



★ BIRMINGHAM TRACK CLUB ★
★ WHERE RUNNERS ARE FORGED ★

THE VULCAN RUNNER



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June 2014

Issue ⑥

OFF TO JAPAN

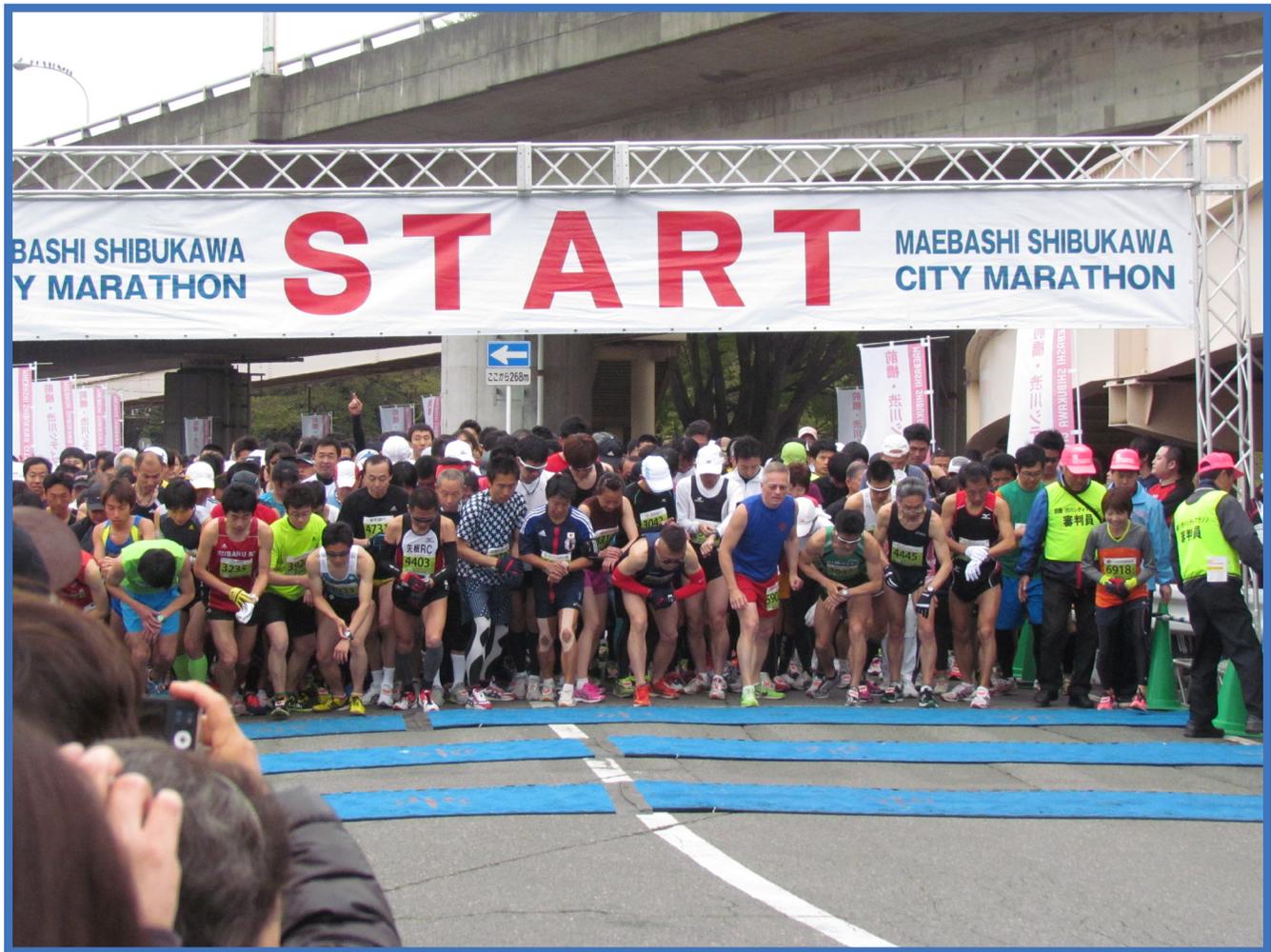
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If I were to sum up why I have taken on the task of writing this article, it would be to make more people aware of the great realm of opportunity presented each year by the Birmingham Track Club (BTC). Let me begin by explaining the basic process, then I will talk about my past and recent experiences.

A posting each January by the BTC asks for runner candidates to travel to Japan and participate in a Marathon or 10K as a representative of our fair city, Birmingham. The event takes place the 3rd Sunday in April and heralds around 6000 runners in Maebashi, Japan, a town of 340,000 (Birmingham's Friendship City) about a 2 hour drive west of Tokyo.

The BTC next selects up to 5 runners who must pay their own plane fare, but once arriving in Tokyo a team from Maebashi then takes over. The 4 to 5 days spent with them is an experience one could never forget. This I can guarantee because I have been fortunate enough to travel across the water two times now, with each time being nothing anyone could really imagine.

A team from the Mayor's office will be holding up

signs with your name as you exit the airport baggage, and then stay with you round the clock until they drop you back off Monday the day after the race. During your stay, you will be escorted around on a private bus to shrines, temples, festivals, gardens, doll factories, or a 100 yen store. You will get to officially meet the Mayor and attend a Friday night social with the International Committee. In summing up, you are the official guest of the City of Maebashi, which covers all of your expenses during your stay, including some great traditional Japanese restaurants.

