

## **MAY            RUNNING SHOES**

People just about faint when I tell them I have 9 different pairs of running shoes that I wear actively. My shoes range in weight from 8 oz to 13 oz for a size 9. For my actual size, they weigh 3 oz more. Since close to all of my running is on natural surfaces, I don't need a lot of shoe but I still feel most comfortable in a shoe that weighs around 12 oz. I wear the lighter shoes when I want to run faster because with a size 14, super light shoes still weigh 11 oz. There is a trade off for me when I wear light shoes. Sure I feel swifter on foot but the next day my feet tend to ache. I think it is a combination of less cushion AND less support. I like the 12 oz shoes the best because I think there is the right balance of cushion, support and weight. Going heavier and the shoes are too clunky and weigh my legs down.

Yesterday, I ran in 2 inches of slush, I was wearing heavier shoes and they got soaked. They weighed a ton and it clearly reflected in an increased HR for the pace. It is really about what works the best for the individual. In my opinion, I think the barefoot movement has gone a bit overboard. I'll take cushy, supportive shoes any day.

## **MAY            BAREFOOT RUNNING**

[http://running.competitor.com/2010/05/features/but-is-it-faster\\_9784#ixzz0nB2IAWgN](http://running.competitor.com/2010/05/features/but-is-it-faster_9784#ixzz0nB2IAWgN)

Mick, after reading the article (see above) yesterday on barefoot running, I read a few more articles on the subject. There were some recurring points that kept coming up regarding barefoot running.

- 1) People who start running barefoot often say they started because they were having injury issues or have a history of injuries.
- 2) The videos I saw on the internet of people running barefoot looked like they were running at 11 min pace or slower. In other words, to me they looked like they were "jogging" as opposed to running.
- 3) Barefoot runners have a tendency to blame running shoes for injuries explaining that running shoes invite you to be a heel striker vs. a forefoot striker.

I have my own questions.

- 1) Since I have never been injured after 70,000 miles of running and I have run every inch of those miles with shoes, why would I change my formula?
- 2) Can barefoot runners click off 7:30 miles whenever they feel like it? I agree with the argument that you generally can't run fast running barefoot.
- 3) What if you are not a heel striker in spite of wearing running shoes?

Sure, there are people who are plagued with injuries and have found that flopping around barefoot has helped reduce or remove their injury problems. I have to wonder what their average pace was with shoes vs. without. I can't help but think about the 14 mile run that I will do tomorrow morning. The trail

is filled with sharp rocks and wherever there is dirt, it will be mud. There are also sections filled with stones about 3/4 inch in diameter that would chew up your feet in minutes without shoes. There is just no way you could travel on this route without shoes. If you were stupid enough to try, I seriously doubt it would be at 9 or 10 min pace and I know it wouldn't be any fun at all.

I think back to one particular run I did. I went on a 30 mile run and it was 30 BELOW 0. Besides that fact that my bottles froze even though I had them under my coat, I remember my shoes. The cold made them very hard. I could actually hear them clicking along the pavement as I ran. If I tried running barefoot, I would have lost my feet on that run. Running barefoot is so impractical to me. In general, it just seems stupid.

## **MAY FOOTSTRIKE MECHANICS/STRIDE RATE**

Thinking of my own mechanics, my feet tend to hit the ground pretty flat, slightly in favor of heel first. Depending on pace and incline or decline, my heel will come in contact first but it doesn't pound, rather it rolls to my forefoot. My feet are flexible which allows for the rolling movement. As far as pronation, I am very neutral; I don't under or over pronate. You asked me about leg turnover at one point. I'm sure my stride length is consistent with very light heel contact to flat landing. I have actually been reluctant to measure it because whatever my turnover is, it has certainly contributed to being injury free. I don't want to know what it is because I don't want to invite the notion of changing it into the picture.

I guess if people want to run barefoot, all the power to them, I am completely convinced that I am not missing anything or risking injury in any way, shape or form by wearing shoes. On the contrary, if I wanted to get injured, the quickest way to do it would be to go on tomorrow's run without shoes. I guess along with passing on going barefoot, I'll pass on being a vegetarian and driving a Prius. I agree with you, barefoot running is a temporary interest. I'm sure there will always be people who think barefoot running is nirvana, whatever. I am truly grateful for companies like Nike that have dumped billions of dollars into running research and in my mind are the very reason I have been injury free for 70,000 miles. I will take my 9 pairs of running shoes and wear them in good health!

## **MAY BIOMECHANICS AND STRIDE RATE EXAMINATION**

Mick, I would agree about my being close to neutral. I am fairly certain I don't overextend my stride length, I don't know if I could even if I wanted to. I'm not very flexible by nature and I'm too tight to be overextending anything. When I look at the wear on the outsoles of my shoes, I see some wear on the outside edge of my heel and under my big toe and ball of my foot. None of it is excessive and part of the reason I can wear my shoes forever (the wear is pretty even). Since my runs have a lot of elevation change, I wonder if the heel wear is from running downhill and the forefoot wear is from running uphill.

Mick, I decided to count my stride rate today towards the end of my run. I counted one leg hitting the ground for 60 seconds and repeated the count 5 or 6 times. I was consistently at 82, or 164 steps for both legs in 60 seconds. I just looked up an article on the internet:

[http://www.active.com/running/Articles/Simple\\_drills\\_to\\_improve\\_running\\_economy.htm](http://www.active.com/running/Articles/Simple_drills_to_improve_running_economy.htm)

The article says I want to aspire to 180-190 strides per minute. It said if I'm a beginner, in all likelihood my stride rate will be 170 or lower. I had to laugh and this is exactly why I didn't count my stride rate when you first suggested it.

Now I am going to feel compelled to improve my stride rate, sheesh. I guess that is OK, I just hope I don't screw something up and end up injured. I need to add 20 steps per minute from where I am now. That, to me, is shocking but I'm used to being shocked. I certainly was when I learned how much I had slowed down. What is really interesting is that after reading tons and tons of articles on running and after running regularly for 38 yrs, stride rate has never come into the picture. I don't know how I've missed such a huge basic like this for all of these years but it is what it is. We are never too old to learn.

Adding 20 steps per minute into my running is going to feel really weird. I guess I am used to a long, loping stride vs. a shorter, quicker step. It reminds me of when I was bike training for triathlons. I never liked keeping a cadence of 90 rpms. I always felt more comfortable at lower revs in a higher gear.

Well, I should at least improve my stride rate to a beginner level.

Mick, I read a few more articles on stride rate. I don't know what I was thinking, I now remember reading a ton of stuff on stride rate and stride length but I just didn't do anything about it and apparently forgot all about the concept. I read the following from an article by Ed Eyestone from "Runners World" published March, 2007 and had to laugh.

"If your stride rate falls below 180, join the club. Although my stride rate during the 1992 Olympic Marathon Trials was 182 (I counted while watching a tape), my stride rate on a few recent runs was more like 160."

That comment made me feel good knowing that maybe all hope isn't lost. I'm wondering with time, if you are not watching stride rate or working on it; that it deteriorates. I seriously doubt that I'm overstriding. My feet are landing below my hips so I guess I am just slowing down as a result of inefficiency. It makes me think about the fact that my avg HR for a given pace 15 yrs ago was 13 or 14 bpm lower than it is today. I wonder if loss of stride rate is contributing to that. I have no idea what my stride rate was 15 yrs ago so I can't compare. Having a HR of 13 or 14 bpm higher for a given pace certainly points at efficiency or better said, loss of it.

