MORE THAN A SPORT: AN IN-DEPTH EXPLORATION OF RUNNING

Patrick O’Donnell

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Committee:
Adviser: Dr. Richard Cole
Reader: Assistant Professor Paul Cuadros
Reader: Walter E. Hussman Sr. Distinguished Scholar Chris Roush
ABSTRACT

PATRICK O’DONNELL: More Than a Sport: A Feature Article Series on Running
(Under the direction of Dr. Richard Cole, Paul Cuadros and Chris Roush)

The sport of running has boomed during the last 20 years. The number of runners completing road races has gone from 3.7 million in 1987 to 8.9 million in 2007. In five articles, this master’s thesis examines various aspects of the sport. The first article is about a team of women runners in Chapel Hill that helps raise money for health and education projects in a small village in Tanzania. The second article discusses severe running injuries and how runners deal with them. The third article is an examination of running shoes. The fourth article tells the story of a woman who uses running to help alleviate the symptoms of depression. The fifth article is a behind-the-scenes look at how a road race is organized. The thesis aims to explore running in-depth and show that it is more than just a form of exercise.
To my mother Kathleen and my late father Joseph. I owe you the world. I hope this makes you a little bit proud.
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Thank you.
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Introduction

Running is one of the most basic human activities. From small children to marathoners in their 90s, it can be done by people of all ages. People run for many reasons. Some run to push their bodies to the limit, others simply to maintain fitness. It can be the most solitary of activities or a social event. Given the high rates of obesity in America, it can help people lead more healthy lives. Running is good for mental health as well. Studies have shown that aerobic activity can be as beneficial to those suffering depression as medication.

Running for sport dates back more than 2,000 years to the ancient Olympic Games in Greece. The popularity of running among everyday people is much more recent. After visiting New Zealand in the early-1960s and seeing average people jogging to stay fit, Bill Bowerman, legendary track coach at the University of Oregon, wanted to spread the gospel of the activity’s benefits to Americans. He wrote the book *Jogging* (1967) along with cardiologist W.E. Harris, which went on to sell more than a million copies and is credited with starting the running boom in America.

The boom continues today. In 2007, 8.9 million Americans ran a road race, a record and an increase of 4 percent from 2006, according to Running USA, a nonprofit organization that promotes running around the country. For comparison, 3.7 million
people ran races in 1987. From 2000 to 2007, the number of finishers at marathons across the country rose by almost 100,000. Most astonishing may be women’s participation. In 1987, more than 790,000 women finished road races. In 2007, almost 4.4 million women ran events. Women now make up 50 percent of runners at races.

It is simple to do -- one foot in front of the other -- yet startlingly complex. Biomechanists, who study the human body in motion, have devoted countless hours to researching how the human body moves while running. Coaches and athletes continue to adapt their methods as new evidence emerges on how to train for races. The science of doping and the measures taken to fight it are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Publications such as *Runner’s World* and *Running Times* cater to runners who crave stories and information about the sport.

The economics of running are staggering. Bowerman, the track coach who wrote *Jogging*, used his wife’s waffle iron to make new sneakers. Putting rubber into the iron, he tried to mold a synthetic sole that would grip the ground and be cheap to produce. From this humble beginning, Bowerman went on to found Nike in the early-1960s. For the fiscal year ending in 2007, the company had more than $16 billion in total revenue, becoming the most recognized sports apparel brand in the world. It has branched out to include almost every sport, but Nike’s roots are firmly in running. It is not alone, however. Companies such as New Balance, Asics, Saucony and Mizuno have made running a multibillion-dollar industry. The companies pour millions into research to make the perfect running shoe because footwear is critical in helping prevent injuries.

As with any vigorous physical activity, injuries are common. Almost all runners eventually experience an injury. Runner’s knee, shin splints, tendonitis, iliotibial-band
syndrome and stress fractures are some of the most common ailments. A new pair of shoes or a few days off is enough for some of them. Others linger for years and require extensive rehabilitation or even surgery. A few are so devastating that people must give up the sport entirely. Massive amounts of scholarship have been devoted to the prevention and rehabilitation of running injuries. Orthopedists and physical therapists are on the front line in the fight against runner’s ailments. Running’s benefits clearly outweigh its potential downsides, especially in light of the lack of fitness across the country.

The health situation of Americans may further boost running’s popularity. In 2007, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that more than 30 percent of adults qualify as obese. Obesity is defined by body mass index, a calculation based on height and weight. Obesity levels among children aged 12-19 was 5 percent from 1976-80. That number jumped to more than 17 percent in 2003-04. Hospitals, public health officials, and federal, state and local governments are scrambling to deal with this situation because of the health problems associated with being overweight.

Despite running’s boom, the number of Americans in races is low. According to a study by Running USA, regular runners number somewhere between eight and 16 million people. Most Americans lead sedentary lifestyles. They drive to most places they go, and they get little exercise, period. But as the weight epidemic continues, more people may be forced to reevaluate their lifestyles. Part of any healthy life is exercise, and many Americans may look to walking and running as an efficient way of building muscle and controlling their weight.
This series will take an in-depth look at various aspects of the sport. The obesity epidemic makes health and wellness issues more important than ever. Running is a simple and efficient way for people to get fit. The federal government released new guidelines in 2008 that recommend that Americans exercise 150 minutes a week at a moderate to high-intensity level. If more Americans ran, it would cut down on many of the problems and costs of being overweight. But as the sport grows, more people will face running-related injuries. Running is also a booming industry. Americans spend millions every year on sneakers, apparel and entrance fees. All of these factors make it a topic worthy of study.
Literature review

Academic journals

People run for a variety of reasons. Some people run for health and wellness, some for competition, still others to be social. People run to escape a busy day and relieve stress. They run to help them grieve. They run to help them make a decision. They run because they love it, or they run even though they hate it. Whatever their reasons, they continue to put one foot in front of the other. And their numbers are growing.

Running USA, a nonprofit organization that promotes running, carried out a study in 2007 to find out who typical runners were. It sent out surveys to more than 30 organizations around the country. More than 8,000 runners replied. The runners who responded were “more active adult participants who tend to enter running events, buy three pairs of running shoes a year, run on the road or on trails, frequent specialty running stores and read Runner’s World magazine” (Lammpa, 2008, para. 1). The organization estimated that America has 10 million runners (Lammpa, 2008).

Women are the majority of this group, 52 percent, reflecting their increased participation in the sport since the 1980s. The women’s median age is 39, and 62 percent are married. The women are well-off, with 64 percent having an annual income of at least $75,000. They are also well-educated, with almost 80 percent having an undergraduate
degree and 42 percent a postgraduate degree. More than 65 percent have been running five years or more, and 55 percent have run at least one marathon. Most women, 65 percent, run four days a week. More than 50 percent run at least 20 miles a week (Lamppa, 2008).

The typical male constitutes 48 percent of core runners. He is a bit older than the typical female at 45, and 74 percent of the males are married. The men are also well-off, with 76 percent having an income of more than $75,000 and 57 percent having an income of more than $100,000. They are also well-educated, with 80 percent having a college degree and 37 percent a postgraduate degree. They have been running longer than their female counterparts: 60 percent 10 years or more. More than two-thirds run at least four days a week; 64 percent run at least 20 miles a week (Lamppa, 2008).

The study is the most comprehensive on American runners over the last few years. But these numbers do not consider all runners and the study makes no such claims. It is difficult to get a truly accurate picture of who runs, because it is a highly individual sport that requires little organization. Many people run but are not affiliated with a running organization. Although it would be difficult to get statistics on this non-affiliated group, it would give a better picture of who runs.

What drives the most dedicated to run every day? Writer Haruki Murakami is an avowed running enthusiast. He wrote a book in 2008 called “What I Talk About When I Talk About Running.” He began running in his early 30s to lose weight. He owned a jazz club, kept odd hours and smoked up to 60 cigarettes a day. Since taking up the sport, he has quit smoking, lived a healthier life, and run 27 marathons. Murakami says running keeps his mind sharp and makes him a better writer. He claims that artists have to reach
into a dark place in their soul, and if they are not physically healthy it can consume them. He cites artists such as Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin and Jim Morrison as examples of artists who met an early fate due to an unhealthy lifestyle (Der Spiegel, 2008).

In a study American marathoners published in 2003, the reasons why people ran were varied. Questionnaires were distributed to 1,519 racers. After studying the data, the authors split runners into five groups. The largest group, 28 percent, was called the Personal Accomplishers. They ran not for weight control or as a way to control negative emotions but simply for enjoyment. The second-largest group was called Lifestyle Managers, comprising 25 percent. This group looked at running as a manner of controlling weight and as a way to deal with negative emotions. They were more likely to train alone and were not interested in the competitive aspect of running. This group also had a high proportion of females. The third-largest group was called Competitive Achievers: 17 percent. Their primary reason for running was competition, self-esteem and health. They tended to be young males and were the most likely to train twice a day (Ogles, 2003).