Now let me briefly share a few of my own experiences. During the first trip in April 2012, myself and another runner elected to stay an additional week in Japan after the Maebashi team dropped us off in Tokyo after the marathon event. We traveled to Kamakura, Kyoto, Hiroshima, and back to Tokyo on high speed Shinkansen bullet trains. It was on our last day in Tokyo before heading back home to Alabama after watching Sumo matches that I was lucky enough to meet my future wife, Choko, a professional jazz musician. It was a major holiday in Japan called Golden Week, sporting many festivals and celebrations. I was in a crowd of



thousands and was looking for Taiyaki, a fish shaped vanilla custard filled pastry, and since she spoke great English she was able to understand and help me locate it.

Since that time, we met again in Hawaii; I traveled back to Japan to live for 3 months, and then brought her back to the United States to get married. The opportunity rose again this year to represent Birmingham and travel back to Maebashi with the BTC, so we decided that both of us should go so everyone there would know and realize the importance of this cultural exchange taking place each year between the two cities (which everyone quickly realized).

I never dreamed that my life would change and be enriched so much when I sent my application to the BTC in 2012, but even though most might not have such a story, simply traveling to Japan and learning how kind and respectful of a culture they are as well as getting to experience many new things is certainly a great reason for anyone to apply next year! It seems to be another one of those “best kept” secrets of the South, so don’t miss out! Apply next year!

Highlights of our 2014 trip with the other BTC selected runners Bradley Whited, Margaret DeHaye, and Mary Lee McMahan were getting to meet Mayor Ryu Yamamoto and hand him a gift from our Mayor William Bell, viewing cherry blossoms at the Mizusawa kanaanon temple, a traditional Japanese tea ceremony, group karaoke, and on our own to Mt. Fuji, Yokohama, and Sumo matches in Tokyo.



—Jeff Aiken

PRESIDENTS ADDRESS

—Jennifer Andress



Greetings BTC!

Summer is here, and I hope you are ready to hang out with the BTC because we have a LOT of exciting events coming up! We are very excited about the return of the Saturday Morning Moderate Run, headed up by our new Coordinator Mark Criswell. If you are looking for a regular Saturday run in the 3 to 7 mile range, this is the run for you! We thank Mark for taking this group on, and we are also so appreciative of our Saturday Morning Long Run Coordinator Natalie Ferguson. If you are training for a Half Marathon or Marathon, Natalie has you covered with weekly routes and organized water stops.

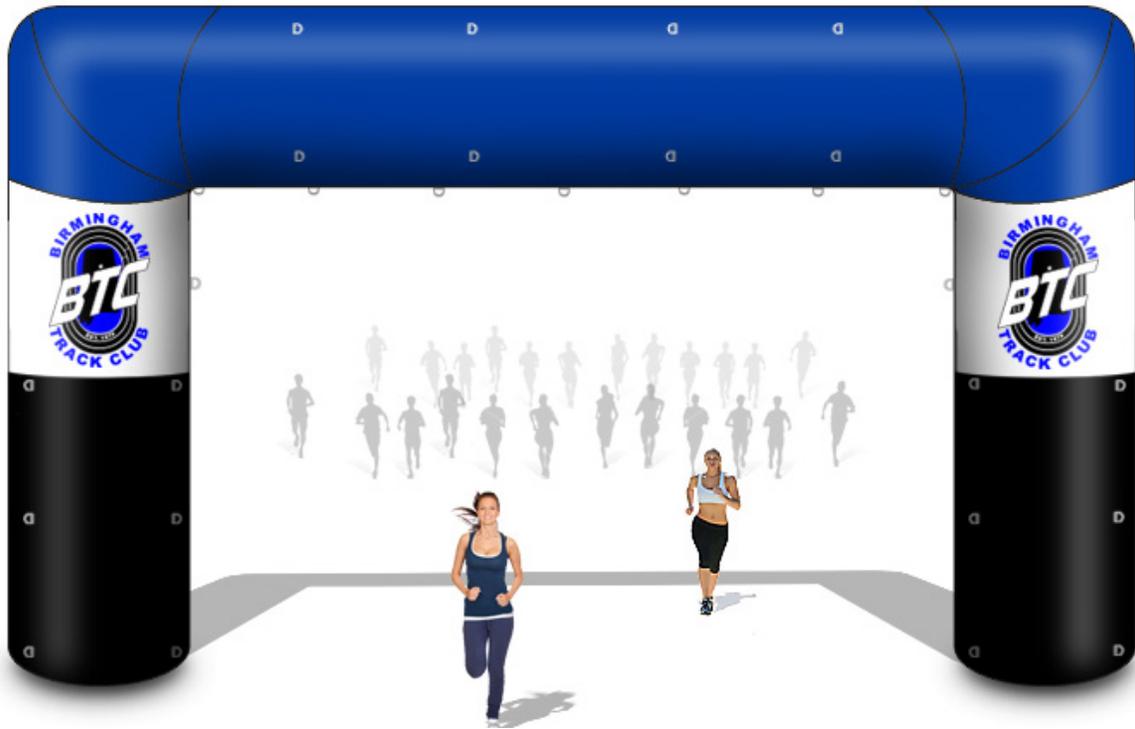
This coming Saturday, June 7, we hope you join us for our first Summer Social. Social Coordinator Katherine Dease is hard at work putting together several summer events. This Saturday we will be at Eskridge & White Physiotherapy in Homewood. They will be providing breakfast, tours of their new fitness facility and equipment for run gait analysis, and BIG door prizes. Fagan Sports Medicine and PhysIQ Life Style Medicine will also be open for touring the Bod Pod, and Metabolic and VO2 Max testing equipment.