Well, in any case I'm going to try to work on getting my stride rate into the mid 170's and we'll see where that takes me. It's not as critical for me to cover a given distance faster as much as it is to cover the same distance easier. For the last few years I have been wondering why I feel like I weigh 300 pounds when I'm running as opposed to feeling like I'm gliding over the ground. Maybe this has something to do with it.

## **MAY WORKING ON STRIDE RATE**

Mick, Shortly after I started my run this morning, I focused on push off and trying to limit/shorten the amount of time my foot stayed on the ground once it landed. I noticed shifting slightly more towards the balls of my feet and subsequently my stride length shortening a few inches. All of this fell into place immediately. It was a familiar form that I had spent years and miles running with. It was like a gear that I hadn't used in a long time but still had. I counted stride length and it was magically at 180! I kept my focus on push off and foot placement for the entire run. It felt like riding a bicycle, shorter, smoother, faster strides. I quickly noticed I no longer felt like I was 300 pounds trying to run, that familiar gliding feeling that I thought was long lost had come back instantly. I continued to monitor my stride rate, counting my right for 30 secs and it consistently stayed at 44 or 45 for the whole run. What felt really good was running uphill; I had so much more power! Downhill I wanted to stretch out my stride and slow down the rate but I focused on not doing that. Towards the end I also wanted to stretch things out and slow down the stride rate but kept my focus on staying with the other gear. This gear is deeply ingrained in muscle memory; I just need to make sure I keep my focus until it sticks in auto pilot.

The results were profound. A few days after I got my HR monitor, I ran the 6.7 mile course in 8:47 pace with an average HR of 153. I had to really push myself and I was dead at the end. Today, I ran at 8:50 pace and I felt like I was out on a stroll and didn't feel tired at the end at all. My HR was 136 which is totally amazing, 17 bpm less for almost the same pace. It is obvious my mechanics were all jacked up from the slower stride rate. All I had to do was think about push off and everything snapped back into proper form. Fortunately, a stride rate of 180 is not something I have to learn, it is just something I need to remind myself about. I have plenty of time to reprogram my brain to make 180 automatic vs. 164. The key of course will be to learn to run for 4 hrs comfortably at a stride rate of 180.

## **MAY BACK TO BAREFOOT/MINIMALIST RUNNING**

Mick, when you asked me about "Born to Run" shortly after we first started talking, I mentioned I hadn't read the book but I thought I agreed with the ideas about minimalist shoes. Since I haven't read the book, I really shouldn't have commented either way. I only have an idea of what Chris McDougall wrote about and the more I understand what is in the book, I'm sure there is plenty that I don't agree with.

I'm finding the barefoot vs. running shoe debate really fascinating; there is controversy even with something as simple as running. Here are a few of my thoughts;

1) I am a supporter of big shoe companies; I have been a long standing customer particularly with Nike. For years, Nike shoes have worked really well for me. They fit well, have proven very durable and I have been running injury free for years. Nike as well as other big shoe companies have come up with a lot of technology over the past 40 yrs and I don't see that dropping off in the foreseeable future.

2) What is important isn't whether you wear shoes or not but with varying the dynamics. Running is repetitive; slightly changing foot strike by varying footwear will help mitigate some of that repetition. It is important to have multiple pairs of shoes of different models and brands and to rotate them. Also, matching footwear to running style, running surface, intended running speed, etc. is important. As the Nike guy put it in his Iped article, the shoe needs to be just right, Goldilocks. The key is to wear just enough shoe to do the job.

- 3) The perfect running shoe does not exist. Because of that, an individual should own many pairs of running shoes and use them according to where and how they will be running.
- 4) I suppose as part of variation, bare feet can be rotated into the mix. Bare feet just seem so impractical, there are few opportunities to run on the right surface, the right distance, the right speed that matches bare feet. Since there is little opportunity for bare feet to be the right choice, why bother? I doubt I will ever run barefoot because I will never want to take the risk of injuring my feet by stepping on something sharp and ruining my healthy running life.
- 5) Wearing "minimalist" shoes is not running barefoot; it is running with light shoes. Light shoes have been around forever, this is not a new concept. I have light shoes that weigh slightly more than Vibram FiveFingers which are supposed to be "barefoot" shoes. The difference is that my shoes offer impact protection and support in addition to protection from sharp stuff.
- 6) One benefit of barefoot running is to build muscles that may have deteriorated from lack of use with shoes. There are better ways to build those muscles than by running. There is no reason time can't be spent barefoot while not running to build neglected muscles. A second benefit is that it encourages better form. Barefoot running may be better than landing on your heels which running shoes encourage but I would argue that landing on the balls of your feet is not better than landing essentially flat across the whole surface of your foot. Learning and using ideal form is easily accomplished wearing shoes.
- 7) Barefoot running seems to be more about philosophy than about practicality.
- 8) Depending on how strong this fad is, it will probably have an impact on the shoe industry. We know they are driven by dollars and will produce whatever they think people will buy. I just hope it helps focus development dollars on something useful rather than detract from it. Nike has always had a barefoot type offering out there. At one point it was Nike FIT technology, a super light shoe that was like a sock with a single buckled strap. Currently, they offer the Nike Free shoes which have been around since 2005. They are designed to feel like running barefoot and to help develop neglected muscles. I never bothered trying either concept.

Here is a website I found. It is a forum of podiatrists discussing barefoot running. It starts and January and goes through to the current time. It has 15 pages of posts. After reading about 4 pages, I got the point and it started becoming repetitive.

<http://www.podiatry-arena.com/podiatry-forum/showthread.php?t=4328>

Have a great run this weekend and wear some shoes!

## **JUNE            VIBRAM**

My wife gave me a pair of Vibram FiveFingers for Father's day if you can believe it. Apparently a trainer at the athletic club who my wife is friendly with, wears them, loves them and swears by them. She has multiple pairs in many colors and that is all she wears. I had mentioned something to her about seeing foot prints in the mud at the end of winter and I was wondering if the person was wearing them. Apparently she picked up on my curiosity about them and totally surprised me. I wore them around the house and for a 2 mile walk with my wife last night. It will probably be a while before I try them running, I'll stick to wearing them around the house and occasionally walking in them. I am really curious about the benefits that are claimed by wearing them, like building the muscles in your feet,

calves, etc., helping your posture, lower back, whatever. It all makes sense but none of it has been proven. If there are benefits to wearing these, I would think I can realize them by wearing the shoes casually without risking injury using them on a run. I don't need much cushion when I run because I run on soft surfaces but I do feel more secure with traditional running shoes. I will keep an open mind and see how they work out.

