

Sixty days of slogging - but it'll be worth it!



Putting the runners back on these past few weeks has been quite the challenge.

SIXTY days: that's the timescale I've given myself to get fit enough to enjoy, rather than endure, a five-mile (eight kilometres) or 10k road race.

And having pencilled in Wednesday last, June 4th as Day One of my fitness campaign, Day 60 conveniently coincides exactly with the end of next month, Thursday, July 31st.

I've felt the need to go public with this, both here and on my Facebook page, as a form of motivation and, of sorts, humiliation. Let me explain.

Having worked hard to get my weight down last summer, and having recently gazed forlornly at my girth, with at least half of the 27 pounds I shed between June and September last year back on my frame, I've felt the need to get moving again. Really moving.

I'm typing these words on Sunday evening having completed 800 repetitions with my 11lb dumbbells while also running five miles that day.

The breeze which had proven so considerable that same afternoon had welcomingly abated when I set off for my run on a five-mile lap which, for the first few weeks, shall feel like an enemy.

But I know that if I stick at it, and when I put my mind to a project of any kind, I generally do, then that particular lap shall become my friend.

What's helpful is that the lap is about as flat as one could hope for; there are no great inclines, particularly when running in the clockwise direction, which I suspect I'll be doing for the first few weeks.

And even though, at the time of writing, I've only just completed Day Five - eight per cent of the plan - I'm already in a better

frame of mind. The human body, despite all the toxicity a great many of us subject it to, remains the most remarkable mechanism ever created.

Had I a time machine at my disposal back in 1994 (my first year competing in track and field as well as cross country) to propel me forward 20 years in time, I'd never have believed then that I'd be somewhat portly in my mid-30s.

I'll go further: my 15-yearold self would probably be ashamed of the way I've 'let myself go'; hardly a unique disposition for a man of 35 but still that's no excuse.

Running and I were quite an odd fit. While my fallen arches are not uncommon among runners, my ridiculously short stride did complicate matters somewhat.

In my childhood, my parents could always tell if it was chubby little me coming up the hall at home; my feet moved so little apart it was more akin to hearing a puppy skipping towards the kitchen than a happy albeit all too conscientious six-year-old.

Oddly enough, my 'athletics Mammy', the late and sadly missed Nora Healy of Ring/Old Parish, humorously queried who was the lad with the cow's lick and the short stride when I ran my first 1500 metres in an open track meeting in Midleton!

Five months later, I won a County Cross County title at my age grade in Dungarvan, much to my own incredulity and delight, and Nora reminded me of her first athletic impression of me that happy day and on many others that followed.

She is sadly, sadly missed, as is John Dower, another great character who gave so much of his time to ensuring that we competing kids held our heads high whether matters competitive went well or not.

Into that bracket too comfortably sit John McGrath, Jimmy Costin, Bernie Fleming and Mick Kirwan to name but four; and Emby Walsh when it came to my days in schools' athletics, the best of people.

But for social reasons above all others, running proved a means for me to reconnect with two primary school friends who attended St Declan's in Kilmacthomas while I was in Carrick CBS.

And for a few years in my teens, I was pretty competitive and reasonably fast.

Human nature being what it is, I stumbled upon an old running journal of mine just days before I decided to stop talking about doing something and just getting on with it.

And, would you believe it, it dated from 1994, that year of great athletic discovery, in which I'd noted all the times I'd run across varying distances, with two in particular leaping off the page.

Running in the inaugural Dromana Run, a slip of tarmac made famous between Villierstown and Cappoquin by our Olympic hero John Treacy, I negotiated the five mile in a time of 31 minutes and 10 seconds.

About three months later, picking up a 'Boggle' board game as my prize in The Munster Bar (how ironic, my winning a word game!), I won the Under-15 section of the old Waterford 10K Race, clocking 37 minutes 20 seconds for the distance.

My 35-year-old self looks at those times, all recorded before college (and all that goes with it), the advent of a social life, food, food and more food, along with the wear and tear of adulthood, and wonders how on Earth I once managed that. How was the fella from Portlaoise with the short steps once so fleet-footed?

While my competitive streak is more or less gone, I must admit the idea of running a road race and running it reasonably quickly does appeal, and that's why I've committed to this 60-day slog.

When training stops feeling like work, that's the day motivation will have truly returned. And that's what I'm hoping to re-ignite over the next eight tough weeks. But it'll be worth it.