Katherine is also putting together a big night out for the BTC at the Birmingham Barons game. Mark your calendar for July 19, when we will join our friends from Vulcan Triathletes at Regions Park. This year we will all be seated together, and will have dinner included in our ticket package. The other date for you to remember is August 16, where we will be returning to Vulcan Park for a big Vulcan Run 10km kickoff! This will be a family-friendly event, and we will keep you posted on details as we get closer to August.



We have been working on a few fun purchases that I am excited to tell you about. The first is a new line of merchandise that we will debut at the June 7 social.

Designed by Vulcan Runner Editor Andrew Nuckols, this fun shirt will come in a tech, wicking material, as well as a soft, heathered tee-shirt.



And when you join us for Peavine Falls Run on July 4th at Oak Mountain, look for this at the Finish Line. (Above)

We are so excited to have our very own Finish Line arch! Thanks to Race Coordinator Trish Portuese for doing the research on this purchase. We will be able to sell space for sponsor banners on the columns of the inflatable arch. If your business wants to purchase the naming rights to one of our races, there is a space for a large banner across the top as well. For any sponsor opportunities, please contact BTC Vice-President Alex Morrow at vp@birminghamtrackclub.com.

So as you see we have a big summer underway. And behind the scenes, plans are ongoing for Vulcan Run 10km. Race Director Danny Haralson and Assistant Race Director Allison Stone are meeting regularly for that November 8 race. If you would like to volunteer with us for Vulcan, we would love to have you. Please contact our Volunteer Coordinator Katie Pezzillo at volunteers@birminghamtrackclub.com.

Our IT Chair Alan Hargrave is doing even more behind-the-scenes work. Along with Membership Chair Jamie Witter and Member Benefit Coordinator Kemper Sarrett, Alan is moving our database over to another software program that will improve the membership process, including the delivery of your Membership card. Look for that to roll out later this month.

Our Membership numbers are very strong, picking up many new members each and every month. Treasurer Russ Hiller tells us that our financial situation is very positive. He and I met with former BTC Treasurer

and CPA Maria Cecil, and she offered us some recommendations for accounting software and practices. We thank her for her help and are appreciative of her sharing her past BTC expertise!

I also had a productive meeting with BTC member Cissy Jackson, who is a Board member for both the Mt. Brook YMCA and Birmingham Zoo. Those entities are looking at putting a walking/running trail around their properties. I look forward to seeing how that develops, and how we as BTC members can assist them in furthering our mission of educating and training of individuals in and around the community as to the benefits of running and walking for fitness, health and recreation.

In that same area, following up on the pedestrian bridge over 280 at Hollywood Boulevard, Homewood City Councilman Peter Wright tells us: "We discovered a bigger traffic problem with that bridge due to the re-routing of 280 traffic and increased apartments coming to Mtn. Brook. The Mayors and representatives from both cities are meeting with ALDOT folks to begin talks on whether a new bridge needs to be considered that can address the growing traffic problems and include a pedestrian walk way. It makes a lot of sense and we simply need to see if funding is possible in the near future. I believe that meeting with ALDOT is to take place next month." We thank Councilman Wright, and I will continue to follow this safety matter for the BTC.

So a lot is going on with your club, BTC members! We look forward to seeing you at one of our summer socials, and at our upcoming races!

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BTC Mission Statement

The primary purpose of the Birmingham Track Club (BTC) shall be the education and training of individuals in and around the community of Birmingham, AL, as to the benefits of jogging, running, and walking for fitness, health, and recreation.

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Race Results

Find the latest and most complete local race results at the following:

birminghamtrackclub.com
trakshak.com run42k.com

DIRTY RUNNING

—*David Tosh*

**THE LAKE MARTIN 100,
WHERE RUNNERS
GO TO HEAVEN**

The Lake Martin 100 was held March 29th and 30th. Conditions were as bad, as anything I have seen in 15 years of trail running. Over 6 inches of rain had fallen on the Lake Martin area in the two weeks before the race and between 2.5 and 3.5 inches fell during the two hours before the start and continued to fall most of the morning. Of the 48 that actually started the 100 only 19 were able to finish, and two of those were over the 30 hour cutoff. One of those finishers was a pretty amazing 19 year old runner that should be an inspiration to us all.

His name is Dominic Collins and he is from Ladson, South Carolina. I asked him to send his bio and I will just quote him. "I'm 19 years old now and have been running since I was about thirteen. I ran cross country and track through middle school and high school. I ran my first marathon at age 16 and my second at age 17; that's where I really found out that I loved distance running. I then went on to run cross country and track in college my freshman year but decided to take this year off so that I could run my first ultra-marathon which is what led me to the Lake Martin 100 and one of the most personally rewarding experiences of my life!" While this in itself is an amazing accomplishment for anyone his age, this is not what makes his story so amazing.

Dominic did not make the cutoff at Heaven Hill. I asked that he be brought back to the finish since it was almost 12:30 PM, the race cutoff, per our agreement with Russell Lands and the Russell Forest Trail System. Dominic asked to be allowed to continue. At first I said that was not possible due to our agreement with Russell. After being told just how determined he was to finish the 100 I decided there was really no reason to stop him. He had signed a release with Russell giving him permission to use the Russell Forest Trail System. I explained that his finish would not be official but that he was welcome to continue. I talked with his parents and to be sure this was all OK with them and explained that we had to pack up the aid station and leave the Stables. They agreed to wait for him and provide him with water and food so he could continue.

A little later, Marye Jo and I went up to Catherine's to eat and Dominic's mother and step-father, Terry Rhone, were there eating lunch. (Terry ran the 50 and is the inspiration behind Dominic's running.) Dominic was by then on the final 7 mile leg headed for the finish. There was no doubt Dominic would finish so I gave Terry his 100 Mile Finisher Shirt and Buckle. He certainly earned them. Technically he may not have been an "official finisher," but as far as I am concerned, there was no one running the 100 mile race that deserved that buckle any more than Dominic.



