Blog Post - By Alan Rothwell

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**The Naked Runner and The Human Psyche.**

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The was never a time when I didn't run. It seems I have always indulged in this amazing yet simple past time. Granted I have never been any good but that has never mattered because that's the thing... You don't need to be.

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My earliest memory of actually running was back in the mid 1970's at John Hamilton High School for Boys and Mr. Walker the P.E. teacher proclaiming it was the 'cross country' season and everyone was expected to take part.

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It wasn't really cross country as we know it now, it was really just a run around the Cottage Homes playing fields in Fazakerley and given that so many boys would stay off or bring notes in from their mothers to plead for exemption I have to say I didn't really mind it.

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So from those early schoolboy days I progressed to running on my own around Everton and Anfield for no reason other than I just liked running. No-one told me to run or encouraged me. I just did it (even before Nike started to encourage everyone to just do it)!

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Just touching on the title of this piece - **The Naked Runner** - it is really a description of my attitude and approach to running. It always has been. There was nothing complicated about what I did. I just ran.

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I had no formal training as unless you were good and had an aptitude for quality running then you had nowhere to go. Running clubs as they were back then were generally the reserve of 'proper' runners, runners with talent and capability. I had neither.

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You have to remember this was all before the introduction of the London Marathon, Great North Run and mass participation in this 'open to everyone' sport.

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Having taken part in amateur league football and not really enjoyed it (as I wasn't very good at that either) I was asked in early 1981 if I thought I could run from Liverpool to Southport. I had no idea but thought I would give it a go, after all how hard could it be...

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Sitting down outside Southport train station I could hardly walk...

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Shortly after this epic adventure I was made aware of the first London Marathon and my curiosity was aroused and I started to think if I could do a marathon. I had no idea **HOW** to run 26.2 miles but as the tiredness left my body after the Southport run (of about 17 miles) I decided to give it a go - only to find out I had missed the deadline for entries. So, with a shrug of the shoulders and a 'never mind' to myself thought no more of it.

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Who was I kidding? The notion of running a marathon even with no knowledge, experience or even basic understanding had taken root deep inside my brain. Despite trying **NOT** to think about it I managed to find another marathon to take part in. It was the Bolton Pony Marathon and it was in August 1981.

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Would I have enough time to train, could I realistically do it? Did I know how to do it? No, of course not. But that was the upside of being a naked runner. I had no baggage. I had no expectation. I had no clue.... I just ran. It was a brilliant era for running. We were pioneers in a way because as mass participation took on epidemic proportions in the 1980's  it didn't matter. **We just ran because we enjoyed running.**

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There were no other incentives than enjoyment and the challenge of whether you could do it or not and there was only one way to find out.

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When I look back at the running community in those early years I do regret slightly that I didn't apply myself more and have the courage to join a running club. Harriers, nah they weren't for the likes of me. A lone wolf, a different kind of runner, one with no boundaries or expectation. Every run was a joy and my appetite was insatiable.

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Groucho Marx once said he wouldn't like to belong to any club that would have him as a member.

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I concur and as a consequence never belonged to a running club until March 2018 when the BTR group secured UKA recognition!

Over the first 25 years of the London Marathon I managed to squeeze in 42 full marathons (22 appearances in London) with varying degrees of success and failure - but that's what happens when you are self taught through trial and error.

The overriding feeling I am left with looking back now in 2018 is that the Naked Runner no longer exists.

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Granted I still run to this day for enjoyment of it and will continue to do so - but the changes and driving forces that influence modern day running are completely different to when I instinctively took those first running steps back in the mid 1970's.

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The main difference seems to be that running is now a lifestyle choice, which I suppose when I started it still was - I just didn't know it!

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My point is the motivations for running are now very much influenced by the marketing of the sport rather than basic instinct or indeed capability of the individual. The two key driver events in this over the last 30 odd years have been The London Marathon and The Great North Run - the irony being that unless you are lucky, a celebrity or prepared to run for charity you can't get a place.

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The beauty of running is and always has been it's simplicity. Anyone can do it and as I have already proven, you don't need a special talent. It IS for everyone and that is how it should be.

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However, like most things that become mainstream it ultimately gets hijacked by commercial interest - and running is no different.

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Harping back to my early years of naked running we had no electronic timing, names on numbers, Goody Bags, technical t shirts, Power Of 10, Garmins, gels, performance trainers, starting pens, pacers, online training plans and the like. What we had was innocence and application and for me that was enough.

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Over the years I have witnessed the morphing of a beautiful concept (organised running for all) from something that only strange people did (!!) to a multi million pound industry which has for many years tapped into the human physche and influenced their lifestyle choices and simultaneously placed greater retail choices in front of them, with many people powerless to resist.

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There is of course now so much information available about running, especially information that can inspire you to run faster, further, longer and many will chase their personal dreams of achievement and other will aspire - and that is good.

But all the time the running market is now being driven by clever marketing and the provision of runner reward packages, early bird incentives to capture you at your weakest moment, personal challenge and host of other retail incentives...

Bigger medals, more medals, medals for well... nothing really.

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Where will it end? In all probability it won't. The running industry will continue to be slowly dominated by larger corporations and smaller companies will slowly disappear because they can't compete with heavyweight commercial entities. Not so much survival of the fittest but survival of those who can attract bigger numbers into their event.

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In a saturated event market which is driven by the human psyche and the need for runner reward (both emotionally and in terms of value for money, whatever that is) it seems such a long way back to those halcyon days of naked running.

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For me, I still just love to run.