I spent most of my vacation wearing my Vibram FiveFingers. I have gone from wearing them around a lot casually to walking with my wife everyday in them to running in them. Sunday I did an 8 mile walk in them and I just couldn't get over how good my feet, legs and back felt. For that matter, walking around the house or, whatever; things just feel good. Monday I ran 6.7 miles in them at my usual pace. I really think I can run longer and faster with traditional running shoes but I don't think simply running faster or further is what it is all about. What I found was after about 4 or 5 miles, my feet and calves started to get really tired and the ground started to feel harder. I'm sure it has to do with using my muscles differently and not fully adapted to the different mechanics. When I finished, I could not believe how good my feet, legs and back felt. They truly force you to use muscles in your feet and your calves like you have never used them before. An interesting thing that I found was that after wearing them a lot on vacation then putting my running shoes back on, the running shoes felt really confining. Not that the confinement is a bad thing but that it reminded me of how dynamically different running shoes are to Vibrams. I can understand adding padding to running shoes to soften the impact. You can compensate for that with how you land in Vibrams on the forefoot or midfoot with shorter strides, but in the long run, it is nice to have some help that running shoes provide. Actually it is important to have that padding for longer runs. Even though running shoes felt confining, the cushion does feel good. I can understand how the cushion incorrectly invites people to land on their heels. I also get that when landing on a cushy heel, it then provides little stability and the heel can twist inward or outward which we know is not good. With the Vibrams, the reason for the toes in the shoes is to allow your toes to spread which provides a very stable landing platform. Your heel barely touches the ground, if at all, and has no opportunity to overpronate or supinate. Since I don't have those problems to begin with, I wonder what happens with a runner with severe over pronation problems when they run with something like Vibrams.

With respect to running, at this point I think the Vibrams are wonderful for an occasional relaxed 6 or 7 mile run with the rest of running done in traditional shoes. With time, I don't know what my opinion will be but for now, I see them as just an option to rotate into my shoe inventory. I certainly want to use them to further develop the muscles in my feet and calves. I would guess that strengthening your feet is a good thing and will help when running in traditional shoes.

Something I noticed that kind of opened a lost world to me. When wearing Vibrams, they are essentially a footshaped outer sole, no mid sole and thin stretchy nylon upper. The rubber outsole protects your feet from sharp things but you can still feel quite a bit. You can walk where ever you walk with shoes but you can feel everything. While in Vegas, I was very aware of walking on marble, on carpet, on wood, on the grating on escalators, on pavement, concrete, grass, tile, molded surface, gravel; whatever. All of this stuff has always been there but traditional shoes really take away the connection and realization of what you are actually walking on. I really got a wow effect from this. To use an analogy, it would be like wearing huge down stuffed mittens all day for years and then all of a sudden putting on tight fitting thin leather gloves and realizing you have the sense of touch. I guess I just took for granted that your feet have that powerful sense. It's kind of ironic, given how much I have traveled on foot in my life and how important my feet are to my whole sense of being. I have been treating my feet as two clumps of

meat that I tie my running shoes on to which then act as a lever. I know I am exaggerating but there definitely is a huge gap.

I truly believe there is a right shoe for the right time. I know because of the far out design and all the hysteria about running barefoot that these truly have a strong fad element to them. With all fads, they die but in the meantime, they can have an impact on traditional thinking. I believe these shoes will have an impact on how running shoe companies look at shoes. In any case, they have opened my eyes to a world that was right under my feet! I will enjoy wearing Vibrams around the house, on walks with my wife and for an occasional run. I actually have enjoyed the pair I have so much that I went out and ordered a second pair in a different model. I have the KSO's which are adapted for running but they just came out with a new model made specifically for running called Bikila that I ordered.

## **JUNE VIBRAM'S IMPACT ON STRIDE RATE AND HEART RATE**

Mick, since the Vibrams protect your feet, it makes things a little more convenient. I checked my stride rate while wearing them. With traditional shoes, I do 43 or 44 one foot strides per 30 secs which translates to 172 or 176. That has been really consistent since becoming aware. In the Vibrams, my stride is a little shorter to ensure forefoot landing and was consistent at 44 and 45 or 176 to 180. My HR vs. pace was about expected but I'm still recovering from vacation. I only plan on running in them once per week at most but doing a lot of walking in them and wearing around casually. I really think a big contributor to my running health has been from having a BIG variety of running shoes to rotate through, I will not change that. Rather, these will just get added into the mix.

Mick, I think the advocates of running barefoot or in minimalist shoes have really missed the boat regarding how they proclaimed the wonders they discovered to the world. They talk a lot about physical benefits but many of the claims are unsubstantiated which has gotten the Podiatry community in an uproar, caused a huge debate and people missing the point.

## **JUNE VIBRAM'S IMPACT ON RULES 1 AND 2; HAVE FUN AND STAY HEALTHY**

**Injury prevention;** healthy running is important, that is **Mick's Rule Number 2** but what about **Mick's Rule Number 1;** Have Fun? What has gotten my attention wearing Vibrams is not the promise or expectation of physical benefits but the incredible sensation you get from being able to feel the ground combined with being forced to use your feet and calves to mitigate impact. Before getting the Vibrams, I was unable to picture or imagine the sensation, now I'm convinced the sensation has to be experienced to be understood. You might get a glimpse running on grass across a football field or on the beach but I don't think it is enough. You need to be able to go for 6, 7 or 8 miles on different surfaces such as dirt, gravel, pavement, concrete, grass, sand, etc. to really get the idea. It is not only the mechanics of using the muscles in your feet and calves but in feeling the surface and feeling the change in surfaces that makes it really interesting.

There are a lot of reasons why I run, among those are definitely fun and entertainment. Experiencing

the sensation you get from Vibrams is certainly entertaining and great fun. I don't think I'll ever run barefoot for safety reasons so using something like Vibrams is a good compromise. When I was growing up through junior high, I used to spend the summers without wearing shoes. In the 7th or 8th grade, I stepped on a large piece of broken glass one night which cut right through the outer edge of my foot. They had to sew it up and it put me on crutches for over two months. I learned the hard way about the importance of protecting your feet. Some of my experience now is bringing me back to the days of going shoeless. I remember the miles I used to put in then with no shoes not for fitness but as a means of transportation.

## **JULY            VIBRAM FOR BEGINNERS**

Mick, I guess if someone is only running 2 or 3 miles/day, using Vibrams as a primary shoe might be OK. As much as I enjoy wearing them, I limit the amount I use them to one run per week at most. They only protect you from sharp objects, not from impact or any sort of lateral strain. You need to rely 100% on the ground and natural biomechanics for impact mitigation. That is a risky place to spend a lot of time. I like running in those shoes because they force good biomechanics and because it feels great to feel the ground but they do come with a risk. Hopefully people understand and respect those risks as well.

Mick, nothing new to you that people new to running are highly susceptible to injury because their bodies have not adapted to the demands of running and they are not patient enough to wait for the adaption process to take place. Adding the fact if someone is wearing shoes that have zero cushion 100% of the time, it unfortunately becomes more of a question of when they will end up injured rather than if.

The Vibrams provide a terrific experience but like racing flats they should be used only on a limited basis and by people who are bio mechanically efficient. Given comments about wanting to be as minimal as possible sounds like the idea is coming from something people read rather than based on experience. Reading "Born to Run" isn't going to help persuade people to try traditional shoes. One thing I have found after wearing Vibrams is how wonderful they make cushioned running shoes feel. I love the contrast of going back and forth. I think I appreciate Vibrams more because of all my experience with cushioned shoes and now I appreciate cushioned shoes more because of my experience with Vibrams.