Way to go Dominic. His official "unofficial" time was 34:28:00.

Dominic coming up the final hill to the finish.

We had so much fun putting on the race and it was great to meet all the people that came in from around the US. We had 94 runners from a total of 18 states other than Alabama. Almost 200 runners started the three races. I hope you all return next year and run with us again. Whatever happens next year, there is at least a 99.9% chance it will be an improvement over 2014's conditions.

STATUE TO STATUE

— by Judy Loo

The 24rd Annual Statue to State 15K on April 19, 2014 was an incredible race! With cooperative weather, a great turn out, and dedicated volunteers, we couldn't have asked for a more awesome day. Thank you to Michele Parr, Debbie Cleghorn, Trish Portuese, Kemper Sarrett and all the wonderful volunteers who helped put this event together. Thank you also to our sponsors who made this race possible: Thomas Waters of State Farms, Jack King from Crestline Shell, Craig Martin from Liberty Animal Hospitals, Orange Therapy, BTC and the Trak Shak. This was a banner year for Statute to Statute participants: the 568 registrations and 537 finishers in this year's race likely is the most we have had since I took over as the race director 11 years ago. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think the "The South's Toughest 15K" would become such a huge success and a totally fun event.

As the race director, I have met so many runners who are now my friends. I remember one year, to my amazement, one of the overall finishers came across the finish line pushing a stroller. Ellis Porch pushed a stroller up and down the course's many hills with his young son, finishing 2nd overall, with an impressive 53:21 in 2006. Ellis Porch was an outstanding runner who had many friends in Birmingham running community. Tragically, due to a sudden incident in 2007, Ellis is no longer with us. He left behind a young wife and son, Ellis IV, who is now nine years. In 2008 the Statue to Statue race was rebranded as The Ellis Porch Statue to Statue to honor his memory and his running accomplishments in the community.

The Statute to Statute race committee has started our planning efforts to make the Statue to Statue 15K even bigger and better for 2015. If you have any suggestions, we would love to hear from you – please email me at: judyloo1@yahoo.com. Let's make The Ellis Porch Statue to Statue 2015 an even better race. Our race date is: April 18, 2015, so mark your calendars. I hope to see you next year!

Ellis Porch 2006 2nd overall with the time of 53:21.



Ellis Porch IV at 9 years old

SEND US YOUR PICTURES WITH YOUR BTC APPAREL



*Former BTC Secretary Mitzi
Duer-Savelis with twins Jack and
Hannah*



*Whitney Cahoy and
Michael Gann at the
Indianapolis half marathon*

SEND US YOUR PICTURES WITH YOUR BTC APPAREL



*Justin Zehnder at the Blue Ridge Half
Marathon in Roanoke, VA.*



*Rick Stockton, Rome Marathon
Rome, Italy (Above)*



Lisa and Amory Booher

*Barry Casey at the
Alaskan Chena River 5k*



SEND US YOUR PICTURES WITH YOUR BTC APPAREL



Vintage BTC apparel from the original Trak Shak, which is celebrating 19 years of business!



Suman Silwal at the Nashville Rock and Roll Marathon



The Harris family, including BTC members Skip, Kendall and Vickie, out for a Mother's Day run at Peavine Falls. Training for our July 4th Peavine Falls race!



Olivia Affuso and friends at the Girls on the Run 5km

SEND US YOUR PICTURES WITH YOUR BTC APPAREL



*This is from the Alexandria VA Running festival held on May 25, 2014.
Rod and Stephanie Robinson*



Lester Gable after taking overall 1st overall male in Judicia 5k Panama City

SEND US YOUR PICTURES WITH YOUR BTC APPAREL



*Jimmy Stout, Lisa Booher and Greg Dill
at Red Mt*

*BTC Finishline Cordinator Tanya Sylvan, Lisa
Booher, Bob Huie*



Team MRuns!



***Bob Huie- first run back after completing chemotherapy!
Congratulations and Godspeed, Bob!***

SEND US YOUR PICTURES WITH YOUR BTC APPAREL

We want to see where you have been running, representing the BTC! Email photos to:

president@birminghamtrackclub.com



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On August 2, 2014 the Anniston Runners Club presents...

Benefiting the East Central Alabama United Cerebral Palsy Center, Special Olympics & others!



Wood **stock** **5k**
2014 RRCA
Southern Region
Championship

**\$3,400 IN
CASH PRIZES**

**Including
Masters
Winners!**

**\$750
Cash Prize
Team**



Hotter 'N Hell Trail Race

9 Mile & 18 Mile Races

July 26, 2014

Oak Mountain State Park

4th Race of the Southeastern Trail Series

1200 MILE CLUB

—by Alison Hoover

May 2014 Club Updates

With the end of May comes the end of enrollment into the 1200 Mile Club for 2014, and the numbers show that we have close to 270 runners who have logged almost 109,000 miles. That means that collectively, we have already run around the world 4.5 times this year! I hope that everyone took “selfies”!

May is always an interesting month for runners, and I discovered that it was listed as National Runners Month back in 2010 by Dick’s Sporting Goods in a marketing campaign, (and actually has its own Facebook Page), but I am not sure how official this actually is. May includes many spring marathons and ultras, and is also a month of recovery before runners crank up the training for fall marathons. As many school age runners finished out their track season at the collegiate and high school levels, the elementary levels got to experience their first meets and are now excited to launch themselves into the summer cross country training season and running camps. A whole new crop of runners is starting to bloom! This month has also offered a smorgasbord of shorter distance and trail races, and we are so fortunate in our running community to be able to jump on any local running website, and be faced with the dilemma of which race to run on any given weekend.

