

Chapter 7

62 Beats 47

“No matter what your age you can be great.”

—KISHORE BANSAL, Author

Martin

I think in these times we live in media has a huge impact on us, and particularly in the area of age and ageism. We're told how to act when we're kids, teenagers, millennials, middle-aged and older. I feel we need to make our own decisions about what we want to do, and I think that as older males or females we can still move, and that we should do that, and that it's critical for our health.

I'm trying to disengage from all the hype about what to do and what not to do on TV and social media and just cut a path based on what we want to do, not what they tell us.

I needed to change things up in my running and decided to look back at my race times from when I started in 2002. As I went through race after race I noticed that I had run my personal best times in the 5K, 10K, half marathon and marathon all in 2003. After that it was downhill. It got me thinking about what it would take to beat those times 15 years later in 2017. To even attempt to achieve this goal I knew I needed help, and I knew who to contact: Malc Kent.



In mid-October I called Malc and said I wanted to have a meeting with him. The next day I headed over to Malc's place and we started to develop a plan. Malc linked me into the TrainingPeaks app, and we decided that October 25 would be day one of the attempt to beat my personal bests set 15 years ago. The rules of the challenge had to be laid out: the attempt had to take place between December 19, 2017 (my 62nd birthday) and December 19, 2018 (my 63rd birthday). Race locations could be anywhere in the world and any technical innovations would be allowed.

Malc would send me a weekly TrainingPeaks plan, and every Wednesday I'd go over to his basement gym for a session of strengthening and stabilizing exercises. Malc wanted a slow build over the winter in preparation for the 2018 race season.

However, I had one race to run before the end of the year. My 8th Annual Run/Walk was scheduled for Sunday, December 31.

This event had never been cancelled, but the weather the week leading up to it had been brutal and the forecast for that day was -32°C . Oh boy. The day before, I asked Paddy, operations manager at the Spray Lake Sawmills Family Sport Centre, if he had any thoughts for a backup plan. He kindly offered to let people use the indoor track, free of charge, instead of going outside. Great idea.



I sent out postings and emails letting as many people as possible know that it was still a go. I had my fingers crossed that the weather would break and warm up. No such luck. Sunday morning I was up at 5:30 a.m. and checked the current temperature. It was -48°C with the wind chill. Not good. On reaching the Centre, my first task was to mark the route by spray-painting orange arrows. Every 30 seconds the nozzle to the spray can froze and I had to keep going back to the car and unfreezing it. At one point I was driving along the side of the path and spraying the arrows from inside the car.

That year we were attempting to raise \$5,000 for Free to Run. The money would enable them to build an ice skating rink for girls in Bamyan, Afghanistan, and also allow a group of girls from other provinces to participate in a week of winter sporting activities, in March.

Soon, 9 a.m. came around and a hardy group lined up at the start, outside the main entrance. I blew my whistle and away we went. The route took us around the building, through the Bow River Edge camp ground, along the Bow river pathway and down to the old bridge, which was the turnaround spot. One loop is around 2.5 km and in the first hour I managed to cover four loops. By this time, my hat and face mask were caked with ice and snow. After a short break I headed out again and was joined by a few more run/walkers.

Leanne Brintnell, from Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan, had arrived and was organizing the band HYMN, who would entertain everyone with some beautiful traditional music. She would also be selling products made by women in Afghanistan.

The day wound on with runners coming and going. Everyone was doing their part and, by making donations, they were also making a difference. At 2:40 p.m. it was time to do the final 2-km "Cookie Loop." A bunch of kids lined up and I blew the final whistle and away we went. Twenty minutes later it was done. The kids got their medal, we packed up and everyone headed home.

In total there were 65 participants, 30 of whom were brave enough to run/walk outside. We raised an amazing \$2,936. I later checked the *Globe and Mail* website and read a story about how the king penguins at the Calgary Zoo were brought inside due to the extreme cold, and the headline in that day's *Calgary Herald* online reflected this. It read "Cochrane runners go where Penguins fear to tread."



I had completed the marathon in 4½ hours but there was a price to pay. The first week of 2018 I tried a couple of runs but my heel was killing me. I turned up at my Wednesday morning session and I told Malc what was going on. We discussed action to take in this situation. Malc recommended some cross-training, i.e., using the elliptical, lap swimming and warm water therapy. He had me applying a compound containing diclofenac, as prescribed by Dr. Hanlon, which would reduce pain and inflammation. He also suggested using an old friend of mine: frozen peas.

For the next couple of weeks the cross-training went well. I had a couple of things to be happy about: the inflammation in the heel was reducing and I was looking forward to a holiday that Sue and I had planned for Cuba.