The fourth-largest group, Running Enthusiasts, made up 16 percent of the sample. This group was overwhelmingly female. The most important reasons for running were health, self-esteem and personal goals, although they were enthusiastic about most aspects of the sport. They were also the most likely to run with other people. The smallest group was Personal Goal Achievers: 12 percent. They were most interested in running fast times and getting the most out of their bodies. They were not competitive against other runners, only with themselves. They trained the most miles and had a high proportion of young males (Ogles, 2003).
This study, while thorough, is a small subset of runners. According to the Running USA survey of American runners, only a fraction of runners completes a marathon, or about 4.6 percent (412,000 people) of the runners they questioned (Lammpa, 2008). The reasons they run may be completely different from those of the average person. Most people seem content with shorter races or with not racing at all.

The physical benefits of exercise and running are well-documented. In a landmark study, Ralph Paffenbarger, an accomplished epidemiologist, followed more than 10,000 Harvard College alumni from the 1960s through the 1980s. He found that men who did moderately vigorous physical activity lived longer than those that did not. They were less likely to die during the study and also less likely to die of coronary heart disease. Men who took up vigorous exercise could expect to live 10 months longer than their sedentary colleagues (Paffenbarger, 1993).

It is not just Harvard University alumni who respond well to physical activity. Jerry Morris, a British epidemiologist, published a study in 1958 that showed that middle-aged men in high-activity occupations, such as boilermakers or dock workers, had lower incidence of coronary heart disease, less severe forms of the disease when they had it, and experienced a later age of onset than those in jobs that required light amounts of physical labor, such as bus-drivers and clerks (Morris, 1958).

One reason why many people begin an exercise program is to drop pounds. Exercise, in tandem with a good diet, can help people lose significant amounts of weight (Klem, 1997). The health risks associated with being overweight are numerous. Hypertension, osteoarthritis, type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke and some cancers are all associated with overweight and obese individuals (Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention, 2007). Running is one of the most efficient and effective workouts for losing weight. Each mile run burns around 100 calories (Burfoot, 2005). Not only does exercise improve the body, it can also improve outlook. Overweight people report that losing weight “improved their quality of life, health and well-being, mood, mobility, and level of energy” (Klem, 1997, p. 245).

Running can also help fight some effects of aging. In a recent study of twins, researchers found that the twin who exercised more had cells that were younger than the twin who did not. They calculated this by looking at telomeres, a part of the cell that diminishes each time a cell divides. Those who did a moderate amount of exercise had telomeres that looked six years younger than those who did the least amount of exercise. Those that did the most exercise had cells that looked nine years younger (Spector, 2008).

Another study looked at effects of running and aging. Over 19 years, researchers found that the benefits of running were substantial. All participants were at least 50 years old when the study started. By the end of the study, 34 percent of nonrunners had died, compared to 15 percent of runners. Runners were able to stave off disability 16 years longer than nonrunners, meaning that their quality of life was better (Fries, 2008a). This is perhaps evidence that runners tend to live longer and healthier lives. Another study by the same researcher found that runners were not more likely to develop osteoarthritis in their knees (Fries, 2008b). This may begin to help debunk a common myth that running will ruin one’s knees.

Physical activity can also help prevent other problems, such as cancer and stroke. Exercise has been linked to “40 to 50 percent reductions in the risk of cancer-related death and cancer recurrence” in breast and colorectal cancer. (Phillips, 2008, para. 1) In a
meta-study, researchers also found that exercise can prevent strokes. Those who did moderate exercise were 20 percent less likely to get a stroke, and those who did vigorous exercise were 27 percent less likely (Lee, 2003). More studies about the link between physical activity and cancer and stroke are needed before anything definitive can be said, but the early signs are encouraging.

Running also has benefits for mental health. With a reduction in weight, meta-analyses have shown that people can boost self-esteem. People who exercise also sleep more, which contributes to mental and physical fitness. Although study of the mind-body connection is still in its initial stages and scientists still cannot equivocally say whether fitness provides significant mental health benefits, research has supported the idea that increased exercise helps mental health (Landers, 1997).

One area that has been studied is the effect of exercise on anxiety. Anxiety that must be treated occurs in more than 7 percent of the adult population in the United States. A government review of studies that examine the connection between exercise and anxiety symptoms has found that exercise has a small but significant positive effect (Landers, 2007). It is not a magic bullet, but it can help. Exercise seems to have its largest impact on anxiety when the physical activity is aerobic, when the fitness regime lasts longer than 10 weeks and when the subjects have an initial low level of fitness or high level of anxiety (Wiles, 2006).

Exercise’s effect on depression has also been studied. It is estimated that clinical depression afflicts up to 5 percent of the U.S. population. In fact, the impact of physical activity on depression seems to be stronger than on anxiety, although the benefits are usually classified as moderate for participants. The results are consistent across age,
gender and race. The benefits can be felt as early as the first exercise session but are most effective if they last at least nine weeks. More sessions and higher intensity tended to yield the best results (Landers, 1997).

In a study of depression and exercise, researchers looked at physical activity and depression in the elderly. Signs of depression had disappeared in 73 percent of the exercising group by the end of the 20-week study, while only 36 percent of the control group was depression-free. The author said that “exercise was associated with a significant reduction in depression at both 20 weeks and after 26 months, despite the removal of supervision, transport costs and group setting at 10 weeks” (Singh, 2001, p. M502).

The studies and medical literature show that running and exercise have incredible benefits. The physical benefits are clear and the medical community is starting to understand exercise’s mental benefits.

**Newspapers**

As the sport booms and as people become more health-conscious, they will look for more articles in daily newspapers. The mainstream press writes about running in three broad categories: injuries, training and equipment.

**Injuries**

Almost every runner will experience an injury in his or her career. This makes injuries one of the most-covered topics. As more people run, more readers of mainstream media will want to know about running injuries and how to prevent them. Stories on
injury prevention are fairly common. One example is an article by an orthopedist in West Virginia. He writes that runners must be extra vigilant when starting a program, coming back from an injury, increasing workout mileage or increasing workout intensity. They must wear proper-fitting shoes and try to run on soft surfaces (Tao, 2005).

A frequent topic in injury prevention is running form. A recent *New York Times* article chronicled running camps that have sprung up around the country. These camps help runners improve their form. Experts at the camps look at stride length, how the foot hits the ground and how the upper body moves. Although running may seem like something natural that does not have to be corrected, experts at the camps insist that improvements can be made. The article also touches upon ChiRunning and the Pose Method, two new running forms that the founders claim can reduce injury. Other experts warn that tinkering too much with running form can do more harm than good (Tuff, 2007).

Articles about how to deal with injuries are also common. Gina Kolata, a reporter for *The New York Times*, frequently writes about running. In a first-person account, she writes of how her dreams of running the 2008 New York Marathon were dashed by injuries. She shares the frustration of getting injured in the midst or training for a big race. She tries using an ellipse machine and running in a pool to take the pressure off her foot and maintain her fitness. Although she did not run the marathon, she learned how to cope and recover (Kolata, 2008).

Runners are prone to overuse injuries, such as runner’s knee and tendonitis. Articles frequently cite the RICE method for dealing with injury: rest, ice, compression and elevation. Frequent stretching and ibuprofen are also recommended. Authors say that
days off and a decrease in pace or miles is also necessary. When the pain starts to subside, runners should ease back into their routine. Coming back too fast will delay full recovery (Rudawsky, 2005; Janzow, 2007).

A 2008 *New York Times* article about the efficacy of stretching before exercise caused a stir in the running world. The author challenges the long-held assumption that stretching, or at least how most people stretch, prevents injury, citing numerous studies that show that traditional methods of stretching have no effect. The old method of holding a stretch for 20 seconds has been found to reduce muscle strength for up to 30 minutes after the exercise and possibly increase incidence of injury. New ways of stretching that are sports-specific are starting to emerge. Female soccer players who did warm-ups consisting of the new exercises saw knee injuries drop by half. Golfers, in another study, were nine times less likely to get hurt (Reynolds, 2008).

The information about injuries provided in the articles is usually written by medical professionals or others who know the sport. It usually tells runners to cut back on miles and do another activity to stay fit. Articles about average people dealing with injuries may help readers connect with the subject more. Most injury profiles are about rehabilitating professional runners. These athletes usually have access to the best quality health care. Most people do not have the time or resources to devote to recovery as professionals do, but their dedication to the sport runs deep.

*Training*

A frequent subject of articles about running is training. Many are aimed at beginners, especially those considering a marathon. Training plans vary, from more
traditional plans that emphasize running 70 or 80 miles a week, to newer programs such as the Galloway plan, which calls for runners to mix walking and running. Galloway’s method can be done for runners with no running background. The duration of the training is about 28 weeks. It is for people with busy lives or who are prone to injury but still want to complete the race. Slower runners run two minutes, then walk one. The faster the runner is, the less he or she walks (Billhartz, 2006).

Plans for more experienced runners are usually shorter in duration, usually around 16 or 18 weeks. People who use these types of programs have run around 20 miles a week for two or three months. These programs do not advocate taking walk breaks during the training or race. Runners must pay close attention to their body and if they feel a twinge or muscle pull to slow down or stop their run. Perhaps the most important element in training for a marathon is consistency. Runners must stick to their plan to see improvement (Condor, 2005; Harper 2005; Hsu, 2007). Almost all training plans call for one long run a week of up to 20 miles. Experts believe this is the most crucial run to any program and should not be missed (Hanc, 2007).

