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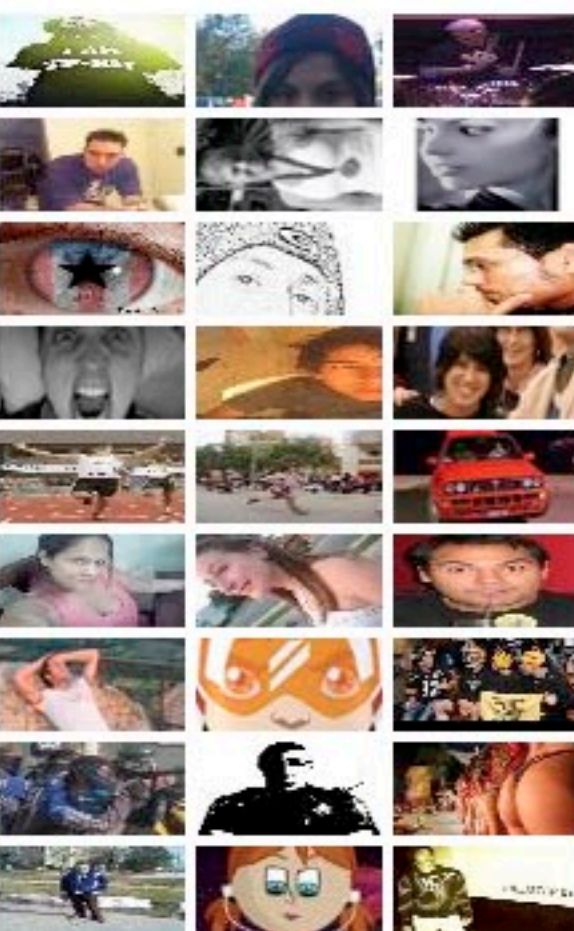
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Runner's Spotlight Blair Heinke

Blair Heinke, Runner & M.D.

There is something to be said about being a runner. Whether it's competing in a 5k, a marathon, or an event like the upcoming NYRR Empire State Building Run-Up, a runner prepares endlessly to position him or herself to compete at the highest level. Regardless of the daily grind of life, a runner always finds time to train. Some get up before the sun rises, others sneak out during their lunch breaks, and of course there are those that force themselves to get out on the road late at night. For all runners, it does not matter how or when they train as long as they get the chance to run each and every day.

by KevinS

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When thinking about the amount of effort that goes into training, only one word comes to mind: sacrifice. For a runner during training season, the time spent with friends and family is put on hold, ongoing rescheduling takes place just to get in a run and sleep becomes a luxury. When you throw in an 80+ hour per week work schedule on top of training, you have a runner that is burning the candle at both ends. This month we feature a runner who continues to test and push herself to extreme limits. Always looks for the next challenge, Blair Heinke, M.D. is this month's 'Runner's Spotlight.'

Rest Would Be Possible if There Were 27 Hours in a Day

The alarm goes off at 11:00am. With little hesitation, Blair rolls over and hits the alarm, ending its ongoing beeping. She does not press the snooze button (a feature that most everyone uses at least three times in the morning), but instead gets up and opens her closet in search of her running clothes. Within minutes she is out the door and off for a 22 mile run. Hearing this, one might think that life isn't that bad waking up at 11:00am and having the ability to go for a late morning run. What is not known, however, is what her past 27 hours were like.

The day before, Blair went to work (as a second year resident at a New York City Hospital) and spent 24 hours on her feet visiting patients, examining and admitting individuals and handling everything that came her way. Blair's daily schedule is demanding, however, she has always been a highly competitive runner and does not allow a hectic day at work to deter her from getting a long run in.

"It was not the ideal situation, but I needed to run long. It was not the greatest run. I was halfway over the Manhattan Bridge when I developed a splitting headache and I all could think about was getting home," said Blair when she was training for the marathon in New York. "I must admit that my training did not go as well as I would have liked but I just love running in New York. I planned my life in such a way that I was working, sleeping or running. There was no time for anything else."

Prior to the 2008 marathon in New York, Blair ran four marathons with her personal best being 3:11:26 in 2006. Having years of solid experience in running—competing at a very competitive level throughout high school and college—she always felt that running the marathon was her strongest distance. Her 2008 marathon was evidence; even with her 80+ hour work schedule, new found responsibilities as a second year resident and her cut and paste training schedule, Blair set a huge personal best of 3:07:59.

"I almost began crying when I crossed the line; I was so happy and tired. I kept checking my watch because I couldn't believe I was going to hit my goal. As soon as I finished I started thinking about my next race."

Setting the bar high after her great marathon, Blair was not sure what would be next in her running career. Her long work weeks were not going away; in fact, her work schedule was going to get even more hectic. Beginning in January, Blair was to live attached to her cell phone and pager because for the next three months she was scheduled to deliver more than 20 babies.

"It's awesome that my marathon went well because I knew that starting in January, I had a lot of work ahead of me. As a resident you are consistently learning, being rotated into different aspects of medicine, and for me, these months were going to be a new experience. I knew that I was not going to be running a spring marathon because I knew that my patients would be counting on me."

Instead, Blair looked around for a race that would fit her schedule. She wanted something interesting, fun and new. After talking with a number of people, it was suggested that she apply for the NYRR Empire State Building Run-Up. The race has a selective entry process and in order to compete in the race, one has to make a compelling case. The race is 1,576 steps (86 floors) up to the observation deck with participants often amazed at the level of fitness that goes into completing such a challenging race. To Blair's amazement, she was chosen to race in the event in her first application.

After receiving confirmation of her acceptance, Blair immediately began to train. Living on the 34th floor of a 40-story building, she sees no reason why she shouldn't have a successful race.

"Living in a building that has 40 stories was one of the main reasons I was interested in doing the Empire State Building Run-Up. I can train and still be close to the hospital. Though my work schedule is unpredictable, I still go to a nearby gym and run on the treadmill, and afterward do a few stair repeats in my building. The chance to compete in this race gives me the chance to focus on a new goal while fulfilling my responsibilities at the hospital."

So on February 3rd, at 10:30am, Dr. Blair Heinke will be lining up at the bottom of the Empire State Building ready to give it her all up those 86 floors and when all is said and done, she will have completed yet another amazing feat while working a ridiculous number of hours per week.

It should be noted that though Blair is ready for the race, she clearly understands that at any moment she could be called into the hospital to deliver a baby, forcing her to miss the race. When asked how this unknown element has affected her training, Blair responded with "I cannot live by the 'what ifs,' I can only go by what I have control over and at this moment, I have complete control over my training so I am acting as if I have a regular nine-to-five job when it comes to preparing for this race."

Truly Motivated

There is something to be said about having motivation. Blair Heinke, M.D. is an individual that does not let her daily life get in the way of her passion for running. She forces herself to train, in one way or another, each day regardless of the time of day or the amount of sleep she gets. Her dedicated method might not work for most runners but Blair can certainly be an inspiration to motivate other runners to get out the door and go for a run.

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