The only thing I had to participate in before the trip was the annual Kimmett Cup, a pond hockey tournament held every year in Cochrane. I was a member of the Rotary Raucous Relics (RRR) and had played with the team for the last five years. Unfortunately this year I hadn't managed to practice, but I wasn't too worried about that. What could possibly go wrong?

The tournament required that we play three games over the course of the day, and after a hearty breakfast of oatmeal I said goodbye to Sue and headed off. The day was clear and bright as I headed down to Mitford Pond and met the rest of the RRR team. We were playing "2 Pharmacy" in the first game, and walking down to the frozen pond I noticed that the ice was a bit chopped up. Both teams got suited up and I was sent out on the first line.



The whistle blew and the game began. I made a couple of rushes up and down the ice and was feeling good. The RRR goalie shot the puck to me and I made a move around one of the 2 Pharmacy players. I drove forward towards their goal but my right skate didn't. It had become jammed in a crack in the ice. I tumbled to the ice but my foot didn't move. I felt something give in the ankle and I knew there was trouble. All the players gathered round and helped me off the ice. I had played 1 minute and 39 seconds of the first game.

I managed to drive home and Sue was surprised to see me back already. I told her my tale of woe and we dug out the frozen peas again; luckily, I hadn't eaten them. Well, there was no time to dwell on the situation. I hadn't broken the ankle and we were off to Cuba the next day. I was pretty sheepish when I told Malc what had happened. What a way to start a holiday.

Malc

I have a theory as to how Martin sustained his heel injury. At his annual end-of-year fundraising event, he ran a marathon, in -30°C . What I think happened is that the water vapour coming from his foot hit the cold air and formed a vapour seal, which then froze inside the meshing of his running shoe. The upper part of his shoe then became rock hard. This meant that the shoe was very stiff and would not absorb the shock of Martin's foot hitting the hard ground, and so over the time it took to run the marathon, the lack of flexibility in his foot caused a buildup of inflammation in the muscles and soft tissue.

You have three parts to the foot: the forefoot, the mid-foot and the rear. Each part should be able to move independently, but the stiffness meant the mid-foot and rear were unable to do that, and the adverse effect would be stiffening of the calcaneus (heel bone) joint. The buildup of fluid causes the inflammation, then nerve endings are triggered and become overactive, sending a message to the brain, resulting in a lot of pain. In these circumstances, the main aim is to get rid of the inflammation.

Martin stopped running, applied ice and a compound containing the anti-inflammatory diclofenac, as prescribed by his family doctor. It takes about three days for the inflammation to go down and for nutrient-rich fluid to return to the injured area. We then talked about a plan to help him through this phase and manage the injury. It's important to take action as soon as you feel something isn't right: consult your team of professionals – coach, doctor, physiotherapist etc.

There is a lot of psychology involved when coming back from injury; therefore, it's important to maintain a schedule. Keeping up with training, when not running, helps mentally. Martin did some cross-training, i.e., swimming and using the elliptical machine. The elliptical in my gym is a sophisticated version that has a knee joint built in, enabling it to imitate a running motion, with zero impact.

Martin chose these activities as he enjoys them. Other athletes might consider other forms of cross-training, e.g., cycling. How you cross-train will depend on your level of injury. Foot injuries can often take longer, due to the nature of where they are. At some stage, once past the acute stage of injury, some stretching might be appropriate in order to prevent the soft connective tissue from becoming shortened, due to a process of self-protection. You want to keep it supple and able to lengthen when required.

The role of the coach, at this stage, is to assess and monitor, on a weekly basis, the capacity of the athlete and to determine how much training and exercise they can tolerate. Good coaches will monitor effectively by collecting data, observing visual clues during training and using other quantitative information. Although Martin might now be feeling pain free, he was susceptible to stiffness in range of motion outside that which he uses when he runs.

As part of the monitoring of Martin's progress, he wore a Garmin watch while doing some short test runs in Cuba, and this enabled me to systematically track his progress.

This was important as, just before heading off on holiday, Martin turned his ankle, while playing in a hockey tournament. This wasn't a serious injury, but, as we were also still dealing with his heel, I didn't

want him to have further issues. In order to keep range of motion in muscles connected to the ankle, I gave Martin some stretching exercises to do while he was away.

On Martin's return, the focus turned to his goal of beating his personal best times (PBs), for the 5K, 10K, half marathon and marathon distances, all of which were set in 2003. He was calling this his "62 beats 47" pursuit. As a coach, it is my role to support athletes in their attempts to achieve their goals. I did think he was facing an incredibly difficult challenge because those PBs had been set so long ago.

