PE 1262, a class where you aren't sitting at a desk, but rather running outside training for a marathon, he got the chance to speak with Merrick McFarling, a senior studying computer science. McFarling said that he just saw the course on Schedule Builder and decided he would give it a try.

**MERRICK MCFARLING:** Before taking this class, I didn't run whatsoever. And then, now I'm running like 20 miles every other Saturday. And that's so fun. It's so cool.

I kid you not, for me, the hardest part of this class is sometimes just waking up in the morning. But once I get here, running isn't that bad. I think just like getting out of bed and like when it's like -20 degrees and just getting myself to class is seriously the hardest part.

**LASSITER:** McFarling will be joining the rest of his class when they run the Eau Claire Marathon at the end of April. After the class ends, he said he still intends to keep up the training this class got him started on.

**MCFARLING:** I can see myself doing the "run your age on your birthday" every year. I'll be 23 in September. I could totally see myself running 23 miles on my birthday this year and then so on and so forth for the rest, for as long as I can, you know?

**LASSITER:** Tony Leija and Samantha Brooks, the two TAs for PE 1262, are both graduate students studying exercise physiology. Contrary to McFarling, they have a bit more running experience.

**TONY LEIJA:** My first marathon was actually two summers ago. And being completely new to marathoning, I had ran in high school, but new to marathoning, it was a very long and humbling learning experience for sure.

**SAMANTHA BROOKS:** I actually haven't run a marathon. So, I ran during my undergrad collegiate career. I was a distance runner there. And then during this marathon training cycle, I've been training for a 50 mile race, kind of hopping over the marathon.

Training and running during my undergrad has definitely given a lot of structure and taught me a lot for these training cycles, which I think is beneficial for the marathon class.

**HEINEN:** The two of them have faced a lot of challenges as overseers and advisors for the students in the marathon training course because they come from all different skill sets and experience levels. They help them attain the right amount of discipline to get through the training period to the actual races.

**LEIJA:** I come from a little bit of a coaching background, so the biggest like challenge is kind of finding that sweet spot that does work for everyone and trying to help teach them without making them feel bad.

But I think the most challenging part of the training itself is also being honest with yourself and saying like, “hey, maybe this isn’t my easy running pace, so maybe I just need to dial a little bit back. That way I can have a better day on race day.”

**BROOKS:** I think the biggest challenge is probably trusting the process. It’s a long, long training cycle. You’re spending the whole semester working up towards it. And especially when you start to get into those really long runs of, you know, 16, 18, 20 miles. And you’re doing that multiple times. Sometimes it’s easy to just be like, man, I want a week off, right?

**LASSITER:** Speaking of wanting a week off, Marathon Alex was starting to understand the pains of marathon training about halfway through his run.

**MARATHON ALEX:** Hey guys, Marathon Alex here again. Yeah, so halfway point. I’d be lying if I said it didn’t suck a bit. My left foot is hurting. There is sweat everywhere. As you can tell by my breathing, my pace is drastically slower than that of the rest of the group.

But somehow, I haven’t lost them, and I’m staying in time. So, we are just halfway through, so we’ve got another 30 minutes in the run to go. And we have a tailwind now which helps. So we’ll see exactly how this all shakes out. But I’ll be back to check in at the end. So yeah, see y’all in a bit.

**HEINEN:** Stay tuned to see if Marathon Alex makes it through the run!

**LASSITER:** Virginia Brophy Achman, the former executive director of [Twin Cities In Motion](#) and a current marathon aficionado, said she started running as training for other sports and general fitness.

**VIRGINIA BROPHY ACHMAN:** I’ve always been a runner, just ran. Didn’t run for any particular distance or race. My dad started running, I influenced him to start running. And then my dad started running marathons. So I’m like, “well, if you’re going to run a marathon, I have to run a marathon.”

My first marathon was Twin Cities Marathon in 1995, a long time ago. I've run a dozen marathons in total. I've been off and on injured as many of us are.

**LASSITER:** Brophy Achman trained for the Twin Cities Marathon with Club Run, a Minneapolis-based running group that provides a community for runners training for full and half marathons. She said since her first marathon, the running community has changed with events becoming more accessible to a wider range of people.

**BROPHY ACHMAN:** For the most part, what I think I've seen change the most is, you know, the number of women running has increased. I think a product of that is just wanting to find a safe place to feel good about running if you're not comfortable with it. And so I think a lot of women have created their own little niches and groups. And I think that's terrific because I think whatever it takes for people to feel comfortable, to gain the confidence to run and then come be part of the events.

In life, in general, technology has changed tremendously from 2000 to 2024. I personally enjoy a live in-person group, but I have used an online coach to help augment that. Whether it's for cross training or strengthening or just wanting a more specific goal. At the end of the day, I love my group and I love my group because we support each other and we just have fun.

**HEINEN:** Brophy Achman is clearly no stranger to marathons, as she has now run twelve. If you are someone who aspires to run a marathon but you don't know where to start, here are her personal approaches to marathon training.

**BROPHY ACHMAN:** You need to understand where you're at in your base. So if you have a base, then personally I like to do between 12 and 16 weeks of training.