Most people would be so much safer alternating between Vibrams and traditional running shoes. They can still be a minimalist runner but have cushioned shoes to provide a recovery period. Like me, by introducing that change every day, the experience becomes more interesting.

## **JULY            VIBRAM BIKILA**

With all of that said, my Bikila's came in the mail yesterday and I ran 6.7 miles in them this morning. I have one impression.....WOW. I won't bore you with all of the details but essentially Vibram has taken their philosophy and ideas and have engineered a shoe specifically designed for running. They did an outstanding job, the shoes are fantastic. I really liked the KSO's but the Bikila's bring it to a new level. Until this morning, I thought I could run further and faster in traditional running shoes than Vibrams but



now I'm not so sure that will be true with time. The Bikila's are 6 oz vs. 5.7 for the KSO so not perceptible yet the bottoms are far more protective. I can still feel the ground and I still get the same sensation but I have much more confidence running on rough stuff and my feet feel a lot better after putting in 6 or 7 miles. The ground didn't feel nearly as hard towards the end of the run. Some improvement may be from my own adaptation to wearing Vibrams. Out of good sense, I will still limit my running to once per week for now but I'm sure it won't be long before I'm doing my 14 mile run in them.

## **JULY            INJURY RATE: FACT OR FICTION?**

A few months ago, before getting Vibrams, I looked on the web for injury rate, etc. relating to Vibrams. I found a lot of anecdotal stuff both for and against Vibrams. The barefoot advocates claim the shoes will do everything; providing almost a religious experience. The podiatrist's rant and rave about the false claims the barefooters are making and counter by providing stories about seeing more people with metatarsal fractures from wearing them. I found absolutely nothing conclusive for or against them from either side of the argument.

I am currently learning about leg stiffness and its relationship to surface compliancy. At a high level, studies have been done to show the relationship between ground softness and leg stiffness. In other words, the more compliant the ground is, the stiffer your leg is when running. The firmer the ground is, the less stiff your leg is. Essentially, your legs act like springs that adjust with the ground. Adding shoes in the equation just changes leg stiffness. The point of learning this is that it is helping me understand what goes on with Vibram or barefoot running vs wearing shoes. The answer is simple, yet profound; your legs adjust their stiffness when you impact the ground to accommodate. The amount of ground stiffness plus shoe stiffness plus leg stiffness adds to give you total stiffness. I believe there is an optimal amount of total stiffness that translates into max running efficiency. In other words, given the ground you are running on, combined with the shoes you are wearing determines how your legs will adjust. The thing is; I think you can help your legs more easily adjust to the given surface by the type of shoes you are wearing. Put in English, if you are running on firm ground like pavement, you want soft shoes to share some of the work with your legs. If you are running on soft surfaces, you want stiff shoes to also help your legs accommodate that surface. Duh, something we've known all along. Think about the technology that goes into running tracks. The athlete's track racing shoes aren't much different than Vibrams with spikes with respect to cushioning. Since that is the case, the track is made softer so that your legs can run at what is considered optimal stiffness. There is actually a term I've learned that helps describe where you want to keep your running called ZOOLES. It stands for Zone Of Optimal Leg Stiffness. This is where your running efficiency is optimized.

Now I think I understand why I like all those pairs of shoes. Because I run on all types of surfaces, I think just based on feedback, I'm selecting the shoes that best fit the surface and allow me to run most efficiently. This is all purely speculation but the story sounds good. This also supports the argument why you would not want to wear Vibrams in all conditions or go bare foot in all conditions. Your leg stiffness can only accommodate so much, if you run for prolonged periods outside of the optimal stiffness equation, there will be stress on your body and you will eventually get injured.

I was really curious but too cheap to go out and buy a pair to see for myself until my wife gave them as

a gift. Now I don't care what the claims are either way. As with any super light shoe, I recognize the risks of over wearing them and I don't care about whether there are physical benefits or not. What has really captured my attention is purely the experience I get, I understand why the advocates are ranting and raving about them. They are worth the price tag just for the experience. I agree with the podiatrists that there are people who will get injured from them but I feel I have a handle on controlling that.

After spending a lot of time in the first pair of Vibrams, I just couldn't resist trying the model designed specifically for running (Bikila) and I wasn't disappointed. My attitude about either pair is that they are a lot of fun and I use them for entertainment more than anything. For the bulk of my training and absolutely for any racing, I am still sticking with traditional running shoes, I'm sure that will always be the case.

I find it kind of entertaining how a simple product can draw so much emotion positively and negatively. We both know that things come and go, I expect these will too. What will be interesting is to see how long they hold people's interest and survive in the market, as well as if they have any influence on the big shoe companies and how they develop their shoes. Nike has been enormously successful with the Nike Free, their version of the "barefoot" running shoe and Nike Free was out there a few years before Vibram came out with FiveFingers.

## **AUGUST                      FIRST LONG RUN IN VIBRAMS**

The long run in Vibrams went great. Here are my thoughts/experience:

- 1) After 3 miles I could really notice my feet loosening up. (Similar to other muscles loosening up when exercising) The difference being that when your feet are bound in shoes, you really don't notice it,, at least I never did. I noticed this on my shorter runs but was really tuned into it on this run.
- 2) After my feet loosened up, they felt FANTASTIC and the ground felt great. It is hard to describe but once my feet were loose and pliable, the ground seemed to feel really soft. Part was that was due to running on dirt but the other part, I think, was due to my feet and legs performing their own natural shock absorption. The funny thing is that when I'm wearing old shoes, I feel like they've lost their cushioning and I need to throw them away. With Vibrams there is no cushioning, yet I don't have that thought or feeling that they need cushioning. I'm sure it is because none is expected so you rely on your natural form to provide the shock absorption. The ground always feels soft, at least it does until my feet and calves get tired.
- 3) From miles 3 to 10, everything felt great. Since the Vibrams are so light and you can feel the trail, it is just a joy to run. As I've said before, there is this wonderful experience that comes with running in them.
- 4) From miles 10 to 14, the party started to end. My feet and calves were really getting tired. Also, you really need to focus on the ground and where you are placing your feet in order not to hurt yourself. Focusing for over 10 miles like that gets really tiring. At that point I was wishing I could have spaced out in some clunky shoes and just cruised to the end.

5) When running on trails, those little 1/2 inch rocks are killers. There were sections of small rocks that were unavoidable, you really had to slow down and be careful. The last few times running this route, I've passed a guy going in the opposite direction running barefoot. I don't know how he travels over those small rocks with no protection. I think with time, practice, conditioning, I will get much better at it but for now, I need to be careful.

6) When comparing my average HR with Vibrams on the 14 mile run to my other long runs, it again came in 4 or 5 bpm lower than with regular shoes. This all may be due to how light the shoes are, I will never know. The way to test it would be to add 7 or 8 oz to each shoe and run that way but who cares, I'm know I would never bother doing something like that.

