

Dimitris Tzefalis

KEEP YOUR MIND RUNNING

Stories
that get you
off your couch
and out for a run



Dimitris Tzefalis

KEEP YOUR MIND RUNNING

Stories that get you off your couch
and out for a run



© 2021 Sportbook Publications
ISBN: 978-618-5649-02-9

Translation to English: Natasha Tsakiri

Cover photograph: Angelos Zymaras (Author's Note: The photograph captures the instant that I dedicate my finish at the 2019 Athens Authentic Marathon to Vaso Ego-nopoulou, who is presented in chapter 22. I'd like to thank the exceptional photographer Angelos Zymaras, for capturing this unique moment)

SPORTBOOK Publications
Thessaloniki, Andrea Papandreou 172, 56626, Greece
Tel: (+30) 2310.629319
<http://www.sportbook.gr>
e-mail: info@sportbook.gr

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission of the copyright owner. Nor can it be circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without similar condition including this condition being imposed on a subsequent purchaser.

Dedicated to my father, Yannis, for all the steps we took together.

*For he taught me not only to take one step at a time, but also to
step aside, look back, see if things were done right and carry on.*

*I thank him for always being beside me.
Not in front of me, standing in my way,
and neither behind me, pushing me.
Beside me.*

CONTENTS

IN LIEU OF A WARM UP	7
1. Eliud Kipchoge	11
2. Emil Zátopek.....	17
3. Steve Prefontaine.....	23
4. John Bingham	29
5. Meb Keflezhigi	33
6. Jesse Owens.....	37
7. Sir Roger Bannister	41
8. Priscilla Welch.....	45
9. Christopher McDougall	51
10. Yiannis Kouros.....	57
11. Frank Shorter.....	67
12. Bill Bowerman	73
13. Dimitris Tzefalis.....	79
14. Abebe Bikila	85
15. Zola Budd.....	91

16. Haruki Murakami.....	99
17. Arthur Lydiard	105
18. Scott Jurek.....	113
19. Hicham El Guerrouj	121
20. Haile Gebrselassie.....	129
21. Kilian Jornet Burgada	135
22. Vaso Egonopoulou	145
EPILOGUE.....	153
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS – DEDICATIONS	157

01

The best time to plant a tree was 25 years ago.

The second-best time to plant a tree is today.

Eliud Kipchoge

IT WOULD BE NEAR IMPOSSIBLE to find a runner in our time who has not heard of Eliud Kipchoge. The marathon runner from Kenya has made history in long distance running. On top of that, he has been established as one of the most important runners of all time due to his long-lasting athletic career. He has won medals in world championships and Olympic Games, in races ranging from 3 to 42,195 km, and holds the marathon world record with a time of 2:01:39, set in September 2018 in Berlin – at least until the time of publication of this book¹. His talent in endurance races is indisputable, even though physically, at 1 m 67 cm (between 5'5" and 5'6") height and 52 kg (114.6 lb) weight, he is not very impressive. We cannot wait to see what more he can achieve!

Referencing all his titles, wins and accomplishments per sport, would probably take an entire chapter. However, we cannot but mention that he has won gold nine times in major global marathon competitions from 2014 until 2021. It seems

¹ The 1:59:04 time achieved in Vienna in 2019 is not considered official due to the special circumstances under which it was accomplished.

that Eliud's attitude mainly, but also his performances, will be considered sports milestones for future generations.

If you were to watch Kipchoge on your screen run at 2' 53" per km (about 4' 38"/mile), you would probably not perceive his extraordinary pace. However, were you to see him up close, as a spectator, you would definitely notice his speed. And if you were to try running 100m in about 17" 25, or, for those a bit on the fitter side, 400m in 1' 10" 00, then you would begin to realize that the vast majority of people cannot complete a 1 kilometer or 400 meters run, and some not even run 100 meters!

I am not mentioning all this for any of us to lose heart as runners but to grasp the athletic magnificence of this four-times Olympic medalist who has climbed all the steps of the medal podium in different Olympic Games, with his most recent success being the marathon gold medal in the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo. This victory makes him the third man in Olympic marathon history to win the marathon in two consecutive Games.

Many of us admire him for his athletic virtues, but something perhaps most people do not know, is his love for reading and philosophy. He is a formidable speaker, one who can inspire us and affect our way of thinking, our life view and our attitude.

Trying to highlight a different side of the athletes, other than their abilities in sports, I chose as his quote a Chinese proverb he used in one of his interviews, which is not sports-oriented. The above quote shows his determination for action, which should concern us if we are serious about wanting to change our lives; ours and that of the people around us. Many of us keep postponing making positive life changes or a decision, because we believe that it is too late and time has slipped by.