For me personally, this month has been one of recovery which fit in well with family responsibilities, as well as educational opportunities. I had been on waiting lists to attend a run coaching course at various locations in the country, and suddenly the RRCA offered the two day course here in Birmingham-SCORE! The course was attended by runners from all over the country and from so many different backgrounds, and our local runners made up a large portion of the class. A really fun take away from the experience was that the national course manual featured a photo of the Vulcan race start line, and our very own Scott Strand’s race photo was the example of perfect running form. Birmingham represents again!

Both of the instructors were incredible, with backgrounds in Urology and Veterinary medicine (not to mention a few masters degrees in virtually every scientific field), and offered great contrast, as one was a youth track

star, and the other an accomplished distance runner who began later in life. Running is a journey, and this very informative course certainly didn’t make me an instant expert on run coaching in 48 hours (nor should it), but addressed very well the issues that we all face as runners (nutrition, volume, speed, sports psychology, safety, balance etc.), and reinforced how important it is to coach runners responsibly, and how influential a great run coach can be. It also reinforced that we are so fortunate in our area to have the opportunity to participate in so many running programs with such a variety of informed coaches, and what an impact they can make on our lives and the next generation of runners.

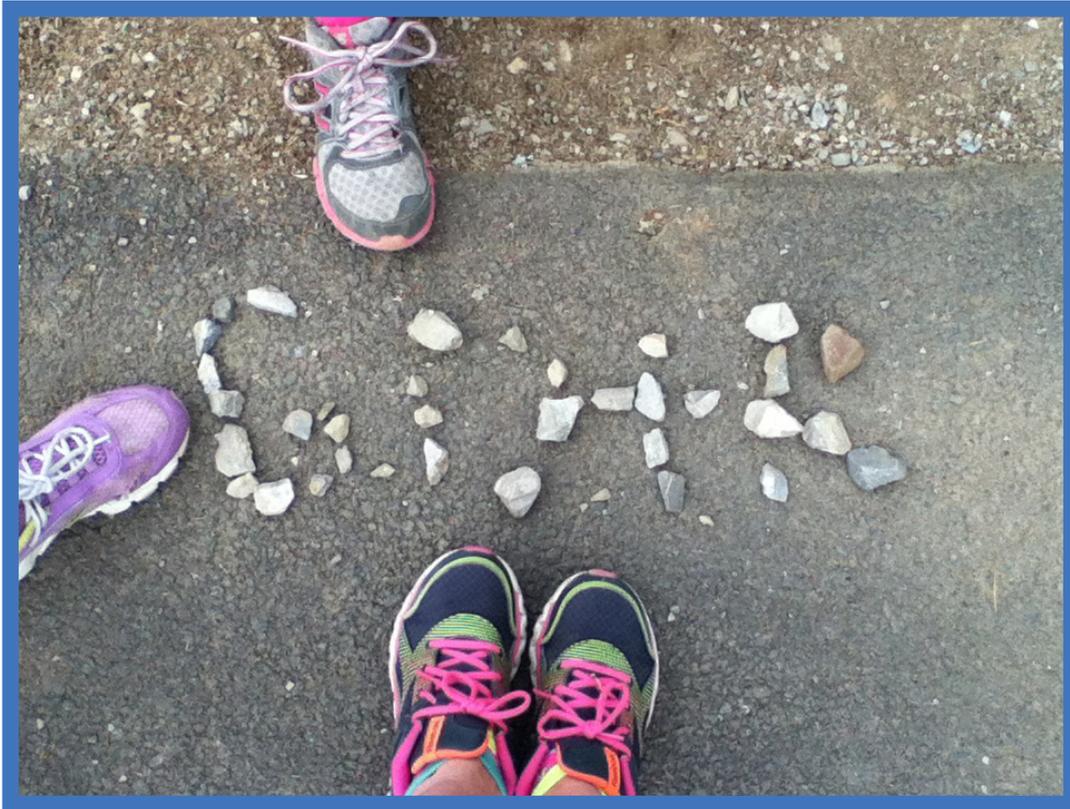
In choosing a quote to summarize the month of May and to inspire our 1200 Mile Club members to crush their goals, I am not going to troll the internet, but instead be completely self indulgent and quote from a speech given by my daughter last week. (I hope you will forgive me, and I hope she doesn’t kill me!). Her speech focused in part on what a huge, positive influence her running team, and specifically her coach, have had on her life thus far, and how much running has taught her about life and living.

“ I am beginning to truly understand the meaning of perseverance through hardship. Being presented with challenges in life is not a reason to pity oneself, or even an opportunity to become a better and stronger person. Instead, choosing to fight back against these obstacles is what living truly is. Living life, as opposed to merely muddling through it, is making the conscious decision to resist the urge to give up and choosing to fight instead.”

So everyone get out there and challenge yourself while logging those miles! June is here, and don’t forget to remind your friends who may be new to running, or thinking about starting, that June 4th is National Running Day!

GIRLS ON THE RUN

— by Rebecca Smith



Surrounded by pink and teal, in a sea of tutus, tiaras and capes, I reached down to grab her hand. I wasn't grabbing out of fear, although some may have found this situation incredibly scary or intimidating, but no, I was reaching out in excitement and anticipation.

On Saturday, May 10th, I had the extreme privilege of acting as a running buddy to a Girl on the Run. Not only was she on the team I was lucky enough to coach, but she was also a student in my fourth grade class. I couldn't have been happier to stand there holding her hand in a crowded sea of people, all there honoring these incredible little girls.

