

What is Running? – by Richie Berry

It wasn't until just over a year ago that I actually enjoyed running. Exercise in some form or another has always been a part of my life - I've always enjoyed resistance training, HIIT, team sports like rugby, and even disciplines such as T'ai Chi and yoga - but running for its own sake never really did it for me. I just didn't get it. I detested it in fact. Until I was dragged that is, to Nostell parkrun by Steve and Wendy - or to me, mum and dad. I was back in the UK for a holiday (I had been working in Thailand as an ESL teacher) and this is what they did every Saturday morning; they awoke from their slumber early on a Saturday morning to run in subzero temperatures at 9am. What?

Now, I'm a morning person, so rising and being ready to run at 9am is no issue. The freezing temperatures on the other hand? Almost a deal breaker. Getting through the pre-race instructions was the biggest challenge on that first morning at Nostell - the contrasting weather conditions I had become accustomed to had never been more apparent. Fast forward to 9am, gloves are preventing my hands from freezing and warming me from the inside is Carly Rae Jepsen's "Call Me Maybe" (don't judge) through my headphones. I was eager for the race to start. And soon enough, there was the cry of 3-2-1-GO!

I don't remember my time, that was of secondary importance that day. From start to finish, I loved it. The atmosphere and camaraderie among all the participants, many of whom were friends and family, was intoxicating. Not only did the whole experience introduce me to lots of new faces of different generations, it also reintroduced me to old faces. Old childhood friends, former colleagues and the like. Running together, struggling together, and enjoying a hot caffeinated beverage and an ever so cheeky slice of cake after the race together. Brilliant.

When I returned to Thailand, I incorporated running into my exercise regime - which had consisted primarily of CrossFit type workouts using kettlebells, plyometrics, callisthenics, battle ropes etc. - and I've never looked back. It also led me to participate in a number of grass-roots triathlon events in Bangkok (it's the Tri-Dash Series for anyone who might be interested) as well as The North Face trail run in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand. These types of events just weren't on my radar before. I'd obviously caught the bug, not just the physical act of running bug, but the sense of community bug that these events/clubs facilitate. Although we are all striving to improve on past efforts, to get that new PR, we are also there to motivate and to encourage our fellow competitors to help *them* get *theirs*. And that's what I love about running. People encouraging each other to push that little bit harder, to be a little bit better than they were the day before. It's inspiring. It's friendship. That's what running is to me.

Richie Berry, May 2020