7) Because I went from running 6.7 miles up to 14.3 miles instantly, my calves let me know it. They were stiff for the rest of the day Friday, worse on Saturday and still stiff Sunday. They were ok Monday so I went 6.7 in Vibrams Monday. I plan on another 6.7 in them Wednesday. I'm sure after a few more 14 milers in Vibrams, my calves, ankles, etc. will be used to the demands of running with a different form. Because I need to ramp it up for the marathon and I want to do it on pavement, I'll save the 14 mile Vibram runs for after I complete the marathon. I am wondering about ramping it up in Vibrams to be able to run 26 miles but I won't do it this year.

My training plans from now until the marathon will include an 18 mile run this Saturday, 19 miles the week after then 4 x 20 milers. That will get me 2 weeks out from race day and I'll start tapering. During the week, I plan on running in Vibrams 2 or 3 days per week just because I like running in them.

When I did the 14 in vibrams, I was mentally tired from work and my long runs so I was planning on taking it easy. My pace started out slow for the first half but ended up quite a bit faster in the second half. It was something like 10:30 pace for the first half and 9:30 for the second half. Anything around 10 min pace is good for me on this route. Running in general felt easier but I think it is because I can easily adapt to 14 miles wearing Vibrams. I won't go further than that until I feel ready to. I will not get injured; I'll just stop increasing my distance before that happens. I never bothered to count my stride rate. Thinking about it, as far as I can remember, it was the typical 180 for wearing Vibrams. It seems like, from what I've read, people who wear vibrams tend to only wear vibrams instead of rotating them.

## **AUGUST**

### **HR AND STRIDE RATE COMPARISON**

I ran my 6.7 miler this morning in Vibrams. This time I counted my stride rate around 12 to 15 different times. It was consistent at 47 or 48 strides for 30 seconds which translates to 188 or 192 for one minute. Amazing compared to the 162 I first measured a while ago. Now I'm curious about what my rate is in traditional shoes. My average pace today was 8:53 which was after starting at a little over 10 min pace for the first 2 or 3 miles. I was in the 7's for the second half of the run for sure. My average HR was 135 for the run so it is still coming in 4 bpm below the line when wearing traditional shoes. To give you an idea of how significant the 135 is, when I first got my HR monitor, I did a similar paced run of 8:47 or 6 seconds faster than today but my avg HR was 153, a huge difference. That is just one data point but I'd be willing to guess that my stride rate was probably closer to 162 than to 192.

## AUGUST

## BACK TO MARATHON TRAINING

Mick, based on today's run, I think I'm back from vacation. I'm looking forward to Saturday's 18 miler. I want to stay as relaxed as possible with my eye on projected marathon pace. I want to stay comfortable and not kill myself while coming as close to marathon pace as possible. The problem I've been dealing with is that it has been too hot to remain comfortable the whole run. When I think of my marathon days in the 80's, 9 min pace was a laugh, now it is a big challenge. I used to typically run 20 miles in 2 1/2 hrs or 7:30 pace, now 20 miles in 3 hrs would be great. A different time, with different goals.

I had a nice email from a guy who ran Leadville in 29 hrs, 59 mins and 35 seconds. The cutoff is 30 hours, he made it by a few seconds. He thanked me for the strategy I wrote, said he never would have finished without it. I also had a call from a woman in Atlanta today who ran but only completed 50 miles. She said she tried really hard to follow my strategy but the altitude really slowed her down and she couldn't keep on pace.

I looked at the Leadville results and a few things surprised me, 1) there was over 800 entrants, when I was running it, there was 300 and they used to cap it. Over the yrs they let it grow to 500. At 500, it seemed too crowded on the trails. 2) I only recognized a handful of names. When I was running Leadville I used to recognize well over 100 names or as much as 1/3 of the field.

I had a good run Saturday. I ran 18 miles at 8:46 pace which I was really happy with. A 4 hr marathon is 9:09 pace so anything around 9 min pace on my long runs is great. What made me happy was that I was at 8:46 pace at 9 miles when I turned around. I was starting to feel the miles at that point, my legs didn't feel the greatest, etc. I fully expected to deteriorate over the 2nd half. I decided to really focus on maintaining my pace at 8:46 and to try to hang on to it as long as I could so that hopefully my average over the run would be under 9:09. When the average slowed to 8:47, typically on hills, I'd push it a little, typically going downhill to get it back to 8:45 or whatever. That went on the entire way back. I actually felt fine at the end and my recovery happened pretty quick which really made me happy because it is another good indicator of conditioning.

I've been wearing my marathon shoes occasionally on my long runs, the Nike Zoom Marathon Racer which they of course no longer make. They weigh 8 OZ for a size 9, mine weigh between 9.5 or 10 OZ on my kitchen scale for my size 14. That is pretty light for me. I like wearing them on the long runs because it is easier for me to maintain my pace. I think between wearing the Vibrams and these shoes, I'm really starting to like wearing lighter shoes. It wasn't long ago that I told you I like liked 12 OZ shoes because they had a good balance of weight to cushion and support for me. Lately it seems that I'm favoring lighter shoes and focusing on how I'm landing to compensate for having less shoe. I know for the shoes I have that are heavier than 12 OZ, I don't like them at all. As I replace my shoes, I'll probably go with lighter shoes for a while to see how they work for me. I'm sure the Vibrams are influencing my opinion about shoe weight. I'm starting to learn that with form, you can compensate for shoe cushioning with how you are landing and the role your feet and legs play as part of the equation. For someone with big feet, saving on all that shoe weight makes a big difference in how much work you need to do when running.

## SEPTEMBER

## SELF-EVALUATION

Mick, it seems like it has taken me forever to transition from ultra running back to "normal" running. I got into this slow plodding that just wouldn't go away. The mentality I've had, didn't seem to help the situation. In spite of ending my ultra running career, I've still had this drive to run longer at every opportunity. Whenever I was out on a run or had a good stretch of runs, I have always wanted to run longer instead of faster. If I was on a 7 mile run, rather than speed up my pace by a min per mile or something, I'd stay at the pace and lengthen the run to 10 miles or whatever. This year I've been trying real hard to resist that temptation to add more miles instead of speed. Even yesterday, given I was home on a holiday, I could have easily stretched the run to 14 miles but I forced myself to stick with the 6.7 and use my energy on pace. On Saturday when I figured I was having another fairly good long run, I couldn't help but think about stretching that run from 19 to 20, then stretching the next runs up to 23 or 24 mile before the marathon. I recovered my sense of reason and will stick with my plan of 20 milers. 20 miles is plenty of time to get in a good workout. If it starts feeling easy, I need to convince myself pick up the pace not the distance.

I completely agree with you (about feeling better recently), I have a lot of factors at work at this point. If I were to guess at the biggest factor, I would have to say it has to do with focusing on my stride rate, thanks to you. I think combining that with limiting my distance to 50 miles/week has really helped. Wearing light shoes really supports the faster stride rate but it is the stride rate that has helped me ramp up the pace.