She had never participated in any sort of race before, much less a 5K. She was a little bit nervous, anxious with all of the people around and the journey we were about to embark on. Despite her quiet nature in the classroom, her apprehension was soon replaced by an ear-to-ear smile. She was excited and ready to run!

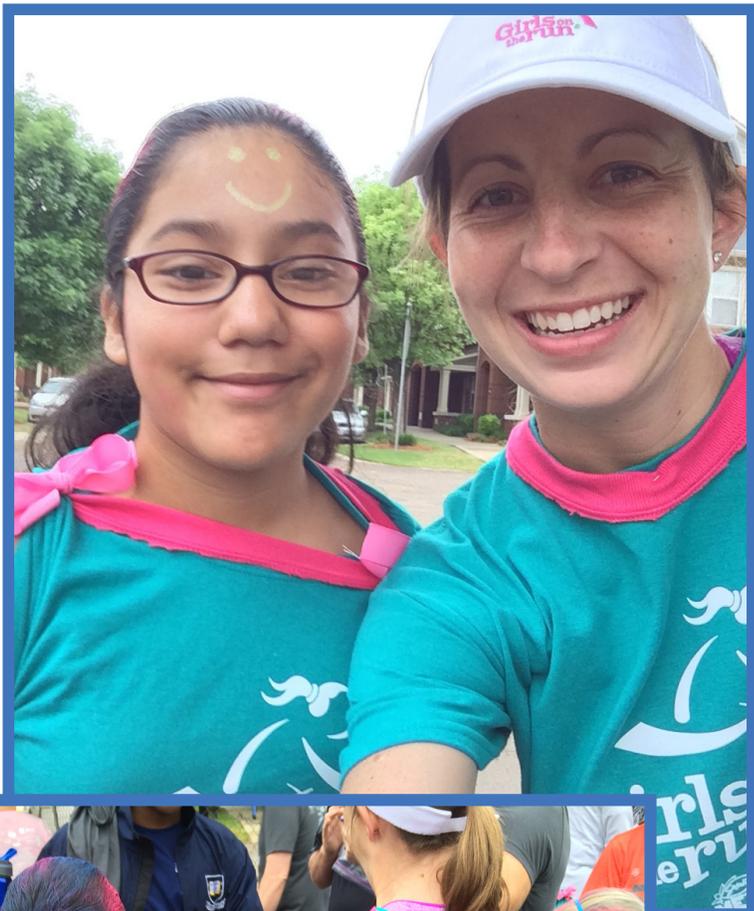
The buzzer sounded and we made our way, hand in hand, to the starting line. We took off, surrounded by other girls from around the city, all with eager grins as they started with a fast pace.

Throughout our three-mile journey, we walked a fair amount, but always kept moving forward. The times we walked were times for us to talk or perhaps even visit with fellow teammates and even make some new friends along the way. There were times for her that I know those three-miles seemed endless, but her smile never dwindled.

Then, we rounded the corner where we could see the finish line up ahead, and although she was tired, she took off, eager to prove to everyone (but mostly herself) that she could do it. We ran through the throngs of cheering mothers, fathers, teammates, friends and supporters, who were calling out to her and encouraging her along those final few steps. Then I watched as she was donned with a medal, signifying her completion of the 5K.

I realize that it is incredibly corny and a bit ridiculous for me to say this, but something magical happens at that moment: that moment when a young girl, one who has never been chosen first for a sports team, crosses a 5K line. The sense of accomplishment and pride seem to radiate from the young girl. It's a feeling I wish I could bottle, a feeling I wish I could spread amongst all young girls (all people for that matter!).

Unfortunately, there is not a way to bottle it. But I know where you can find some for yourself. Join us, in late November and watch these girls cross the finish line with smiles that seem to go on for days. Sign up to be a running buddy to encourage a young girl on through the three-mile journey, or stand at the finish line and cheer and holler knowing you are watching a girl grow in her self confidence.



BTC MINUTES

April 15, 2014

Attendance:

Judy Loo, Trish, Tanya Sylvan, Ali Hoover, Natalie Ferguson, Jennifer Andress, Katherine Dease, Julie Elmer, Allison Stone, Kelly McNair

Agenda

Membership (Jennifer for Jamie)

To date: ~ 1170; activity since social on April 12: 11 new members, 7 new race series, 10-12 signed up for Statue 2 Statue

Social (Katherine)

1. June 7 – Eskridge and White: we will tour their new run-gait analysis room; set-up in the parking lot. JA will coordinate with E and W
2. Barons: options are not cheap (networking, seating and food)
 - a. Saturday, July 19
 - b. \$23.00 adult ticket; \$19.00 kid – includes food and secluded area
 - c. homerun porch – next to kid zone; minimum of 100 and a deposit is required 2 weeks prior to event (\$2300.00)
 - d. picnic terrace – price is same; minimum of 31
 - e. ask sponsor for a keg of beer? – as long as there is a server.
 - f. BTC will help cover costs of tickets: \$10.00/ticket for BTC members; \$23.00/ticket for non-member

*Do we notify RRCA when we have a race, event, weekly runs? It is required that we tell them everything that we do for insurance coverage. Needs: certificate for events as well as additional insurance for Boutwell, police. Do we complete an application for each event? We do not have to alert them of every single event. Upfront, we let them know of weekly runs, quarterly socials and each race needs to go out individually.