Articles about the benefits of cross-training are also common. Cross-training is when athletes use a different sport to supplement their training. The sport most frequently used by runners is cycling, which allows them to get their heart rate high while preventing legs and feet from taking a pounding. For team sports, soccer provides a suitable alternative to distance running. (Nunez, 2001). Experts advocate weight-training to supplement running as well. Weight-training works muscles not normally used in running. Proponents claim it can make runners faster and prevent injury. Weight-lifting helps the body correct muscle imbalance, lessening the chances of a repetitive stress
injury (Miron, 2006).

A common topic written about training is the benefit of joining a running group. The reasons most often cited are camaraderie and the challenge of running with faster people. Runners usually meet two or three times a week and form strong bonds. They open up with other runners about their lives. During the miles they share on the road, runners also find they are more apt to push themselves during their run, improving their times during their times and fitness (Kolata, 2007; Crown, 2008).

A problem with these articles is so many different ways exist to train for a race that they can overwhelm the novice runner. Even experienced runners can read one article that says running fewer miles is better for a marathon, and then read another saying that more miles are better. Most training plans are for marathons, not the type of race most novice runners should enter. Training plans five-kilometer or 10-kilometer races would be more valuable for beginners.

Equipment

Running shoes are another common topic. The technological aspects of a shoe are a frequent subject. One example is from 2005, when Adidas released its Adidas 1 running shoe. The shoe has a microchip that changes the cushioning of the sneaker, depending on how fast the runner is going, the weight of the runner and the terrain. A pair cost $250 upon its initial release, or almost $200 more than an average running shoe (Walker, 2005). Nike also created a stir with a new shoe in 2005, but its design was counter to the Adidas 1. While the Adidas 1 emphasizes technology, the Nike Free is a lightweight sneaker that tries to mimic a bare foot as much as possible. It was met with much fanfare
when it was released. The idea is that a lighter shoe with less cushioning strengthens foot muscles, therefore decreasing injury (Barbaro, 2005).

Not to be outdone technologically, Nike also paired up with Apple to make a sneaker that connects to the iPod. It tracks distance, calories burned and time. It even has a button runners can hit to make a song of the their choice come on. The sneaker, the iPod and the kit cost about $300, well out of the range of most running shoes (Mossberg, 2006). Nike also teamed with the Payless chain to make a $35 sneaker that the companies claim rivals high-end sneakers in quality (D'innocenzio, 2007).

*The New York Times* has had many interesting articles on running shoes. One article from 2004 concerning the production of the Adidas 1 was particularly insightful. In order to make the shoe, the crew had to measure data on what the ideal cushioning felt like. The makers of the shoe used everything from magnets to the parts of a Furby toy to get the design nearly perfect (Marriott, 2004).

Few articles help the reader decipher the dizzying process of buying a running shoe. Many are quick guides that give little useful information to readers. *The Washington Post*, in 2008, provided a comprehensive guide to shoe-buying. It describes the three most common types of feet and what type of shoe to buy for each. It says that home tests can help determine what type of foot a person has, but the best that a runner can do is get tested by a professional in a specialty running store (Hallett, 2008).

It must also be acknowledged that readers may look to places on the Web for advice on running. Blogs, Web sites and e-magazines can provide excellent information about the sport. But nearly anyone with a computer can publish online, so readers must be wary when reading Internet sources.
Newspapers, both in print and online, are still a critical source on running for most average people. Their articles bring knowledge and information to readers. The voice that is missing from most stories is that of the average runner. Millions of people of all ages pound the pavement every day. Hearing some of their stories would help inspire others to do the same and help in the fight against obesity.

What drives a normal, working person to run every day?

What are some interesting ways people are using running to connect with the outside world?

How does an average athlete deal with a devastating injury?

What are the best types of running shoes, how much do they cost and what exactly goes into them?

How much work goes into organizing a race for thousands of participants?

This series of articles will start to put a face on the average runner and answer these questions.
Methodology

This was a professional project geared toward writing five in-depth feature articles. Like in most journalistic pieces, personal interviews were the main source of information. Before the interview, thorough research was conducted on the topic and the interviewee. Using this information, a list of questions was written and brought as an aid to each interview. Since improvisation in conversation was inevitable, questions from the list were not the only ones asked. It was a guide, not a script. Each person was told he or she was speaking to a journalism student and that it was possible the story would be published in a newspaper or other media outlet.

Most interviews were conducted in person or over the telephone. E-mail interviews were also conducted, but only as a last resort, or with people who were far away. Every accommodation was made within reason to make the participant feel as comfortable as possible. Subjects were given a choice of place and time that suited their schedule best. The interviews were traditional journalistic in-depth interviews, asking open-ended questions and encouraging sources to talk in detail. When possible, conversations were recorded using a digital device to help aid note-taking. Permission to record was asked of all participants.
To make the stories as in-depth as possible, interviews were sought from a wide range of sources. Academics, doctors, coaches and ordinary people are all part of the running landscape, and their points of view were important. Funds from the Roy H. Park Fellowship paid for the rental car and hotel room in Morehead City, although the generous fund made it possible to look at races all around the country.

The series focused mostly on runners around Chapel Hill and Carrboro. One resource for finding subjects was the various track clubs in the area. For instance, I went to a women’s running club in Chapel Hill and asked the group if anyone would like to work with me on an article. Jo Ellen Rodgers came up to me that night and became a subject of one of my feature stories. I am a runner and cultivated my own personal network to find other sources, such as Austin Brown, a 12-time marathoner. UNC-CH has a vast medical system, which is a good place for interviews with medical professionals. I interviewed Dr. Alex Creighton, chief orthopedist for Carolina’s sports teams, and Sara Stahlman, a health educator with Counseling and Wellness Services, through the medical system.

Other sources of information, such as orthopedic and medical journals and Web sites, provided evidence and facts about the science of running. Government statistics about the health of Americans were found on Web sites for the National Institute of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Articles from newspapers and specialty magazines also yielded significant amounts of information. Running organizations, such as Running USA, were consulted because they gather data about runners throughout the country and frequently post statistics on their Web sites.
Sources of information were culled for anecdotes, quotes and descriptions. No reasonable effort was spared in presenting each source in a full, fair and accurate manner. When needed, sources were contacted for follow-up and clarification. Facts were checked by different sources to ensure their veracity.

**Limitations**

A primary limitation for the project was resources. Running and the components of it are worldwide. Running shoes are most often made in factories in Asia. Company headquarters are dotted throughout America and Europe. Having the time and resources to go to all these places would have added great depth to the project, but was simply not possible. The articles focused primarily on running and runners around the Triangle. Runners from other countries, or even other parts of North Carolina, may have different opinions or outlooks than what was presented in these stories. The purpose of this series was not to provide an in-depth report on every aspect of running. More details, sources and anecdotes can always enhance a piece, but certain limits must be acknowledged.

Another limitation was my own knowledge of the field. Although I am a long-time runner, I am by no means an expert. Orthopedists and physical therapists know much more about injuries and biomechanics. Engineers and workers at specialty running stores know more about footwear and apparel. Coaches and experienced runners know more about training. Although every reasonable effort was made to fill these gaps of knowledge by talking with appropriate experts, no single writer can know everything.

None of the articles in the series was provocative or controversial, but the stories that were told inevitably reflect my outlook and interpretation of events. What I decided
to include or not include was a way of editorializing. All journalists face this dilemma.
The intention of these articles was not to provide commentary, but to observe, listen and present what I found. Nevertheless, I attempted to adhere to the ideals of the best journalism and present full, fair and accurate articles.
Article Summaries

The thesis has five articles, each exploring a different aspect of running. The stories on Team Sakina and Butch Robertson could be published in a magazine such as *Runner’s World* or *Endurance*. The other three are more likely to find a home in local newspapers.

- The first article is a 1,600-word feature about Team Sakina, a women’s running group that uses running to raise money for children in Tanzania to go to secondary school and health initiatives. The group not only does charity, it also gives local women a place to get fit and be part of a healthy, vibrant community.

- The second article is a 1,500-word feature on running injuries. It is the story of two people, Jenn Harlow, a master’s student in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, and Dr. Tom Linden, a professor in the School, who have experienced running injuries severe enough to require surgery and extensive rehabilitation. The injuries forced them to redefine their lives without one of their passions. Both had knee injuries, so a 200-word sidebar appears after the story to give readers an idea of how the knee works.
• The third article is a 1,500-word feature on running shoes. The idea was to write a story that presents the basic science of the shoes to help readers decide which to buy. The array to choose from can be bewildering to even experienced runners. The article will also cover the three types of feet most people have and explain how readers can find their own type with a simple test at home.

• The fourth article is a 1,500-word newspaper profile of Jo Ellen Rodgers, a woman who uses running to cope with postpartum depression. Like many people, she had side effects from antidepressants and wanted to try an alternative method to alleviate symptoms. This article chronicles her bout with depression and attempts to wrestle free from its grip.

• The fifth article is a 2,500-word feature on how a race is organized. Races, even small ones, take a massive amount of organization and manpower to put on. Volunteers must be recruited, roads must be reserved, endorsements lined up, food and water provided, entries counted and distributed, and medical help arranged. Weather can be a major factor. The article follows Butch Robertson, organizer of the Crystal Coast Half Marathon in Morehead City, N.C., and his crew as they prepare for the race.
CHAPTER ONE

Running to help others

Each day 11 children in a village in Tanzania get to attend school thanks to a group of women in Chapel Hill wanting to get fit. The children in Africa improve their lives by continuing their education. The women in America improve their lives by staying healthy and meeting new friends. Although the two groups are thousands of miles apart, they have a profound impact on each other.