Maybe it would have been better if we had started to learn a foreign language or a musical instrument, had taken up running

03

To give anything less than your best is to sacrifice the gift.

Steve Prefontaine

HE CAME INTO THIS WORLD TO LEAVE HIS MARK, to become a legend. He possessed something that most people don't. He had this spark in his eyes that made him stand out. If singing had won him over, I am certain that he would have become a rock star. Thankfully, for those of us that love sports, middle-distance running reeled him in instead. He filled the stadiums with sports fans who enjoyed watching him run. The atmosphere was electrified when he entered the stadium, let alone when he ran. Often you would hear the chant "Go-Pre, Go-Pre", using his nickname, rise from the bleachers. The courage he displayed while running excited the crowds.

Steve Prefontaine was one of the most communicative runners Americans had known, but also one of the most committed. His physical beauty and the self-confidence he radiated, drew admiring glances from most people. Despite the repeated invitations to dates from his female colleagues at school, he often found excuses, because he didn't want to be behind in his training and the races that he so loved.

18

Every single one of us possesses the strength to attempt something he isn't sure he can accomplish. It can be running a mile, or a 10K race, or 100 miles. It can be changing a career, losing 5 pounds, or telling someone you love her (or him).

Scott Jurek

ULTRAMARATHONS RESEMBLE LIFE TO A POINT. Let's say, for example, you have to cross 100 miles and you are at mile 60. If you start thinking about and preoccupying yourself with the remaining distance you need to cover, you might feel disheartened, while recounting the miles you already completed probably won't be of much help either. You have to focus on the present and try to complete the mile you are currently running. At times, you might just have to focus on the next step, and then the one after that, until you finish.

It is certain that most, if not all, runners will feel tired at some point during the race. They will get frustrated and may possibly want to quit. The reason most athletes give up doesn't have to do as much with their body as with the negative thoughts that consume them.

Something similar happens to all of us from time to time in real life. Some quit and abandon the fight at the first sight of

adversity. Others take advantage of it and learn something, in order to become more resilient and better in what they do. Each athlete, but also each and every one of us, when it comes to life, has their own unique way of dealing with adversity. This way usually depends on the preparations made and the provisions picked to carry along the way. I often wonder how champions manage these difficult situations, and specifically how ultra runners handle them.

One of those athletes provides us with the answer, explaining that: “Racing ultras requires absolute confidence tempered with intense humility. To be a champion you have to believe that you can destroy your competition. But you also have to realize that winning requires total commitment, and a wavering of focus, a lack of drive, a single misstep, might lead to defeat or worse.” Those are the words of great ultramarathoner and multiple-time champion Scott Jurek.

At the sound of his name, the tall, skinny runner comes to my mind, with his kind, smiling face and his curly, light brown hair trailing behind him as he runs. His physique reminds me, in a way, of that of an ancient Greek. In my head, winged Hermes would be a little like Scott. His photographs with the runners of the Tarahumara tribe, with whom he ran an informal and unpublicized race, are those that stand out in my memory.

Born in Minnesota in 1973, of Polish descent, Scott has been holding a prominent role in ultras for many years. During the last couple of decades, he has become emblematic of ultramarathons. He has won the Spartathlon three times (2006, 2007 and 2008), with a personal best of 22 hours 20’ 01”, which is one of the 6 all-time best performances, and Badwater 135, a 135-mile race in Death Valley, California, twice. The latter is considered one of the toughest races in the world, due to the time of year it takes place in and the unbearable humidity and heat endured.

KEEP YOUR MIND RUNNING

Through the pages of this book, Dimitris Tzefalis shares twenty one + one examples of the life trajectory of people, examples that have to do with running, and he traces the way our running journey, as well as the journey of our life, can become a little more beautiful, positive and interesting. It's a book willing to "train" us to have a better and fuller life.

One quote at a time, Dimitris Tzefalis presents a series of athletes and coaches. His perspective shows that running, apart from physical exercise, is also a polyphonic activity, a constant arranging of the self, a life pace. Zatopek's grimaces, Gebrselassie's smile, El Guerrouj's humility, are all an identity game. It matters not if they have achieved their dreams, whispers Dimitris in each one of the twenty-one plus one stories of this book. What matters is what you become by chasing after them.

Yannis Pattakos, Author-Marathoner

Each champion has a backstory. All those you will read about here have accomplished something more. The same goes for many of those that live beside us. Every story reminds us of the reason running gives life. It's not only the way they have realized their dreams, but the way they have managed themselves in order to accomplish their dreams. Dimitris Tzefalis knows full well what running means and how it can guide everyone's life. Because each step moves us forward and running teaches us the best way to move forward in life, too.

Lefteris Plakidas, Author-Journalist-Marathoner