I run Monday, Wednesday, Saturday, I throw in a fourth day during my training for a marathon. I am really mindful about how I eat. I try really hard to eat well. I'm still actually in pursuit of the best nutrition to not bonk because I can do a ten-mile and a half without bonking but I still bonk in a marathon, and that's nutrition.

And the other thing I do is I make sure I have three goals, right? So your first goal, your second goal, your third goal. I always have realistic goals in there.

You always want to hope for the perfect day, right? You want the weather to be perfect. You want to feel good. You want to have had a great training, and sometimes it happens, and sometimes it doesn't. I like to have three: one really high goal and then two goals that are a little bit more attainable so that I can feel good at the end of my race.

**HEINEN:** Brophy Achman has her training schedule down to a science, but it took her time to perfect it. For those new to running, the idea of a marathon seems unattainable and terrifying. However, Brophy Achman has a very optimistic outlook on new runners. Even I,

the loser of many a middle school cross-country race, felt inspired to try running again after hearing her speak.

**BROPHY ACHMAN:** I would say anyone who wants to run a marathon can. I mean, you want to maybe start with a, you know, train, get some mileage in, do a 5k, try a 10k and like, just kind of see how that goes.

If you want to do something, there are so many resources and so many places. Just ask. If you don't even know where to start, maybe go to a local shoe store and ask for some advice or where to get it. Or my group, Club Run, you can find us on clubrun. minnesota.org and just reach out and ask, cause we'll get people that ask questions. Runners want to help other runners.

I think anyone who wants to can, and if it's a marathon, I think you just have to understand that it takes time. Of all the people who run, if 1% run a marathon like you're doing something special and it doesn't matter how fast or how slow. If you do it, that's amazing, that's an amazing feat in and of itself.

**LASSITER:** Since her first race in 1995, Brophy Achman has been running marathons for almost 30 years, and was involved with Twin Cities In Motion for almost 23. She said after those three decades, she's starting to shift away from running in full-length marathons. Despite this change, Brophy Achman isn't done running yet, since she's racing in two half marathons this year.

**BROPHY ACHMAN:** Yeah, so I'm actually training to run the half marathon at Get in Gear at the end of April, and I'm so excited because it's a different course. I'm excited to be the inaugural group on that course. So this race will get me through spring and then I'll focus on trail for fall. I'm actually going to do my first trail half marathon in November in Washington state.

**HEINEN:** This episode is nearing the finish line, so I think there's one more person we need to check up on.

**MARATHON ALEX:** Hey guys, so it's Marathon Alex here. Everything hurts. I'm finished, but at what cost? My left foot is either severely numb or in incredible pain. It switches off between the two every few minutes. The sweat has spread. My breath is non-existent. My butt hurts for some reason, but I'm done. I'm done. I did it.

Now all I gotta do is cool down. Cool down and take water into my mouth like I've never drank water before. I feel like an alien, my words don't mean anything. But all in all, good experience. It sucks a lot, but I can see why people do it, because it sucks in a good way.

**LASSITER:** Despite how bad I made it sound, I had a ton of fun doing that workout. I forgot my earbuds, so all I had to focus on was the sound of my own footsteps and the weight of my own breathing. And I think that really helped. I came out surprisingly energized.

By the end of it, despite my heaving breath and complete loss of vocabulary, I felt like I could just keep running. My friend who invited me to join the class said she was impressed with how well I kept up for a first-timer, though my head was spinning so much that I'll never be sure whether or not she just said that to make me feel better.

**HEINEN:** Marathon training is a different experience for everyone. Many of the students in PE 1262 had never run a marathon before, and now they're gearing up to run one of the biggest races in the Midwest.

Brophy Achman had run marathons for decades, and even in her shift over to half marathons, she's still training incredibly hard and helping new runners find their footing. Even Alex, who hadn't done any kind of marathon training since high school was able to leap right back in... more or less.

**MARATHON ALEX:** Oh man, that sucked, but it was amazing.

**HEINEN:** One of the best parts of training for a race of any distance is that you can set your own goals. You could leap right into one of the most strenuous weeks of training like Alex did, or start in a healthy way from the ground up like Brophy Achman recommended.

Taking it day-by-day and assessing the needs of your own body will help you grow at your own pace. If you do it well and do it right, you'll come out on the other side with a greater understanding of yourself both physically and mentally. Remember: it's a marathon, not a sprint.

**LASSITER:** I'm just glad I didn't run a full marathon with no prior training, because if I was muttering that much gibberish after just a routine workout, I would've been a puddle of sludge on the floor by the end of a full race.

This episode was written by Alex Lassiter and Ceci Heinen, and produced by Kaylie Sirovy.

**HEINEN:** As always, we appreciate you listening in. Feel free to send a message to our email inbox at [podcasting@mndaily.com](mailto:podcasting@mndaily.com) with any questions, comments or concerns.

**LASSITER:** I'm Alex.

**HEINEN:** And I'm Ceci.

**LASSITER AND HEINEN:** And this has been In The Know.