The runners are part of Team Sakina, a women’s running group based in Chapel Hill. Members range in age from 22 to 65. Some run six-minute miles. Others feel like athletes for the first time. All share two goals: to get faster and to help the less fortunate.

In the fall, through registration fees and donations, team members raised $3,000. It was enough to fund the education of 11 children in Sakina, a small village in Tanzania.

“Money allowing, I would never, ever want to send a child to school for (only) one year,” says Kerry Brewer, a master’s student in the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Public Health and a former Carolina cross-country runner. She is the team’s leader. “Our hopes are that either through Team Sakina, or some other revenue stream, we would be able to send at least these 11 through all of secondary school. And if we can expand beyond that, it would be great.”
Per capita income, a nation’s income divided by its population, is $400 a year in Tanzania, making it one of the poorest nations in the world (it is $48,000 in the United States). Brewer says that primary school is free and compulsory in Tanzania. After that, families must pay to educate their children.

The cost, though low to Americans, is high enough to Tanzanians that many children do not continue their education. She says that school costs about $75 per student per year. But transportation, books, lunches and uniforms add up to about $100 more.

For Team Sakina’s spring season, Brewer has expanded its role in Tanzania. In addition to supporting education, the team will help fund health initiatives.

“My goal all along has been to establish a health program in Sakina to address their health needs,” she says.

After the fall season ended, 35 women continued running with the group during the winter. Team members were charged $50, which got them a one-on-one coaching session in addition to the weekly group runs.

Brewer was able to raise about $1,800. That was enough to send two Sakina villagers to a two-week health training session in Nairobi, Kenya. She says that the two who attended the session learned community organizing and leadership skills related to health issues.

“I think that’ll be knowledge and skills they’ll have forever even though the program’s only two weeks,” she says. “So that’s why we decided to invest the money in something that seems short but will be long-lasting in its impact.”

The idea for Team Sakina came last spring as Brewer was coaching a group of women runners organized by Fleet Feet in downtown Carrboro. Fleet Feet is a specialty
shoe store that participates in No Boundaries, a nationwide program designed to help beginning runners.

At the final practice, Brewer said that anyone interested in running during the summer could hang around after their run to discuss the program’s next step. They all stayed.

They decided that their summer group needed a new name. Brewer told the team she had worked for five weeks in Sakina, an experience that still resonated with her. In honor of Brewer’s time there, they christened themselves Team Sakina.

Brewer says she loves running and would coach for free, but she got the idea of having her runners donate money for the coaching they received. She started the Sustain Foundation, a nonprofit devoted to helping solve environmental, educational and health problems around the world. She began collecting money from some runners.

She was also working at Fleet Feet at the time. Then-store owner Amanda Bushman asked Brewer if she would like to partner with the store and expand the program in the fall. Brewer agreed and, with Fleet Feet’s backing, started with 45 runners. By the end of the season, Team Sakina had 80 runners.

The winter training, since it was more informal, was not affiliated with Fleet Feet. But Brewer renewed ties with the store for the spring season. She says that the new owners, Brian and Tricia White, decided to strengthen the link between their store and Team Sakina and the Sustain Foundation.

“When we got here, we looked at what had been done in the past,” Brian says. “Naturally we wanted to change some things. But this is something we want to keep and grow.”
White says that what separates his store from big-box stores is that their services extend into the real-world. In addition to supporting training programs, Fleet Feet is partnering with the Sustain Foundation to sell a series of trail maps for runners, with the proceeds being divided between each organization.

“We serve a bigger purpose than just going out running,” he says. “We go one step further, which is even cooler. This is a great partnership.”

Brewer works with two coordinators in Sakina to help organize the education program, Emanuelli Maturo, 27, and Irene Maturo, 32. She met them during her five-week stint in Tanzania in 2005. They were the brother and sister in her host family. The siblings were the ones who attended the health training session in Nairobi.

As donations come in, Brewer wires the money to a bank in Sakina. It is then distributed to the students.

The coordinators in Tanzania send back photographs of the children along with letters they have written thanking team members for the chance to go to school.

“We decided to do it because it is something which seems to help our community here,” Emanuelli says.

The siblings take pride in trying to make Sakina a better place.

“We would like to say to America and to Team Sakina that we can have a better community here if we share knowledge and experience,” he says.

Brewer sees the two groups as a partnership that helps fill a void in each community. The community in Tanzania gets to send its children to school and learn how to live healthier lives. The community in America gives women a place to get fitter and faster and contribute to something greater than themselves.
“The whole idea of running with a bunch of other women is what makes this team special,” says Ilona Jaspers, 40, who has been a member of the team since its inception.

“Most of us are in the same situation; we like to run and get better at it. Our schedules are busy, and Sakina gives us an outlet and a forum to meet and run with similar women.”

Amy Wollish, 25, is one of the coaches for Team Sakina. She also sits on the Sustain Foundation’s board and is closely tied to what happens in Tanzania. In her duties with the team, Wollish runs with the women, watching the road and making sure everyone is safe and accounted for. She also gives feedback and advice on running form.

“I think (we’re successful) because we represent a niche that doesn’t exist for middle-aged women,” she says. “We provide them with friends.”

For the spring season, Brewer has three groups, beginner, intermediate and advanced. The goal race will be the Tar Heel 10-Miler/5K on April 25, an annual race that takes place in Chapel Hill and Carrboro.

Fees from the beginner group will be put toward supporting educational programs. Money from the intermediate and advanced group will go toward continuing health initiatives in Sakina.

The beginning group has around 35 members and the intermediate/advanced group has around 60 members. Brewer hopes that by the end of the spring program, the total raised during the year will be between $7,000 and $8,500.

“I am happy with the numbers,” she says. “I would like to reach out to as many people as I can to build a community of women runners in this area and widen the scope of people who have the knowledge and experience of running.”
Brewer sees Team Sakina and its partnership with Fleet Feet as a reliable source of funding for the Sustain Foundation for many years to come. At the root of it all is a love of running, which was on display last autumn.

The goal for Team Sakina in the fall was the Old Reliable Run, a 10K and a 5K, in Raleigh on Nov. 16. Brewer says the women ran a timed mile when the program started in August. They ran another timed mile the week before the race to track how they had progressed.

Brewer says many of the women improved, one even going from an 11-minute mile to around 7 minutes, a significant decrease for the distance.

When it came time for the Old Reliable Run, the women were ready. They wore matching T-shirts to show solidarity. Women running the 5K cheered for those running the 10K, and the 10K runners returned the favor.

Brewer says many Team Sakina members ran fantastic times. But more importantly, they built a sense of camaraderie in their struggle to get faster and in their support of the village in Africa.

“I remember so vividly hearing the chanting of ‘Sakina! Sakina!’ to fellow runners in the race,” she says. “And it was an important moment of reflection for what this partnership has become.”

A few days after the run, the team had a potluck dinner at the Fleet Feet corporate office in Carrboro. She displayed the letters and photographs of the children they had helped in Tanzania as Team Sakina ate and reminisced about their season.

“It’s become probably the most important thing in my life,” she says. “It’s the most meaningful, for sure. And I never expected that. On that fateful spring day, when
we all decided to keep going over the summer, I had no idea it would end up where it is today.”

Map of Tanzania Showing Sakina’s Location
CHAPTER TWO

Running into trouble

Jennifer Harlow loved to run. She would pound the pavement three or four days a week around Washington, D.C., a half hour or more. She had run half marathons, 10Ks and 5Ks. A full marathon was a lifelong goal.

But on Jan. 4, 2008, everything changed. After an intense run, she met friend at a local bar. They sat and chatted a few minutes. She stood up to order a drink. Immediately pain shot through her knees. Her legs buckled.

It was the beginning of a long, slow descent into injury and frustration that many runners face. She visited doctors and endured physical therapy sessions. She steadfastly followed a rehabilitation program to heal her body. She improved. But in May, her left knee swelled to the size of a cantaloupe.

Her doctor gave her the news that no runner wants to hear. She might never run again. She was devastated.

“I don’t enjoy cardio for the sake of doing cardio exercise,” Harlow says now. “But I really, truly love running. I really like it because it’s my time by myself, in my own head.”
Harlow is not alone. According to the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation’s Web site, up to 70 percent of runners will get injured. Most are minor, but if not treated they can become serious.

Dr. Alex Creighton, assistant professor in the UNC-Chapel Hill Department of Orthopaedics and orthopaedic surgeon for the university’s athletic teams, says most runners suffer from overuse injuries. They occur not from a single trauma but from repeated use of the same body part.

Runners are especially prone to maladies such as Achilles tendonitis and shin splints, or pain along the shin caused from running.

“Most ordinary people break down if they run more than 30 miles a week,” he says.

Harlow, 28 and a master’s student in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at UNC-Chapel Hill, says the pain came from intense speed workouts without time to rest. She was training for a 10K and wanted to lower her time. She started to do speed workouts every time she ran, but experts recommend that runners do them only once or twice a week.