Statue 2 Statue

1. 357 registered
2. 100+ race series
3. Shirts should be coming in tomorrow
4. Parking is an issue: no one is allowed to park in deck of infinity insurance company. We can park around deck and around building but not in deck. Boy scouts are allowing us to use their space
5. Buses will be located in front of animal hospital and piggly wiggly. We have 5 buses. 1st one leaves at 6:30, each bus holds 48. Drivers have a map but Judy would like a volunteer on each bus to help direct. Last bus pulls out at 7:30. Encourage runners to carpool.
6. 'V' at the start and finish line. What time? 7:30 at the start. How long at finish line? until 10:00
7. Paul Demarco to start the race with the horn.
8. Prayer for Boston Marathon and racers?

9. 11:00 – awards ceremony
10. Club members are donating beer
11. Help needed? Parking,
12. Pre-registered are guaranteed their shirt size
13. Mile markers were ordered and will be here
14. We sold a sponsorship – orange fitness (\$250.00)
15. Packet pick-up will be at the Trak Shak from 10:30-close.
16. Do we need to set up a BTC tent at Trak Shak? Yes. How do we transport it from TS to finish line? Tanya will coordinate with Kemper.
17. Tracy Pool – covering the 3 water stops. He has tables and coolers. Michele Parr is coordinating who is manning them.
18. We need 6 tables and 8 coolers for finish line. Kemper will help Tanya with set-up.

Positions

Moderate Run coordinator – Mark Criswell – coming on in May

Apparel

Inventory – need women’s mediums. JA will access inventory.

BTC business (Julie and Jennifer)

1. Directors will sign existing articles. Club has not been incorporated in the past. Move to incorporate and take to the courthouse on Thursday. \$28.00 to reserve name – done. \$263.00 to incorporate. Priv-ledge tax form?? JA will coordinate with accountant Marie Cecil to review our books.
2. Articles of Incorporation – revised to be consistent with existing by-laws. Vote to adopt in substantial form – allows for room to be tweaked. We will be moving to incorporate and adopt the articles that have been drafted and a motion to approve the money to file to incorporate with county and state. Motion to spend \$263.00 - approved. Motion to approve articles - approved.
3. Japan – leaving tomorrow.
4. Minutes – should they be published in the newsletter or website? Yes, on the website. Announce to members (within the newsletter) that anyone is allowed to add an agenda item. Proper procedures should be followed: submit a request to the secretary. Board meetings are the 3rd Tuesday of each month. If you would like to be included on the agenda or add an item to the agenda, contact secretary@birminghamtrackclub.com

Meeting adjourned.

RUNNING RAMBLINGS

— Compiled by Randy Lyle



Quotes

“Like the marathon, life can sometimes be difficult, challenging and present obstacles, however if you believe in your dreams and never ever give up, things will turn out for the best.”

~ *Meb Keflezighi*

“But I also realize that winning doesn’t always mean getting first place; it means getting the best out of yourself. One of my greatest joys is inspiring other people to perform at their best.”

~ *Meb Keflezighi*

“I have an Olympic medal. I won New York. Before today I felt my career was 90% accomplished. There was one gap. Now I’ve won Boston, and I feel 110% accomplished.”

~ *Meb Keflezighi, after winning the 2014 Boston Marathon*

“As an athlete, you have dreams, and today is where the dream and reality meet. I was just crying at the end. This is probably the most meaningful victory for an American, just because of what happened. It’s Patriots Day.”

~ *Meb Keflezighi, reflecting on winning the 2014 Boston Marathon*

“Just when there was a need for another American hero in our sport, along came Meb. He epitomizes everything this sport stands for – courage, determination, commitment, and above all, respect. There is no better role model in our sport than Meb Keflezighi.”

~ *Dave McGillivray, B.A.A. Boston Marathon Race Director*

Ramblings

The Boston Marathon Boston Strong

In previous columns, I have written about a couple of my running heroes, Terry Fox and Team Hoyt (Dick and Rick). I decided this month to write about another one of my heroes, Meb Keflezighi. In addition to being one of my running heroes, I am blessed to also call Meb and his brother, Merhawi, my friends. We often see world-class athletes and have an impression that they are so far removed from us that we could never have the chance to actually meet them.

In my case, a chance meeting at the expo for the Zappos Las Vegas Rock ‘n’ Roll Marathon/Half Marathon in 2010 developed into a friendship. I was at that race with my good friend, David Kahn. We saw someone just standing in the expo talking with a couple of runners and thought it looked like “the guy” that won the ING New York City Marathon the year before. We introduced ourselves and were happy to learn that it was indeed Meb. When he discovered that we were from Birmingham, he told us that our city held a special place in his heart. In 2004, he qualified for the Athens Olympic Games at the Marathon Olympic Trials in Birmingham. He was the runner-up at those trials and went on to win a Silver Medal in Athens. We ran into him and met Merhawi a month later at the expo for the P.F. Chang’s Arizona Rock ‘n’ Roll Marathon/Half Marathon in Phoenix. From there, our friendship grew.

Meb visited Birmingham back in November 2012 and spent a few days meeting and running with a number of our local runners. There was a meet-and-greet event benefitting his charity, MEB Foundation (Maintaining Excellent Balance), at David’s house one night. There was also a book signing at Aloft in Homewood another night where many people got the opportunity to talk with Meb as he autographed

their books and posed for pictures. David even went to London to be Meb's "gopher" during the 2012 Olympic Games, where Meb was the top U.S. marathoner with a fourth place finish after winning the trials earlier that year in Houston. For this January's Houston Marathon/Half Marathon, David and I had the opportunity to act as Meb's handlers for the weekend when Merhawi had to go back home unexpectedly. Seeing Meb interact with runners of all skill levels gave me some insight into just how humble he is. He never turned down a request for a picture or autograph, even when we were pushing him to his next appearance. While in Houston, he also won the U.S. Half Marathon Championship (his 22nd career national championship). On top of that, he came back out on the course to run David in as he finished the half marathon and he ran me in as I finished the marathon later in the day. He did that even though he ran and won his own race earlier that morning. While standing near the finish line, he also congratulated and high-fived other runners as they finished their race. As always, he was uplifting and encouraging to everyone he encountered.

