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ChiRunning® & ChiWalking®

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ChiWalking® a Marathon: A Personal First

As a certified ChiWalking Instructor since Danny's first training class in 2005, I had often wondered how I would fare if I tried to ChiWalk a full (26.2 miles) marathon. Until recently such an idea had remained just a question in my mind but last Fall, I was spurred to action by the chance to lead a training group through the Eugene Running Company for Walking the Eugene Marathon in May of 2009. I was clear that I had to "practice what I preached" so I quickly researched and signed up for the Seattle Marathon, set for Nov. 30, 2008. With only a month to prepare I knew I could not build up the typical base needed to complete a marathon. Instead, I had to rely on prior experience running marathons (5 in recent years), my overall good fitness level, prior experience as a Race Walker, and the blessings of the ChiWalking® approach. I wondered what I was getting myself in for!

One of the training supports I did find very helpful, was my trusty old metronome as I knew that keeping a consistent and high turnover rate would be key to my success in completing the marathon and doing so in a respectable time (whatever that meant!). Assessing the relationship between cadence and my pace per mile was central to my abbreviated training program and, as it turned out, this knowledge in the actual marathon proved to be critical to my successful performance.

The weather on race day was good, for Seattle; no rain and not too cold. Waiting for the starting gun in the crowd of marathon walkers not far from the Seattle Needle was an exciting experience. As I aligned, engaged, balanced and focused one more time—we were off! Initially, things went smoothly and without much effort. I found myself walking at a good pace in a smooth and easy groove, falling in step with another pair of walkers, experienced marathoners, who expressed considerable interest in my ChiWalking technique and my personal goal given the minimal mileage base I had under my belt.

All seemed straightforward until we crossed the midway point. From then on, I had to continuously "body scan", increase attention to my ChiWalking focuses (e.g., pelvic rotation, bent knee on landing, strong arm swing and more), turn on my metronome more often for pacing guidance, and basically call upon my "mental toughness" to keep on going at my desired pace. The final phase of the race offered several miles of both rolling and steep hills, a nice change for me in that

my focus increased again and I could get some relief by modifying my form as appropriate. I have to confess, I also got a little motivating buzz by passing more than a few runners as they struggled with the hills—as experienced ChiWalkers know, it’s often easier to walk up hills than it is to run up them.

With renewed energy and increased confidence, I walked swiftly into Seahawks Stadium and “sprinted” to the finish line spurred on by the cheering crowd. I had done it—and done it well. I had walked, ChiWalked to be exact, my first marathon, crossing the line in a respectable time of 5 hrs., 31 mins. for a pace of 12:38 per mile. What relief, joy and a sense of accomplishment I felt. And what an affirming experience it was for the potential of the ChiWalking approach in long distance walking.

Keith McConnell, PhD, is a Certified ChiWalking and ChiRunning Instructor living in Eugene, Oregon and practicing in the Northwest. He also teaches walking and running courses at the University of Oregon and serves on the board of the Oregon Track Club Masters.