Harlow, tall and lean with light brown hair and shining blue eyes, says she shares a trait many runners have: stubbornness. Despite the pain in her legs, she continued to run. As winter turned to spring, the pain worsened. She recalls sitting at her desk at her old job and crying because of it.

In March, she went for a run but had to stop five miles from home because of the pain in her legs. With no money or Metro card, she had to limp back to her house. At that point, she decided to see a doctor.
She chose an orthopedist who was a runner. Harlow wanted to make sure the doctor could understand her love for the sport and her desire to return to it as quickly as possible.

The doctor found she had patellofemoral pain syndrome, commonly called runner’s knee. Her kneecap was not moving correctly. It was grinding on her cartilage, which in the knee acts as a shock absorber. This grinding can soften and wear away the cartilage, causing major problems.

Harlow also had iliotibial band syndrome. The iliotibial band is a connective tissue that runs along the side of the leg and helps keep the knee in place. When inflamed, it causes pain around the knee.

The doctor told her she would have to spend six months to a year rehabilitating the injury.

“I realize now that I totally reacted like a psychotic woman,” she says. “You would have thought they ran over my puppy. I was devastated. I cried.”

Despite her frustration, Harlow started on her road to recovery. She did physical therapy sessions two days a week and took prescription anti-inflammatory drugs. At the sessions, she did stretches to build flexibility in her legs. She also did exercises to build strength in her quadriceps and hips.

The rehabilitation was a heavy investment of time. In addition to her two weekly visits to the physical therapist, she did an hour of exercises every day at home. She tenaciously stuck to her plan and saw a vast improvement during the next two months.

On Mother’s Day weekend in May, Harlow went for a four-mile walk. She had friends visiting and wanted to show them Washington, D.C.
Two nights later her left knee swelled to the size of a cantaloupe. The pain was so bad that when she wanted to go to the bathroom her boyfriend had to carry her.

She went to the hospital the next day. Doctors drained her knee. But the fluid returned in 12 hours. The MRI, a type of magnetic scan used by doctors to see inside the body, showed that a piece of cartilage had broken off and was lodged under her kneecap.

Harlow had arthroscopic surgery a week later to remove it. Arthroscopic surgery is an operation that uses a tiny camera inserted through a small incision. The incision is much smaller than traditional surgery, so the procedure generally has faster recovery times.

Her surgeon found more ragged cartilage around the knee and cleaned it up. After surgery, doctors told her that she might never compete in distance runs again. One of her life goals, running a marathon, might never happen.

Creighton, the orthopedist, says recovery from cartilage removal depends on the type of cartilage removed. Harlow had articular cartilage removed, the toughest to rehabilitate.

“With a chunk of cartilage, usually you do everything you can to save it,” he says. “But if it’s floating in the knee too long, it has potential to have problems.”

For three weeks after surgery, Harlow focused on getting the range of motion back in her knee. The surgery stiffened the joints. Once she could move her knee again, she returned to rehabilitation two days a week.

The injury has cost Harlow time, effort and a good deal of money. Although she has had health insurance, she has still had to pay more than $2,000 for the surgery and physical therapy sessions.
Like any physical activity, running has risks. Knee problems are common.

Dr. Tom Linden, Glaxo Wellcome distinguished professor of medical journalism in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at UNC-CH, has also suffered knee trouble.

Linden, a tall, distinguished-looking man with a shock of grey hair, ran almost every day for more than 15 years, starting in the late-1970s. One day he felt severe pain in his left knee. After hobbling around for a couple of weeks, he decided to see a doctor.

The doctors found that he had torn his meniscus. The meniscus is cartilage that helps prevent the bones of the leg from grinding on each other. He had to have surgery to repair it.

“The meniscus has a good prognosis,” says Creighton, the UNC-CH orthopedist. “A person can deal with losing a little meniscus. During an operation, people typically lose 30 to 50 percent of it. It’s when they lose 80 percent that there is early arthritis.”

After the operation, it took almost a year and a round of steroid injections for Linden’s swelling to go down. He saw a physical therapist and tried to return to running. But the pain was too great. He had to give up running and take up walking and swimming.

“My identity wasn’t being a runner,” he says. “It was more of a physical craving. If I skipped more than a day, I would get really antsy.

“I really liked that runner’s high. I can walk all day and not get the same feeling. I have to swim really hard to get it.”

Since moving to Chapel Hill in mid-July, Harlow, the graduate student, has been seeing a specialist at the Duke Sports Medicine Center in Durham. She has continued
with her exercises and is also taking anti-inflammatory medicines. Her specialist set her up with a special running coach to try and get her back on the road.

Harlow does not know if she will ever be able to run again. The pain in her knee is still severe. If she runs even a few steps, the pain is excruciating. To fill the void, she has taken up other sports such as yoga and boxing.

After her surgery, she frequented the message board on the Runner’s World Web site, looking for information about her injury and trying to connect with other runners. During the last few months she has visited the Web site less. She says it is too painful to see others talk about their running exploits.

Despite the physical and mental pain, Harlow tries to keep a sense of perspective:

“When I went in for my first appointment with my doctor in D.C., he was like, ‘Running a marathon is cool, but walking comfortably when you’re 40 is cooler.’ I keep thinking about that.”

**Sidebar**

**The troublesome knee**

The knee is the largest and one of the most complex joints in the body. It connects the thigh bone with the shin bone. It bears most of the weight of the body and is prone to injury. It is made up of bone, tendon and cartilage.

Articular cartilage is on the outside of the bone, helping it glide smoothly against other bones. Meniscus cartilage sits between the thigh and shin bone and acts as a shock absorber. Cartilage lacks blood supply, preventing it from healing as well as other body parts, such as bone.
Ligaments are bands of tissue that help keep the knee strong and stable. The knee has four major ligaments: anterior cruciate, lateral collateral, posterior cruciate and medial collateral. One of the most common knee injuries in sports is a tear of the anterior cruciate ligament. This often requires surgery and months of physical therapy.

The patella, or kneecap, is bone that helps protect the inner-workings of the knee and increases leverage on the patellar tendon, making it easier to extend the leg. The patella moves along a track. Runner’s knee, or patellafemoral pain syndrome, is caused when the kneecap goes off track. Usually rest, a knee brace and anti-inflammatory medication are enough to treat it. Surgery to correct the alignment of the kneecap is used as a last resort.
CHAPTER THREE

Every step counts: footwear vital for runners

Crossing the finish line beneath the Arch of Constantine in Rome, Ethiopia’s Abebe Bikila had just won the 1960 Olympic marathon. What set him apart from other competitors, other than winning in world-record time, was that he ran barefoot.

For the rest of us, we need something between our feet and the road.

According to the American Podiatric Medical Association, each time a runner lands on his foot the impact is three to four times the runner’s weight. A 100-pound woman can exert more than 300 pounds of force. Footwear is critical for runners.

“Running shoes are very important because they reduce the pounding on the legs and minimize the shock,” says Austin Brown, 32, a 12-time marathoner and resident of Carrboro. “You want running shoes that match your foot type, particularly if you’re running mid-to-high mileage on a weekly basis.”

Jeremy Hawkins, sales manager at Fleet Feet, a specialty running store in downtown Carrboro, says finding properly fitting running shoes is vital to prevent injury.

Hawkins says that when runners come in looking for new shoes, they go through an exhaustive fitting process.
Workers measure the size and shape of the foot, watch customers walk barefoot and observe their stride while running outside on the sidewalk. Particular attention goes to the motion of the arch of the foot, one of the most important factors in choosing a shoe.

At 9th Street Active Feet, customers go through a similar measuring process. Walt Cleary, the owner and former football and track coach at Duke University, says each staff member has a bachelor’s degree in an athletic-related field such as kinesiology, sports science or sports medicine.

Some runners, such as 12-time marathoner Brown, do research online and tests at home to determine their type of foot. He did the “wet test,” where he dipped his foot in water and then stepped on a towel to see his foot’s shape. From that, he found he had a normal arch.

According to Runnersworld.com, people have one of three types of arches:

* A normal arch collapses somewhat each step. This collapse helps absorb the shock of walking or running.

* The next type of arch is overpronated, or what most people would call flat-footed. This means the arch collapses too much or is too low to the ground. When the arch does not collapse correctly, it can lead to injury.

Cleary says overpronation can cause injuries in the Achilles tendon, the largest tendon in the body. It connects the heel to the calf muscle, and is integral in walking, running and jumping. A strain can eventually lead to tendonitis, an inflammation of the tendon, which can take months to recover from.
The third and least common type of arch is supinated. This means the arch collapses little, and most of the shock from running is absorbed on the outside of the foot and the leg, which can also lead to injury.

Cleary says that injuries common with this foot type are stress fractures and sprained ankles.

In taking the wet test, Brown, the marathoner, saw about three-quarters of his foot on the towel, meaning he had a normal arch. If he saw almost all of his foot, he would have had flat feet. If he only saw the outside part of the foot, he would have had high arches.

Although the wet test can help, no home examination can match the trained eye of a professional. About two years ago, Brown went to Fleet Feet just to make sure he was wearing the right type of shoe. He went through the fitting process and found his home test was correct.

Once the type of foot is determined, a runner must be fitted with the correct shoe. The science of shoe design has given runners a vast array of choices.

