

From Dads' Race to the London Marathon by Tom Camponi

In 2008 I moved to Fitzwilliam while expecting our first child, leaving my old rugby team, team-mates, friends and social life behind in Mirfield. Missing my old rugby team but new to the area, I decided to wait until we had settled into a new family-focused routine and then find a local team to join. However there always seemed to be another reason to wait a bit longer as 'now's not a good time.'

Fast forward eight years of comfortable living and very little physical activity, I'm the most overweight and least physically fit I've ever been, sat at my eldest's sports day when the call goes out for the Dads' race.

I look across the field to see my daughter gesturing for me to join in. Reluctantly I walk to the start line to get this 100meter torture over with. As expected, it was not pretty and, other than a Grandad who tripped at the start and didn't finish, I came last.

Embarrassed and disappointed with myself for getting that out of shape, I was determined to do something about it. I started going for a few short runs, but frustratingly just couldn't get into it. Even when I was younger and fitter I'd never been a fan of running. School cross country sessions were boring monotonous runs around the school fields, warm up laps at rugby training were a chore, and worst of all were the extra laps doled out by the rugby coach as punishment.

Then one day my Dad called to say his local running club were having an outing to Nostell parkrun in a few weeks and did we fancy meeting him there for a picnic, which led to me registering with parkrun to give it a try. I turned up on the appointed Saturday with a paper printout barcode, a rugby shirt and a pair of cheap Lonsdale pumps that I'd been doing my short runs in. It was more painful than I'd expected, and only sheer pig-headed stubbornness made me continue onto the second lap to torture myself all over again.

Yet somehow the next Saturday I was there again now with a pair of proper trainers, then the next, and over the following weeks I got talking to a few other parkrunners, which led to me joining Ackworth Road Runners.

Fast forward another four years and, while I'm still as overweight as I was at the start of my running journey, with the support and encouragement of the amazing coaches and members of ARR I now love running, especially the PECO cross country events. Over this time, I've taken part in a host of races, from 5km up to marathon, with a highlight being getting to do the London marathon through the club's ballot. I now look forward to the Dads' races and, while I'll never win them, I no longer come last!

Tom Camponi, May 2020