



Patrick High

I'M A FRONTRUNNER

3 Marathons in 10 Months. Graduate Student, 28, Member Since 2005

WHEN I was 17 and joined the Illinois Army National Guard, I had to run to pass the Physical Fitness test. I never ran before in my life. The test included push ups, sit ups and a two mile run. The two miles were so difficult that I walked towards the end. It was a gut check.

Over the nine years that I served with the National Guard, I got used to running. At that time, there were moments when I enjoyed running, but for the most part, I pretty much hated it because it was part of the job.

While I was in the military, I made a commitment to train for a marathon. There was no particular reason; I just wanted to challenge myself. Looking back, it was really good to NOT know what it takes to train for a marathon! Good thing that I was so naïve.

After I resigned my commission in 2004 and moved to DC to work on my Doctorate, I picked up a brochure for the National AIDS marathon. I went to one of their orientation sessions. I heard a woman who finished a marathon talk about her good experience with the program. I listened to other speakers, who never ran before, tell their stories about finishing a marathon. That was a real inspiration.

I'm an AIDS/HIV researcher. And the AIDS Marathon program brought together two things that I really love: running and working to combat AIDS. Although I never ran in a race before that day, I decided to take the big leap. I started running the next Saturday.

Six months of marathon training and I enjoyed every bit of it. The training made me enjoy running. It was a wonderful experience. My pace group was great and we socialized quite a bit outside of the weekend training. Raising the money seemed more daunting, but everything came together at the end.

Even though I trained on the weekends with my AIDS Marathon group, I wanted to run with a group during the week. I really liked the idea of running with a group of people. My friend told me about DC Front Runners and I joined them on the Tuesday and Thursday night group runs to help me with my first marathon.

Last December, I ran in my first marathon in Honolulu. The race started at 5:30 in the morning and I was up at 3 AM. I couldn't believe that the day arrived and I was anxious. The first ten miles was really crowded and it was still dark as I was running through the city. At mile 11, I felt great. I heard that the marathon didn't

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begin until mile 20, and I believe that now. The last six miles were a bit harder. We ran over Diamond Head, along the beach and I was exhausted. But I could not have picked a better place for a first marathon.

When I finished, I didn't want to stop running and I wanted to try more races. I ran in the San Diego Rock 'n Roll Marathon and I just finished the Marine Corps Marathon. Since the MCM I've come to the realization that I should run a marathon only once a year. Three marathons in one year is too much. So I'm thinking about running in Chicago or New York City next year.

One of the great things about being a Front Runner is that I can look up another group when I'm traveling and run with them. I've already run with the Front Runner groups in San Francisco and Boston.

What I enjoy most about Front Runners is the camaraderie that you gain from running with a group of people. It's much more affirming than running by yourself. After all this time, I really like running. And it's nice to be around others who are obsessed with running as well. ▼

Interview by Marcel Acosta