Cleary says the cushion in the midsole where the foot rests is usually made of ethylene vinyl acetate (EVA) or polyurethane. More manufacturers are using EVA because it is impervious to moisture. It also has high memory, which means it molds to the foot when you wear your shoe.

He says that extra padding is put under the heel, where the foot strikes the ground, and the forefoot, where the foot pushes off. It is often made of liquid silicon oil and is injected into the sole. Depending on a runner’s needs, different parts of a shoe can have more or less padding than others.
People with normal arches run in shoes that are evenly cushioned and provide no extra support for the arch.

Hawkins, sales manager at Fleet Feet, says people with low arches need to buy shoes with extra foam and shock-absorbing material. This helps to slow the fall of the arch and provide extra cushioning.

Those with high arches should be careful to choose a shoe that is not designed for people with flat feet. These shoes restrict the motion of the foot. Instead, supinators should wear shoes with neutral cushioning that allow the arch to fall as much as possible.

Differences also exist between men’s and women’s shoes. Cleary says that women’s shoes are made with a wider forefoot and a narrower heel. He says that some runners believe the quality of women’s shoes is not equal to men’s, but that women’s shoes are every bit as good.

Runners also use orthotics, which are inserts in the shoe. Eva Hendershot, a graduate student in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, has been running for 11 years. For the last eight years, she has run in orthotics, which have cut down on injuries.

Orthotics can be bought at running stores or drugstores for around $20. People with more severe arch problems usually get them custom-made by a podiatrist. Although expensive, they can cut down on injuries and make running more comfortable.

Good running shoes are costly, too. Prices at Fleet Feet range from $85 for the Nike Pegasus to $130 for the Asics Keyano.

Hawkins says the most popular model around the country is the Asics 2130, which sells for $95. Another popular model, for the same price, is the Brooks Adrenaline.
“Generally, the more expensive the shoe, the more cushion and gel,” he says. “You get higher technology. But it’s not about shock absorption or health. It’s about feel. Two or 3 percent of people need that $120 shoe, but most are happy with $90 to $100.”

Cleary, the 9th Street owner, says new technology has made shoes lighter today than in the past.

“You can be in a training shoe today that’s only 12 ounces, whereas 20 years ago it could have been 20, 22 or 24,” he says.

While some runners bounce around from shoe to shoe, Brown, the marathoner, has been running in the Asics 2130 since he started 10 years ago.

“In 1998, when I started running, I was really opposed to Nike because of their business practices,” he says, referring to the criticism Nike underwent in the late-‘90s for the company’s labor practices abroad. “Asics fit my foot type, and I had a pair of Asics cleats in high school that I was happy with.”

Hawkins says it’s important to replace shoes after getting 300 to 500 miles out of them. When Brown is training for a marathon, he replaces his shoes every four to six weeks.

But some runners, such as Hendershot, do not replace shoes as often. She says she replaces her shoes once a year and will not usually spend more than $80, although she recognizes their importance.

“From my understanding, you use your muscles and legs differently for each activity you do,” she says. “Running impacts your joints differently than other activities, and running shoes seem to be designed to deal with that.”
Caring for shoes is also important. Hawkins says shoes should never go in the washing machine. Getting a shoe sopping wet can break down its cushioning. Even shoes that are never worn should be thrown out after a year. Air attacks the foam in the shoe and reduces its effectiveness.

Despite the technology and expertise devoted toward making the perfect shoe, some people contend that running barefoot is actually healthier and yields faster times. Little information exists on the subject, but one man is trying to fill the gap.

Daniel Lieberman, professor of biological anthropology at Harvard University, says he believes he is the only one in the country looking at the issue. He is researching barefoot runners.

Although the study is not ready for publication, he says that preliminary data support the idea that barefoot running can reduce injury and improve running efficiency.

“We know that humans have been running for millions of years,” he says. “And the running shoe was invented in 1972.”

A Web site called Runningbarefoot.org has been created, where runners with naked feet can exchange information and ideas. The site was founded in 1997 by Bob Baxton, known to many as Barefoot Bob.

“Why run with shoes?” he writes on the site. “Were you born with shoes? Did you grow shoes on your feet as a response to running? What makes you believe shoes are necessary?”

Despite the enthusiasm of some practitioners, scientific evidence supporting running in bare feet is still thin. Runners must contend with hard pavement, broken glass and potholes. Until the streets get softer, most runners will still buy shoes.
In Tokyo in 1964, Abebe Bikila ran and once again won the Olympic marathon.

But this time he wore a pair of Asics.
CHAPTER FOUR

Body and mind:

local woman runs for physical and mental health

Like many people, Jo Ellen Rodgers has a hectic life. She is a wife, a mother of two children and a clinical assistant professor in the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Pharmacy.

Almost every morning, she seeks refuge in the one place where the demands of family and work cannot reach her: her daily run.

She laces up her sneakers and heads out the door at 5:30 a.m. up to five days a week. She usually does between three and four miles, most of the time with a partner or two.

Rodgers, blonde with an athlete’s body, runs as much for mental health as for physical health. Her daily miles help keep depression and anxiety at bay.

This is backed up by recent research. A study published in the American Journal of Preventative Medicine in 2005 found that exercise helps alleviate symptoms of depression. The Mayo Clinic’s Web site says that exercise may also help prevent relapse.

“It gets me through a lot of things,” she says. “I’ve made a lot of major life decisions running.”
A native of Hope Mills, N.C., Rodgers, 37, began running as an undergraduate in the early-1990s. Shortly after meeting her husband a few years later, she started to run more seriously. Back then, she ran for vanity. Now she runs for sanity.

“There’s a difference in her temperament,” says Philip Rodgers, her husband and a clinical pharmacist at Duke University Hospital. “When she’s running, she has a longer fuse. She’s less anxious about her schedule.”

After the birth of her first child, Michael, in 2002, Rodgers slipped into postpartum depression. She started to feel pangs of loneliness while staying at home to care for her son.

It continued when she returned to work at UNC-CH. She did not take the same pleasure from her job.

“There was some level of anger,” Rodgers says. “I was more quick to get upset about things and internalize things and sit and sulk on them. It felt like an angry period in my life.”

She took things more personally. She had a short temper with her husband and often took her frustrations out on him.

Rodgers is not alone. According to the Office on Women’s Health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 13 percent of pregnant women and new mothers are depressed.

One place during this time she felt better mentally was on her daily run. She decided to focus more seriously on running and see if it could ease her depression and anxiety.
Sara Stahlman, a health educator with UNC-CH Counseling and Wellness Services, says that exercise reduces cortisol, a chemical that can cause stress. It helps alleviate some symptoms of anxiety. Exercise also helps the body secrete endorphins, chemicals believed to enhance mood.

“Thirty minutes of cardio three to five times a week can help with symptoms of depression,” she says. “Exercise is known as a great coping mechanism. You hear of people turning to drugs to self-medicate. Exercise is a way to self-medicate in a healthy way.”

Multiple studies have shown the benefits of exercise on depression. According to a study from the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, a government agency that promotes exercise, the link between exercise and a reduction in depression is well-established. One downside is that running, as with all physical activity, carries with it the risk of injury.

Between running and adjusting to life with a small child, Rodgers began to feel better. By the time she was pregnant with her second child, Caroline, who was born in 2005, she saw running as a critical tool in maintaining a healthy, balanced life.

Unlike her pregnancy with Michael, she remained active with Caroline. She ran until she was six or seven months pregnant.

“Now I wasn’t going fast,” she says. “And definitely toward the end, it was more of a waddle. But even during the very last weeks I was still out walking. It felt good.”

But after Caroline was born, she slipped back into the dark moods that enveloped her after giving birth to Michael. Although she was running more than ever, she felt she was losing the battle.
About a year after Caroline’s birth, Rodgers told her family physician about her struggles. They decided to try antidepressants. She eventually settled on a combination of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI), common depression medicines.

Stahlman, the health educator, says different combinations of exercise, therapy and medication must be tried to treat depression effectively. What works for one person may not work for another.

At first, Rodgers did not feel the medicine’s effects. But while driving to work one day about a month later, she noticed that she felt more relaxed. She asked her husband. He said he noticed a difference. The exercise and medicine were working.

Her good mental and physical health helped her complete her first marathon in Las Vegas in December 2007.

But like many powerful medicines, antidepressants have side effects. According to Harvard Medical School’s Web site, some side effects are insomnia, headaches, nausea and sexual dysfunction.

Rodgers struggled with side effects and debated whether to continue taking the drugs. In May, feeling stronger, she decided to try living without the medication. She wanted to depend on running to keep healthy.

She quit the antidepressants cold turkey. She cannot recall exactly what the next two days were like, other than that they were miserable.

According to the Mayo Clinic Web site, people who stop taking this type of antidepressant experience nausea, headaches, dizziness and lethargy.

After 48 hours, she started to feel better. She no longer suffered withdrawal symptoms or side effects from the medication.
To fortify her commitment to the sport, she joined a running group on Thursday nights. She continued to put in her four miles before work most days. She decided to train for a race in November. She felt good most of the summer.

At the beginning of October, her work started to pile up. She became short-tempered with her husband and children.

She recalls one morning when she cried while driving to work. Rodgers sat in her car 15 minutes composing herself before going in.