I'm sure yesterday would have been a good run regardless of the shoes. I think it is going to take some time to really sort out if there are benefits to wearing VFF other than the fun factor. It might have only been a coincidence that I was wearing those shoes. I will say that the shoes really gave me a feeling of agility while running. I could really feel the benefit of having minimal weight on my feet. The difference from VFF and lightweight, lightly cushioned shoes is that with the lightly cushioned shoes, you are still relying on the cushion to some extent so you may be landing with the expectation of cushion. When doing that, it doesn't take long for your feet/legs to take a pounding. With the VFF, there is no expectation of cushioning so you land accordingly and you don't take that same pounding. I also noticed Saturday when wearing my marathon shoes on the long run that I was running a lot softer in them. The marathon shoes aren't much heavier than the VFF but in the past I used to run in them like regular running shoes. I noticed that I was running in them more like how I run in VFF with shorter strides and landing more forward in the shoe. The good news was that after 19 miles, my feet and legs didn't feel like they had taken a pounding. Again, it comes back to a form thing with the VFF.

## SEPTEMBER

## FORMING MARATHON RACE PLAN

OK, now with respect to the marathon, I read a great short article by John Bingham. He is a writer for competitor.com like Matt Fitzgerald. Competitor also puts out a free magazine that is in the racks at my local athletic club. John Bingham has a column called the Penguin Chronicles that I think is really good. His last column was about this pro football player he spent a lot of time talking to at a marathon expo. The football player talked about how they would spend all week on an elaborate game plan only to throw out the plan right at the kick off. Bingham equated that to running marathons. He said he used to have these elaborate race strategies with splits written on his race number or his arm only to toss that to the

wind as soon as the starting gun went off. He said you need to expect that and to plan on reacting to the situation such as the weather, how you feel, the profile of the course, etc.

I can relate too well to that. I have always had elaborate race strategies. They have always been too optimistic. They have always assumed I would have a breakthrough day. They always never came true. I think of my last marathon, I was going to run a 4 hr marathon, my strategy was to run 9 minute pace for the first half, then pick up the pace to whatever I could for the second half. The gun went off, I ran 8:15 pace for the first 4 or 5 miles and my strategy was a waste and my run was doomed.

This year my strategy will be similar but I do recognize I won't have the patience for 9 min pace in the early miles. I've made a compromise at 8:45 pace because I know I can run 20 miles at that pace. If I find myself at 20 miles at an average of 8:45 pace and out of gas, my hope is then to hang on for 6 miles at 10:30 pace and still break 4 hrs. I will try to stay closer to 9 min miles at the beginning but I'm not optimistic I will be able to control myself. I know my absolute biggest challenge will be is to NOT run faster than 8:45 for at least the first half of the run. Somehow, I need to convince myself that running faster than 8:45 will ruin my run. I know it will, the trick will be to keep myself from ignoring that on race day. After 13 or 14 miles, it is hard to run too fast at that point on and I can let the run take care of itself at that point.

I still find it hard to ignore some of my history such as my 50 mile PR of 7:32. That was 9 min pace for 50 miles on a hilly dirt course. Now I want to run the same pace for half the distance on flat pavement and it is a challenge for me. I guess resetting expectations is one of the hardest things runners need to do as they progress through their running life. What was unique about that 50 miler was that I didn't have a race strategy; I was just going to run strong but comfortably for as long as I could. I should try and learn from that.

I ran 20 miles Saturday. My plan was to average 8:45 for 20 based on how I've been doing the last few weeks. I did the first half in 8:49 pace and followed it with 8:37 for the second half for an average of 8:43. I was really happy with that because I felt good the whole way, I felt I really had control over my pace and recovered quickly. I mowed the lawn after and then walked 7 miles with my wife.

I'm going to really try to not be too aggressive on marathon day. Does it seem reasonable to run the first half at 8:45 and try to pick it up in the second half or should I start out slower? (or faster?) In the past, I would have done something like started at 8:15 pace and died. Actually, that is exactly what I did last year. I'm really struggling with what the ideal starting pace should be.

## **OCTOBER                      LAST COUPLE WEEKS**

Mick, last Friday I ordered a 3rd pair of Vibrams. It is a 3rd model called Treksport. They are designed for light hiking and trail running. Essentially, they just have a slightly more substantial and heavier sole on them. I like the Bikilas a lot for running but I found when on trails that have unavoidable 1/2 inch rocks, they are uncomfortable to say the least. People have written that the Treks solve that problem. They do say that the Bikilas are a better choice for the road. I like the KSO's for walking with my wife so now I'll have a pair for all occasions.

These are the 3 models I'll have with each having progressively more protection but slightly more weight and less feel for the ground.

- 1) KSO 5.7 OZ
- 2) Bikila 6.0 OZ
- 3) Treksport 6.5 OZ

Now I need to stop buying these things and just wear them to see how durable they are before I invest any more money in them. I also need to stop buying them before you think I've gone totally nuts.

As far as the marathon goes, I usually just pick an unrealistically aggressive time, go out too fast, die in the end and that's it. By convincing myself to have a conservative strategy, I'm in really uncomfortable territory for me. Why I'm more comfortable with a crash and burn strategy, I don't know. I guess I always have the hope that in some race I'll start out fast and miraculously be able to maintain it. After 30 years of marathoning and ultramarathoning this has never happened, but my race optimism never seems to die.

For this run, ever since I signed up, I planned on using my best 20 mile pace in training as the benchmark for my strategy so that's what it will be. That run had an 8:43 pace for 20 miles so that is what it will be for the first half of the marathon. After that, I'll simply run as strong as I can for as long as I can and the results will be whatever they happen to be. I have NEVER had negative splits in a race, hopefully this will be the time for that.

I think about my annual training which I've essentially followed for the last 20 yrs. It is based on the fact that I recognized in the 80's that I was only good for a couple of races per year. I honestly don't know how people can race all year; that is not me. I'm definitely more of a periodization type.

Given that I only had a few targeted races, I have always had about 6 months of base building which consisted of simply logging mega miles. That would be followed by adding a long run and a speed day in the weekly routine and building on those as the race approached. This year it boiled down to just adding a weekly long run onto my basic daily running. I just don't think a complicated formula would ever work for me. I sincerely believe that running is a very simple, natural act and I like to keep it that way.

Once I run the marathon in October, I will be back to my routine of a daily 6.7 mile trail run with and occasional 14 mile trail run on Saturday. Starting next March the 14 miler will go from occasional to weekly and for the 2 months prior to my next chosen race, I'll ramp it up to 20. That is it but I won't be running marathons at 5 min pace, either.

I can't do my long run tomorrow so I did it today on trails and thoroughly enjoyed it, what a relief from running on the roads. I think I'll do my last long run on the trails as well. My legs feel so much better, I'm sure it is from the softer surface and slower pace. I did the first 10 miles in 10:07 pace, the second 10 in 9:29 for an average of 9:49 so about a minute slower than on the pavement but I felt like I was jogging it the whole way.

I think it is really important to train on the roads for a road marathon but hopefully I've gotten enough

road work in. If I run on the trails next week, the following week, which will be the week before the marathon, I'll do 12 miles on the road for my last road run then taper.

I did my last 20 mile long run last Friday on trails in Vibram Trek Sports. I enjoyed the run knowing it was my last 20 miler for a while. I went back and forth on whether to wear Vibrams and risk injury after all of the training I've done. In the end, I decided the risk was low and really wanted to just have fun on that last long run. This week I've been doing the 6.7 mile trail loop every day and I'll do a moderately paced 12 miler on the roads on Saturday just to remind myself of pace, stride rate, etc. Next week leading up to the race, I'll probably only do 3 mile runs in the morning and 3 mile walks at night with my wife and take the day off before the race. That should allow me to feel like I'm ready to jump out of my skin by race day.