Looking at the individual distances, during the 5-km and 10-km races, he should be running full out the whole way, running beyond his lactate threshold and into a heart rate he will not be used to. As you get older, it's harder for the heart to adapt. Over time, your heart rate drops and you have less headroom to work with. On the flipside, the recovery time required after a 5-km or 10-km run can be quite quick.

There are also "backup" 5-km and 10-km races. Because he can recover quite quickly from these distances, he will be able to have multiple attempts, if required. The shorter distances could prove to be the most challenging, as Martin has concentrated on longer distances over the past few years. The half marathon is more controlled; Martin will run around his aerobic threshold but should have no problem completing it.

The marathon is a bit more of an unknown. A runner is not always guaranteed to make it to the finish line and there will probably be a low point during the race. You have to pace yourself well enough to know that you can finish the distance. You also have to take into account factors such as nutrition and hydration. The marathon suits Martin as he has run many of them, and ultramarathons. So he has spent a lot of time running in a predominantly aerobic state, at a slower speed. I explained to Martin that, overall, he would have to make many adaptations, within a year, which would be very difficult and might prove to be beyond him.

Martin was planning to run the California International Marathon in Sacramento, in December. We had decided this in January because it's late in the year, it is flat terrain and books up very quickly. Having decided this, it was then a matter of working backwards to fit in the other races. We worked collaboratively on scheduling and Martin then booked the following three races:

- The Legacy 5K – Airdrie in April
- Sporting Life 10K – Calgary in June
- Edmonton Half-Marathon – in August

When arranging this type of schedule, it's not possible to contemplate running more than two marathons as, ideally, the time between each one should be around four months. This allows for an adequate amount of recovery and training. The 10K and half marathon do not require as much recovery time and the 5K less again. It is always worth having Plan Bs for all of these, in case of unforeseen circumstances, e.g., injury or weather conditions. Other considerations can be cost and race location. You need to decide how much you are prepared to spend on races and how far you are prepared to travel. In Canada, most marathons take place in the spring and fall.

During the course of the next session, we had a discussion about running gear and Martin asked me about my personal views. I explained that there is a great deal of gimmicky, high-priced gear available, but I feel that, ultimately, running should be a cheap sport.

With regard to shoes, I explained that these are the most important piece, as they are the contact point with the ground and it is essential that they are the main focus when buying gear. They should have at least a half-size extra room in the toe box. If you have two different-sized feet, always go with the larger size. Look at the shape of your foot and make sure the shoe mimics this: Is it wider at the back, long and narrow? Etc. Comfort is important, including the “ride.” This refers to how the shoe flexes in transition from front foot strike to the toe-off and how smoothly that works. It has to synchronize with what the foot wants to do.

Pronation is, simply put, the degree to which the arch of your foot collapses upon impact. As your foot contacts the ground when you run and moves toward push-off, the arch of your foot naturally collapses to help your body absorb the shock of impact. This action of your arch collapsing is called pronation. Pronation and pronation control involve the notion of a neutral shoe versus a stability shoe versus a motion control shoe.

These are quite archaic terms that tend to pigeonhole people into categories. In this era of the use of biomechanics, science and data do not support these theories. In a store, the shoes do not fall into these categories. Most runners, perhaps 80 per cent, require a neutral shoe. Martin is one of them. A small number of runners will need some degree of support or motion control and perhaps even orthotics.

If you find a pair of shoes that really works for you, I suggest buying a couple of pairs. As far as clothing is concerned, psychologically, you need to be comfortable and it’s important to plan ahead when deciding what to wear – especially in cold temperatures. You need to visualize how you are going to be 20 minutes into your run, when you are warmed up. It is the peripheral areas of the body, like the fingers, that get the least blood flow and will be most affected, whereas feet tend to get warm. In winter, merino wool works well due to its wicking effect, but everyone is different and you need to experiment and adapt.

When training on a treadmill, it’s worth bearing in mind that you create an area of warm air around the body and this can be an issue if there is not adequate ventilation. If the head gets really hot, the brain will sense this and regulate energy output. What you wear on your head can be important. The head generates lots of heat, so, in cold weather, despite not wanting all of that heat to be lost, you also don’t want to overheat, so a good, lightweight toque works well. In warm, sunny weather, a peaked cap will protect the head and keep the sun out of your eyes. Wear a white or light-coloured one, which will reflect the sun’s rays and as much radiation as possible. Some runners will wear a hydration pack or belt for water bottles, while others prefer to deposit water bottles along the race course.



A wrist-based GPS is a great tool for tracking time and distance while running. All you need to know is how to press start, stop and save. Some models will enable a runner to monitor pace and heart rate, which also helps the coach. There is all manner of high-tech equipment available, geared to the runner, but my advice is to keep it simple.