Lately, Rodgers is no longer sure running alone will be able to carry her.

“In any wellness arena, there are no magic bullets,” Stahlman, the health educator, says. “The same is true with depression or anxiety. Each individual coping with depression or anxiety has different symptoms and therefore, no coping mechanism or therapy will work for everyone.”

Even if she has to go back on antidepressants, Rodgers believes running has helped her in many ways. It controls her weight, cholesterol and blood pressure. Her mind is sharp and clear at work. She has met and cultivated relationships with her running partners and running group.

Rodgers knows that in life, like running, some days are better than others.

Although depression visits her once in awhile, it cannot stop and catch its breath. To keep up with Rodgers, it is going to have to run.
CHAPTER FIVE

Running the show: Behind the scenes of a half marathon

It’s just before 4 a.m. and Butch Robertson hasn’t slept. Robertson, race director for the Crystal Coast Half Marathon in Morehead City, N.C., has been up all night preparing the 13.1-mile course.

He sits at a computer in his hotel lobby looking at weather maps, seeing if the rainstorm heading toward eastern North Carolina will affect the race. In a few minutes he will meet in the lobby with his staff to plan the day and finish preparing the rest of the course.

Although millions of Americans run races every year, few realize the amount of behind-the-scenes work necessary to create a successful event. A race director needs to have exceptional organizational skills. Roads must be reserved and endorsements lined up. Police, course volunteers and emergency medical personnel must be arranged.

Directors must also be able to improvise. If bad weather or a car accident alters a course route before a race, he or she must quickly decide how to manage the problem. Organizing a race can take more work and effort than running one.
Robertson has overseen more than 200 races over nearly 30 years. One of the most well-known is the Old Reliable Run in Raleigh, which he founded and has directed for 25 years. He says it had around 2,800 runners last year.

“I had no intention of doing it this long,” he says. “I’ve probably threatened to quit 700 or 800 times.”

The Crystal Coast Half Marathon and 5K is in its second year, and it will have 628 registered runners, up almost 100 from 2008. Robertson realizes that it may once again be plagued by bad weather. Last year, tornado warnings were forecast, and winds almost blew his clean-up crew off the road.

“One thing you need is an ability to withstand pressure,” Robertson says. “That’s why people don’t do this very long. You have the big clock in the sky ticking, and you need to have organizational skills to oversee a lot of different things.”

Robertson, 60, who lives in Raleigh, is the head of BTR Management, a company that organizes races around North Carolina. He was a marketing director at The News & Observer for 17 years before leaving in 2004.

He looks like a runner, tall and slender, with gray hair and glasses. He is a garrulous man, quick to laugh. Often he pats acquaintances on the back.

The idea to organize races came to him during a half marathon in Greensboro about 30 years ago. After taking issue with the placement of a water station near the end of the race, a friend suggested he should try organizing a race himself.

“I was tired of complaining about how other people do it,” he says. “And I realized it’s not that easy.”
Paul Sutherland, 63, a retired veteran of the fast-food industry, is Robertson’s neighbor and one of his main assistants.

“Nobody can coordinate a race like him,” Sutherland says. “He’s a typical marketing guy, like a pingpong ball in a boxcar. He’s got the gift of gab, he can schmooze you, and he’s not quick to anger. He knows everyone and never forgets a name or a face.”

Robertson has no full-time staff other than himself. He is helped at each race by a slightly different crew. For this race, Robertson’s helpers are family and friends. Interestingly, most are not runners. He says it doesn’t matter; the important thing is that they be reliable.

The thought of organizing a half marathon in Morehead City came to Robertson after working and visiting relatives in the area. No large races existed nearby, and he wanted to launch one.

Robertson says an important part of a successful race is a memorable stretch of road that gives runners something to talk about. He saw the bridge connecting Morehead City to Atlantic Beach as that stretch of road.

In 2006, about a year before the inaugural Crystal Coast Half Marathon, Robertson approached the police departments in Morehead City and Atlantic Beach. He gave each a presentation about why he wanted the race in the area and what benefits it would bring the community.

“The first door I knock on is the police,” he says. “They say you should go to this part of town, they give you guidelines, tell how many volunteers you may need and where to put the barricades.”
The next step was finding sponsors to help defray costs and make the race financially viable. Finding sponsorship is difficult. Some back out. Others pay late or not at all.

Robertson got backing from places such as Mike Toler’s Chrysler, Dodge, Jeep dealership and TrySports (correct), a sporting goods store in Wilmington.

Once sponsors were arranged, Robertson affiliated the race with the United Way of Coastal Carolina.

“It brings awareness down here to what we’re doing with different partner agencies,” says Sandra Phelps, executive director of that organization.

She says that although conditions at the inaugural 2008 race were rough, the event still raised about $1,500.

For this year’s race, on Saturday, Feb. 28, Robertson arrives in Morehead City on Wednesday morning. During the next three days, he makes sure of every detail.

He meets with United Way volunteer coordinators and the police. He drives the route to make sure no construction will obstruct runners. He marks all the turns with spray paint, so runners will stay on course.

He distributes flyers to houses and businesses on the course, giving information about the time of the event, his phone number and the Web site of the race. He says some people get upset that part of the street will be blocked off, but most enjoy it.

“They love it,” he says. “They look at it like a big parade.”

Early Friday afternoon, the day before the race, Robertson talks with police about finalizing plans for the race route. A wheelchair racer using a hand crank has decided to enter, complicating how to start the race.
Robertson has to decide whether to wait and allow the wheelchair racer to complete the loop and then start, delaying the runners, or start the race and make the wheelchair racer weave in and out of the human traffic.

Robertson finishes talking with the police but still does not have an exact answer to the problem. He says he will brainstorm with his staff during dinner.

The day, which started sunny and warm, has become colder. The wind has picked up. In spite of dire predictions of rain and wind, Robertson remains optimistic. He knows not to worry about things he cannot control.

“The day before an event can be nasty, the day of the event can be nice and the day after goes back to being nasty,” he says.

Despite harsh weather predictions on this Friday, runners drop by the race tent in downtown Morehead City to sign up and pay the $65 entrance fee. At 7 p.m., registration closes.

Robertson says his wife Teresa thinks that when he draws blood preparing for a race it is a good omen. While cleaning up the tent area with his crew, Robertson cuts his hand and sees drops of red.

Shortly after this, Robertson and his workers go to a nearby restaurant for dinner, joined by his wife and 10-year-old daughter Kori. Over plates of seafood and Coke, they discuss all sorts of topics, from steroids in sports to funny YouTube videos.

Robertson eventually asks his crew for ideas on how to start the race. Although three wheelchair participants will participate, only one is fast enough to cause complications. After some discussion, Robertson decides to allow the wheelchair racer to pass and then start the 5K.
As the crew steps outside, the temperature has dropped, but the sky is still clear. Robertson and the group get right back to work, setting up the start-finish line and posting mile markers along the course.

The crew work until midnight and then meet in the hotel lobby before going to bed. They decide to gather in the lobby at 4 a.m. to set up the rest of the course. The men head off to bed, but Robertson stays up.

For the next few hours, he sets up about two miles of the course, putting out orange cones on the road to mark off the lane for runners. A light rain starts to fall.

Robertson returns to the hotel before 4 but cannot sleep. He ends up reading in his hotel room’s bathroom, so he does not wake up his wife and daughter, until it is time to meet his crew.

At 4 a.m., his workers descend on the lobby, alert and ready to work despite only three and a half hours of sleep.

“With morning races, you can’t set up the night before,” Robertson says. “You’re scrambling the morning of, during and after.”

The next two hours are spent preparing the course. In one truck, Robertson’s brother Chuck and family friend Matt Pruitt drop off cones about every 30 feet. Other workers prepare the water stations, set up tables and put out cups for volunteers to hand to runners.

By 6 a.m. the crew is back at the starting line. Robertson assigns a section of the course to each crew member, who must monitor volunteers and traffic. Police begin arriving to make sure the course is blocked off and safe for runners.

“I will do anything to make sure the runners have a safe race,” Robertson says.
The registration tent opens at 6:30. Rain, which has held off most of the night, starts to come down in sheets. But runners show up at the tent to pick up their race packet, which includes a T-shirt and their timing chip.

The timing chip is a small device that runners attach to their shoe with their lace or plastic ties. During the race, runners will cross electric strips that will record the time of the runner and send it to a computer near the course.

One of the busiest people is Robertson’s niece, Noelle Phelps, 28, head of registration. She helps coordinate United Way volunteers, register runners and answer any questions they may have.

She is constantly peppered with questions about T-shirts, registration forms, runner bib numbers and timing chips. Phelps, who is from Raleigh and works for a credit counseling and mortgage company, is patient, thorough and calm.

“I love the chaos of registration,” she says. “And I also see the joy people get from running. Runners are good-natured and understanding. If T-shirts run out or they have to refill forms, it’s really surprising what a good natured bunch they are.”

As race time nears, the temperature rises above 50 degrees. The rain slacks off. Perhaps the drops of blood that Robertson drew the night before will prevent drops of water landing on the course during the race.

Most runners do not seem intimidated by the elements. Sam Schandorff came from Knoxville, Tenn., to run. He will do a marathon in a month and wants to use this race as a tune-up.