I have felt pretty strong on all of my long runs this year and for all of the road runs, I have been able to average a pace between 8:40 and 9:55 fairly easily. I know that basic training philosophy tells you not to do your long runs at race pace but screw it, I needed to do it for my head. Maybe, 8:45 or so will not be race pace but somewhat slower. I looked at my long runs last year and realized I did all of them with a pace between 10:20 and 11:20. What was I thinking, I was still training like I was running ultras; no wonder I couldn't maintain a 9 min pace. I'm surprised I was able to average 9:30 pace considering how slow my long runs were. This year my pace has consistently been over 2 min/mile faster. I'm optimistic that it will translate into a fun marathon.

I generally enjoy the last two weeks before a race. I like the excitement and anticipation. The hard part of course is the head games that go on about whether you did enough training, how come I feel sluggish, etc. I've been there so many times before I try to ignore it.

Mick, this is certainly marathon season, maybe next fall you should join in. For the kid that wants to break 3:10, I agree with you, if he is routinely running 20 milers at 7:02, it is not much of a stretch to average 6:57. What will be his undoing is if he goes out at 6:15 or 6:30 and his wheels fall off. I remember running in my 20's, ancient history.

Two years ago when I ran a marathon with my daughter, she had a friend run, who did a few 10 milers to prepare; that was it! I thought he would be done at the half marathon point. Instead, he went on to run a 3:30 or something. For my entire running life, I have always been surprised at how well many people have done on very little training. For me, I have always had to run a lot of miles to accomplish even mediocre race times.

Is your calf feeling any better? (NO!) I thought about it this morning and I'm sure it is a matter of just giving it enough rest to heal. Sometimes these things take forever. Around January of 2009, my left glute started to bother me; it might have even been my upper hamstring. It was not bad enough to force me to stop running but it was always there. This went on for over a year. Finally this spring it just disappeared. I don't even know how long it had gone away before I even noticed I no longer had pain/stiffness there. Because it had lasted so long, I was getting concerned that it was my hip that was having the problem, that it might have been wearing out or something. What a relief when the issue went away. It is possible that when I increased my stride rate and reduced stride length that it REALLY helped it. I might have been straining it before I changed my mechanics.

I did my last run of any significance this morning. It was 12 miles on the road at 8:24 pace. It felt good



but I do know with absolute certainty that if I tried to average 8:30 pace in the marathon it would be suicide. The run confirmed and makes me feel good about a race strategy of maintaining 8:45 pace. The difference between 8:30 and 8:45 pace is 6:33 minutes. To me it is somewhat irrelevant to run 3:42 vs 3:48. Given that, it would make no sense at all to risk a disaster by starting out at 8:30 pace. Last year I ran the first 8 miles in 8:30 pace and I fell apart, I'm not going to do that this year. From now until race day, my runs will be jogs of 3 to 5 miles long.

## **OCTOBER                      REVIEW OF VIBRAMS EXPERIENCE TO DATE**

Mick, this is a short run down of the 3 models of Vibrams. I have the KSO, Bikila and Trek Sport. These 3 are specifically designed and marketed for running by Vibram. The uppers are generally similar for the 3 models made from various types of thin stretchy material that hugs and conforms well to the foot. The primary distinguishing feature between the models is the outer sole. Each has increasingly more protection with a trade-off of loss of feel for the ground. I added a photo of each after I describe them so you can see the differences in the soles.

I will have a better perspective of the differences, my likes and dislikes when I have more opportunity to really run in all of the models on a daily basis. At this point, I have been very cautious to ensure I'm building the muscles, tendons and ligaments in my feet and legs to adapt to the transition from regular shoes. I have been extra cautious because I have been introducing these shoes in the middle of a marathon training program. After I run the marathon, I plan on wearing Vibrams for 4 or 5 out of 6 weekly runs. Currently, I've been only wearing them once or twice per week. I don't feel I've worn any of the models enough to have a specific preference of protection vs. feeling in one shoe over another. I also have only worn Vibrams for trail running. I have no experience running on pavement in Vibrams. Ultimately, I expect to always use these in conjunction to traditional running shoes. I think wearing both Vibrams and traditional running shoes provide distinct benefits so by using both, you can take advantage of both.

**KSO** - Adapted from an earlier model of Vibrams to include an upper that fully covers the foot to keep dirt and debris out of the shoe while running. It also has a strap to better secure the fit. The bottoms are fairly thin and provide the best feel for the ground and are the most flexible. They provide the closest approximation to the feeling of going barefoot. These are really the next best thing to running barefoot in my mind. The bottoms of my feet are very sensitive so I can feel a lot! In addition to running, I really like just wearing them around and feeling all the different textures of the ground or floors that I'm walking on. Right now, I use these on shorter runs and for walking. I have found the ground to feel hard and the small rocks to be a factor when going more than 6 or 7 miles in these at this point. This may change with more adaption on my part.

**Bikila** - Designed specifically for running. The bottoms are more protective with thicker "pods" covering the bottom. The pods allow more protection from the ground and rocks but allow the bottoms to remain very flexible. My feet feel great in these on my daily 7 mile runs. I've run 14 miles in the shoes and my feet felt great the whole way with the exception of running through areas that had a lot of half inch rocks that were unavoidable.

**Trek Sport** - Designed for trail running and light trekking. This model has the most rugged bottoms. They

clearly provide the most protection from small rocks, sticks, etc. They also allow for the least amount of ground feel so there is a trade off. I used these on a 20 mile trail run and had no issues with small rocks or the ground feeling hard when my feet got tired, etc. Like all Vibrams, this model does not provide any support and has very, very minimal cushioning, virtually none relative to regular shoes.

Right now, I see the Trek Sport as being the most versatile. I enjoy using them for short walks all the way up to 20 mile trail runs. Although I have found that, after wearing these then switching to Bikilas, I really liked having more feel and greater flexibility. Until I have a chance to put a lot of mileage on all three pairs, I won't know what my ultimate preference will be. Another factor that will weigh in is the ultimate durability of each model. It is great that Vibram has provided several options and maybe what is best is to have all 3 like I do and just select the shoe that best fits the type of run you will be doing. Other than running on short stretches of pavement, I haven't gone on any runs of any length on pavement with any of these models. I may find I like one specific model to be best on pavement over the others.

I have thought about the new minimal shoes coming out; the Merrell Barefoot collection and the New Balance Minimus collection. Both will have soles by Vibram but they won't have separate toe pockets. For shoes that have no support or cushion, the differentiating feature of the Fivefingers is the toes. They do not restrict your toes from spreading and providing support and they allow your toes to grab onto the ground when running. I noticed when I was climbing on a sandy trail that my toes were actually grabbing into the sand. I don't know how much of a difference it makes but it felt pretty cool. If you are going to wear this kind of shoe, might as well go for the whole effect and give your toes all of the freedom they want.