Probably the highlight of Meb's career (from my selfish perspective) is his win at this year's 118th Boston Marathon on 21 April. Not only did he become the first American in thirty-one years to win this prestigious event, but he also did it by running his personal best of 2:08:37. In my opinion, Meb was just what Boston needed following the tragic events that occurred the year before. At this point, I should mention that he was just a couple weeks shy of his 39th birthday when he won. I noted that this is a selfish highlight for me and that is because I was there. Of course, I did not see him finish since I was still on the course at the time. In fact, Meb was close to mile 20 when I started, but I got to run the majority of that race knowing that he had won thanks to the thousands of spectators lining the course. I could not have been more happy or proud.

While in Boston, a few of us were fortunate to spend some time with Meb the night before the marathon. Jack Burnette and his wife, Barbara, along with me and my wife, Caroline, visited Meb in his hotel room for a few minutes on that Sunday night. This was also when we met Meb's wife, Yordanos, for the first time face-to-face. We found Meb very comfortable and relaxed in his room. Jack said a prayer for Meb as we were planning to leave so Meb could get some rest. Before we left his room, Meb asked if we wanted to take a picture. Of course, we said yes. The next thing we

know, he is pulling two boxes out of the safe in the room. When he opens them, one contained his 2009 New York City Marathon Championship Medal and the other held his 2004 Olympic Silver Medal. He let Jack wear the Silver Medal and he let me wear the NYC Medal in the picture. That was a huge honor for the two of us.



Jack and I told Merhawi after we left Meb's room that we thought he was confident in his training and that he expected to run well the next day. We hoped it would be well enough to win since the elite field was strong this year. When he won, it made the whole trip for me. My race became secondary. Of course, it meant we lost our dinner partners for Monday night when he won. Apparently, Meb had a few obligations that went along with being the Boston Marathon Champion.

I think it is safe to say that Meb is a favorite of the Birmingham running community. A number of Birmingham runners have raised money for the MEB Foundation through various races: Alison Burnette, David Kahn, Joey Longoria, LB Mitchell, Carrie Patterson and me. We have adopted Meb as one of us. You only had to look at Facebook during and after the Boston Marathon to see that the vast majority of posts were about Meb. It was more than the obligatory congratulations. Runners were posting pictures that they had taken with Meb when he visited here. Others were sharing their stories about interacting with him at one time or another. There were plenty of "generic" congratulatory posts on Facebook, but the tone of the Birmingham posts was much more personal. That is just indicative of the type of person Meb is. He



genuinely cares when he speaks with people and just wants to encourage them to “Run to Win.” That is his way of telling people to be the very best they can be. I have heard him tell that to so many people.

If you have not read Meb’s book, *Run to Overcome*, I highly encourage you to buy it or borrow it from someone. It is an inspirational story about his journey from humble beginnings to winner of the New York City Marathon. Without giving too much away, you will learn about how his father escaped their home country of Eritrea and made it to Italy to save his family during the thirty-year war between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Meb’s father had to flee the country because his life was threatened by the Ethiopian regime. He worked for four years in Italy as a laborer to get his family out of Eritrea so they could join him. After their reunion in Italy, the family immigrated two years later in 1987 to San Diego. Meb was twelve-years-old at that time. Despite a significant language barrier, Meb and his ten siblings persevered and thrived by making education their top priority. The Keflezighi kids hold eight undergraduate degrees, a MBA, a MD, a JD, etc. I would say they have become very productive members of society since their arrival in this country. Meb earned his U.S. citizenship in 1998 and has represented our country in numerous international competitions, including three Olympic Games and several World Championships.

Meb embodies what can be accomplished when one takes advantage of the opportunities presented to them. His story of dealing with both struggle and success can teach us all what it means to persevere through anything life throws our way. For distance runners, Meb has become a role model that rejuvenated interest in their sport.

I consider it a privilege and honor to call Meb a friend. It is not so much because of his running accomplishments,

which are numerous, but because he is such a fine Christian family man. You only have to be around him for a few minutes to realize that he really does care about others. The world could use more people like him and Merhawi.

The following are just some of Meb’s running accomplishments:

- **Olympic Marathon – 2004 (Silver Medal in Athens), 2012 (4th in London)**
- **Boston Marathon – 2014 (Champion), 2006 (3rd), 2010 (5th)**
- **New York City Marathon – 2009 (Champion), 2004 (2nd), 2005 (3rd), 2010 (6th), 2011 (6th), 2002 (9th)**
- **London Marathon – 2009 (9th)**
- **Chicago Marathon – 2003 (7th)**
- **USA Marathon Champion – 2009**
- **USA Half Marathon Champion – 2009, 2014**
- **USA Cross Country Champion – 2001, 2002, 2009**
- **USA Olympic 10,000m Trials Champion – 2000, 2004**
- **USA Olympic Marathon Trials – 2012 (Champion), 2004 (2nd)**
- **USA 15k Champion – 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2007**
- **USA 10,000m Champion – 2000, 2002, 2004**
- **22-time USA Champion (16 roads, 3 tracks, 3 cross-country)**
- **Former U.S. 10,000m record holder (27:13.98 set in 2001)**
- **Inducted into the UCLA Hall of Fame in Fall 2010**