“The (weather) conditions are subpar, but I’ve run in worse,” he says.
Shortly after 8, the air horn blows and the wheelchair racers are off. The runners step to the line. A few moments later another air horn blasts, and the half-marathoners are off.

The first wheelchair racer completes the loop and shoots by, accompanied by cyclist escorts who make sure the road is clear for him. Another horn blasts, and the 5K race begins. The start goes off without a hitch.

As the half-marathoners round the corner, the leader is shirtless despite the cool and drizzly conditions, with a smiley face painted on his bare chest.

Robertson jumps in his truck. Since the police are already escorting the wheelchair leader, he decides to lead the race himself.

A lead car keeps racers on course and helps identify problems. Driving his truck, Robertson signals to a few oncoming cars to take another road. They get the message.

The leader of the half marathon finishes with a time of 1:17. He wins the race by almost three minutes. Soon other finishers cross the line, and many seem content with the race.

Ben Hess, 28, from Newport, says he thought the race was organized well and that he would do it again next year.

“It was pretty wet, but it was pretty good,” he says. “I like the (timing) chip thing. There was no waiting around. They just took it off.”

The only real problem with the day’s events is the new timing system. In January, Robertson went into business with two other men to create their own company, called Carolina Timing and Events.
It is the first large event with the new equipment, and some glitches arise. During the award ceremony, various runners say their times are incorrect and that they finished higher than listed.

Robertson says the confusion was partly due to some runners not wearing their timing chips. He says also that runners tend to start their own watches when they cross the start line, but his races are timed by when the starting horn sounds. Official race results are not usually posted until a day after the race. This gives organizers a chance to correct any problems that may have occurred.

Despite how seriously runners take their times, most are calm and accept Robertson’s explanations of the situation. Runners await results with bananas, apples and water provided at the finish line. Some jubilant souls celebrate the race with morning beers.

In a race, the top finishers overall and the finishers by age-group get prizes. For this race, prizes include hats and gift certificates ranging from $15 to $75. Robertson and his crew try as hard as possible to correct all the errors and see to it that runners get the prizes they deserve.

The last finishers cross the line to applause, about four hours after the start of the race. Phelps, from the United Way of Coastal Carolina, seems pleased. She gives Robertson an Obama-like fist bump as a way of celebrating the day.

Soon after, the crew starts to break down the course. Some of Robertson’s men have already started gathering cones and water tables on the route, getting a jump on the cleanup.
Robertson says that despite glitches in the timing system and some registration delays, the day went well. He’s happy with his crew and says they took a sense of ownership with their sections.

“The way the course was marked, the water stations and the turnaround point were all perfect,” he says.

He also believes that the race can grow.

“I’m fully confident we can get 1,000 runners,” he says. “We can get more sponsors and make this a big event.”

Although the final financial numbers on the event haven’t been crunched, Robertson says the United Way will come away with more money than last year.

As the crew finishes cleaning the course, the heavens open with a torrential downpour. Robertson and some of his staff break for a well-earned lunch.

By 4 p.m. the course is clear. Robertson will soon head back to his hotel to relax with his wife and daughter in the pool. Runners at the hotel will come up to him to talk about the race.

“I love being around runners and providing an opportunity for them,” he says. “I get a lot of personal satisfaction and pride in the fact that I can provide them with something.”
Reflection

Running is a simple activity. All anyone needs to get started is a pair of sneakers and a healthy body. Its simplicity makes it one of the most accessible forms of exercise. No expensive equipment is necessary. Other people are not needed to participate. No time is needed to learn a complex skill, such as dribbling a basketball or hitting a baseball. Almost everyone knows how to run. The problem is that most of us have not done so since we were children.

The United States sits in the midst of an obesity epidemic. One of the most effective ways to fight it is through exercise. Unfortunately, few Americans do enough. Many Americans realize they should be doing more but are intimidated, squeezed for time or feel it is more of a burden instead of something to enjoy. But the human body was made to move. Although running may not be for everyone, it is undoubtedly one of the most efficient and inexpensive ways to get fit.

Writing the story on Team Sakina shows that people can change their lives. Although many of the women had been running for years, others on the team were fairly new to exercise. These women made a new group of friends and positive lifestyle changes. Some found joy in the fact that their bodies were able to run fast. They were
sprinting for the first time since they were children and loved it. They made goals to complete races and worked and supported each other until they did.

Writing the thesis allowed me to meet some amazing people. Kerry Brewer, the leader of Team Sakina, was an untiring ball of energy whose passion for running was matched only by her wish to make the world a better place. Butch Robertson, the race organizer, was a genuine and friendly person who did everything he could to make sure runners had a great experience. Jenn Harlow missed running so much she started to tear up during the interview. The thought of never running again still hurts. Her passion for the sport keeps burning strong. I feel lucky to have been able to meet them and many others.

Reporting is an interesting process. One of the final interviews I tried to arrange was with an expert on the science of running barefoot. I tried contacting a podiatrist, an orthopedist, the American Podiatric Medical Association and the American Academy of Podiatric Sports Medicine, all to no avail. Frustrated, I took one last shot in the dark.

Dr. Daniel Lieberman, a professor of biological anthropology at Harvard University, is one of the few people actively studying running barefoot. I looked his name up on Google and found his Web site and phone number. I wrote a quick list of questions and gave his number a call, not thinking I would get an answer. After two rings, someone did answer. It was Lieberman. By luck and gumption, I got an interview with one of the world’s leading experts on barefoot running biomechanics. This was proof that reporting can be both a frustrating and fulfilling experience.

I learned the lessons that beginning reporters must learn. Tracking down people to talk to takes time and tenacity. Rewrites take longer than expected. Preparation before an
interview can make a huge difference. It shows your subject that you care and helps you come up with the best questions. Preparation also helps journalists improvise. More knowledge of a subject allows reporters to let interviews go in unexpected directions, which can add to the story.

The most intense reporting for the thesis was covering the race in Morehead City. I did not want to stand around and watch people work, so I decided to get my hands dirty and help the crew out. We started on a Friday afternoon and worked until midnight. Then we got up at 3:30 a.m. to arrange cones on wet and deserted streets. As night turned to morning, rain started to come down in sheets. My hands were so cold I could hardly hold the pen during the interviews. My notes got wet and the ink smudged. I was drenched. Despite the difficulty, I got full access to what happens behind the scenes of a road race.

One of the toughest tasks for a reporter is choosing what to include in a story. Journalists often get much more material than they can ever use. In the story on Team Sakina, I had interviews, Web sites and e-mails to sift through. Brewer, the team leader, was extremely thorough in every answer she gave. I had enough material to write two or three stories. Ultimately I had to focus on one area for the piece and go with that.

I had to be respectful of my subjects. Jo Ellen Rodgers, the woman who ran to combat depression, opened up a great deal during our interviews. When it came time to write the article, I debated whether to include some personal details she revealed. We had discussions about how much she wanted in the story, and eventually she thought it would be best to keep some things out and keep some facts private. My goal for writing the story was not to expose someone’s personal details but to show that running can be as
beneficial for the mind as it is for the body. In reporting, there is always some give and take.

The aim of the thesis was to fill some holes in the coverage of running. For example, most people with an interest in the sport have heard that exercise can help alleviate symptoms of depression. I decided to write about Rodgers because few stories have been written about someone who is actually trying to use running as a form of therapy. Little has also been written about what goes on behind the scenes of a race. Runners rarely think about how much time and effort a race takes to organize, which is why I decided to go to Morehead City. My hope was to shed light on some of those who make up the running community.

Many other stories about running are out there to be covered. One of the most interesting is about barefoot running, mentioned briefly in the story on running shoes. Dr. Lieberman’s research has tremendous potential to influence runners and the running industry. If running shoes are found to cause injury and lower efficiency, the running world could be greatly affected. Shoe companies will have to search for new technologies to closely mimic the human foot. It could be one of the sport’s biggest stories in this young century.

The continuing study of the connection between body and mind is a treasure trove of stories. Scientific research is just starting to investigate how they are linked. As more studies are released, journalists will have a chance to make sense of the information and interpret it for the general public.

The effect of the economic downturn on running should also be reported. Corporate sponsorship of road races is the economic lifeline that keeps the races afloat.
They cannot make a profit by registration fees alone. As money tightens, it will be interesting to see if races continue. Large races, such as the Boston Marathon or Raleigh Rocks, should continue to thrive. But smaller races, such as local 5Ks and 10Ks, may fall upon difficult times. It also will be interesting to see if runners are still willing to spend around $100 on running shoes as discretionary income lessens. Perhaps people will cut from other places to keep running, or perhaps the industry will contract.

No matter what happens, I hope participation in running continues to grow. As Americans, we are lucky to live lives of comfort and luxury. We can drive everywhere. We can eat food for very low prices. Many of our jobs do not require us to do backbreaking labor. But we do need to move. We only have one life and one body, and it is vital that we treat them well. As health-care costs skyrocket, prevention should be emphasized, and exercise should be a part of that. I do not believe that we must all become marathon runners, but I believe a little exercise will go a long way.

This thesis has been a labor of love. Running is one of my great passions, and I cannot imagine spending so much time and energy on something I am not as interested in. Running may be a simple activity. But it has provided me with so many stories to write and people to meet. I hope these stories find a place for publication and start to fill where coverage has been missing.
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