## **OCTOBER**

## **RACE DAY**

Mick, thanks for all of your support and encouragement over the past 6 months. In spite of me having over 38 years of running experience, in some ways I feel like I am starting all over in the marathon. Because of my age and given ability, I am where I am so my goal at this point is to optimize my time with what I have. In all the marathons I've run starting in 1982, I have never run anything that was anywhere near even splits. I have never fully executed a race strategy so to that end, it was an extremely successful run. The one thing that sticks with me the most is how close in pace my best 20 mile run was to my marathon pace. I had an 8:43 pace in training, used an 8:45 strategy pace and did the marathon in 8:42. It is just uncanny to me how close my 20 milers were to my race.

The event was huge with 15,000 entrants. I'll look up the break out at some point but the size went from 8000 entrants over the last few years to almost double in the inaugural yr as a Rock n Roll marathon. I saw that the marathon went from roughly 2000 entrants to 3000 entrants so the big increase was in the 1/2 marathon and possibly the relay. For the first half everyone runs together so you feel the 15,000 entrants. After the 1/2 marathoners split off at mile 12, there is certainly a lot more room on the streets. All of the streets in Denver are very wide so there was never an issue of bottle necking and being forced to slow because of crowded areas.

The start was a wave start. I don't know if you are familiar with that type of start. For this run, they assigned everyone a corral number based on their predicted finish time. They used chip tracking so no

matter where you started, the clock for you doesn't start until you cross the start. The corrals looked like they had 500-1000 people in each group. For the waves, they start corral 1, then corral 2 walks up to the start line and 60 seconds later they start corral 2 and so on. What this does is for the first 5 minutes after you start, it is like you are only in a race of 500 to 1000 people so you can easily get into your pace immediately. After that, everyone blends together but it spreads the run out so it is not nearly as congested along the course once people fall into their rhythm.

When I signed up for the race, I just put my last year's race time of 4:10 which put me in corral 7. I was concerned with that because, I knew I was going to run almost a min/mile faster than a 4:10 marathon this year. I didn't want to get stuck in a 9:45 pace at the start and waste energy trying to pass people. When I picked up my race number, they had a table set up for people to change their corral assignment if their goal had changed. I was thrilled to see there was no line so I followed your advice and told them my projected time was 3:40. They moved me from corral 7 to 2 with no problem. Corral 1 I was for elite runners and those probably going under 3 hrs. or something. In any case, no need for me to worry about them.

At the start, I lined up towards the back of my group because I was concerned about getting caught up and starting too fast. My strategy was to simply run at 8:45 pace for the first half, then try to pick up the pace a little and maintain it to the finish. 8:45 is a 3:49 marathon, my ultimate goal was to break 4 hrs but my training runs were telling me 3:50 would be a realistic goal. I wore my Garmin and noted that after 100 yds I was already on my pace of 8:45. The first few miles are downhill, everyone is loaded with adrenaline, etc. I looked at my pace at mile 1 and it was at 8:30, too fast. I backed off a little which meant I was running a little slower than everyone around me. Not a problem because of the wave start, it wasn't congested so I wasn't getting in the way. At mile 2 my split was still 8:30. Good thing I backed down relative to those around me, otherwise I would have been around 8:15 through 2 miles. I said to myself if I keep this up I WILL FAIL! I pulled back on the reins even more and by the 5K mark I was at 8:43, much better. I then maintained that pace for the first 10 miles. The pace seem so easy to me and I was really happy that I was mentally strong enough to stay on my plan. After 10 miles, there was some gradual downhill so I thought I should take advantage of it and maintained the effort but let the pace pick up a little. That brought my pace down to 8:40 by the half. Since I already increased my pace from mile 10 to 13, I just held onto that for the next 10 miles to mile 23. I was really happy that I still felt strong through mile 19, 20, 21. Usually my wheels start to fall off about mile 17. It wasn't until mile 23 that it started to get difficult. In hind sight, if I were to change anything, it would have been the last 3 miles. I simply maintained my perceived effort until the finish so my overall pace slowed from 8:40 to 8:42. Essentially I lost 52 seconds in the last 3 miles so I was still running 8:57 pace but if I focused, I probably could have finished a minute or two faster. At the time, the last 3 miles felt like it was going to take forever but it was over before I knew it. Really not a big deal it is just funny how little things can feel so insurmountable at the end of a race.

What was interesting and fun for me was that by running even splits, I was able to pass a lot of people in the 2nd half of the race. Very few people run even or negative splits so few passed me. That made it much more enjoyable to feel in control of my pace the whole way. Other than not pushing really hard as I could have for the last 3 miles, I don't think I could have run a more perfect race. I think my time of 3:47 is a true representation of where I'm at in the marathon. It is a great benchmark to work towards going forward. I finished in 546th place out of 2894 or in the top 19% of the field which I am happy with at age 53.

As far as training goes, with respect to my base and long runs, I wouldn't change a thing. I liked using the long runs to work on projected marathon pace. That really let me fine tune my race strategy. The only change I will consider making is that I did very little with respect to tempo runs and did absolutely no speed workouts. Next year I will consider doing some 800 meter repeats on the track. That is about the only thing I can think of at this point that I can do to help me improve my time. Since I don't enjoy speed work, it will be a decision about whether I want to try to shave a little time off or not. Honestly, if I can stay under 4 hrs, I'm happy.

Now that the marathon is over, the whole cycle starts over again. I'll just do my 6.7 mile daily runs, maybe throw in a 12 or 14 miler from time to time and that will be it until I start routinely doing Saturday long runs in April.

Just as a side observation, I saw thousands of runners this weekend but not a single barefoot runner. There may have been someone out there but I didn't see them. I only saw a couple people wearing Vibrams. I thought I might consider Vibrams for next year's marathon but at this point, I think I'll keep them as training tools and use racing flats for the race itself. I have a pair of Nike Marathon racers that they discontinued. They weigh 7 or 8 oz, not much more than Vibrams. Since I've had good success with them, I don't think I want to mess with the formula. (At least not at this point) Since I don't know what it is like to run on the roads in Vibrams, I can't say for sure. I guess I have a whole year to figure that out.

Mick, for whatever reason, my HR was a lot higher than I was used to in training. For the pace, I was expecting it to be in the mid 130's climbing to about 150 towards the end with an average around 142. It was in the high 140's, to high 150's for most of the run. It averaged 151 which was about 8 or 9 BPM higher than I was expecting. About 8 or 9 miles into it, I thought maybe I'm not being efficient for some reason so I checked my stride rate. It was right at 180 so that was fine. I'm not sure about the HR thing, possibly just adrenaline, who knows. If I didn't have the HR monitor, I would not have even known what it was, the higher HR really didn't affect me at all. I know the stride rate helped, I spent a lot of time focusing on it in training so it seemed to be second nature in the race.

I will follow your advice on the anaerobic training (advice; do none). I hate doing it so this is advice I like to hear. I do think I need to spend more time around 8:30 pace though to get more comfortable running in that range. I can do that while on my long runs next year. Now that I've established a benchmark, if my training goes well next year, I'll take more risk in the run. I just had to prove to myself that I was capable of running even splits. I haven't maintained a pace like that for a marathon since the early 1990's. Once I started doing ultras in 1993, I stopped doing marathons and I lost anything that resembled speed.

Looking at the results, I was 33rd in my age group. In two years I will be in the 55 to 59 group. My time was good for 4th place in the 55 to 59 group. Amazing how much age impacts speed once you get into the 50's.