

Most people would consider a 26.2 mile trip across the Causeway a chore, but avid runners challenging themselves to complete a marathon see this distance as a goal. On Sunday, February 1, 2009, hundreds of determined runners will flood the streets near the Superdome to participate in New Orleans' own Mardi Gras Marathon & Half Marathon.

Preparing for the marathon can be exciting, yet nerve wracking; having a plan can ease doubts and worries about being ready on race day. Most individuals participating in the Mardi Gras Marathon are not professional runners; therefore, finding a specific training program that fits your needs and your schedule can be beneficial for all athletes. Whether you're training to simply finish the marathon or striving to qualify for the Boston Marathon, these tips can help.

All marathon participants, first-time and professional, should incorporate a rest day with little or no running at least once a week in their training plan. Training puts stress on the body, and rest allows the body to heal and become stronger for the next run. The day after a long run is usually a good day to take off. Having a day dedicated for recovering can help prevent overuse injuries and pains associated with running.

Training for long runs, 16 to 20 miles, is the most important part of marathon training. Athletes should generally train the longer runs at a slower pace than their goal marathon pace, 90 seconds to two minutes slower than their fastest 10 k pace. Group training can make the long runs easier, but remember to train with individuals at or with a similar pace. Having a team can help motivate you to complete your workouts and can bring extra encouragement on race day.

Tapering. It's most athletes' favorite part of marathon training. Tapering is a gradual decrease in the duration and intensity of training. Most should start their "taper" about two weeks prior to the race. Marathon runners should still do some kind of tempo training to keep the intensity up, shorter runs at race pace. It is not uncommon to feel sluggish during taper; it's your body's way of rebuilding and strengthening.

The most important part of training for a marathon is to have fun and enjoy the race.

race day tips

- 1) Run your own race. It is very easy to get caught up in the excitement of the event; don't do it. You don't know what kind of athletes you're running with or what kind of training they have done.
- 2) Stay hydrated, especially if it is a hot day. A 2% loss in body weight due to dehydration can cause at least a 7% reduction in endurance. If it looks like it's going to be a hot day, wear a mesh running hat. You can put ice under the hat to cool yourself off. In the more likely chance it will be cool, wear a few extra layers you can easily peel off and discard.
- 3) Relax and focus on your running technique, i.e. landing mid sole to fore foot, relaxed shoulders, and arms at your sides not crossing the center line of your body. The more efficient you are with your running, the more effective your energy use is going to be throughout the day.

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26.2 Miles to the Superdome

