Running the New York City Marathon

by RUSSELL WINWOOD

Russ's NYC Marathon Journey

In my endeavour to continually shine a light on COPD and asthma and encourage more spending globally on research, patient education and, hopefully, a cure, I'm running the New York City Marathon.

I've accepted a charity entry via the American Lung Association of the Northeast to run the marathon in November this year.

While I have completed a marathon at the end of each Ironman event I've competed in, New York will be a very different challenge, even though I don't have to swim and cycle first.

So, What's the Point?

I firmly believe that we all have a purpose in this life and it's taken my COPD diagnosis to realize mine.

Raising awareness and helping other people with chronic lung conditions is what drives me to find new challenges and raise the bar.

The more we can bring this disease into focus, the more people will take notice of the struggles and frustration patients deal with.

While raising awareness can be done in many ways, for me it's through sporting events as I've always been a sports nut. I'm also a believer that while exercise will not cure COPD, you can train your body to be very efficient in its use of oxygen, which in-turn improves your COPD symptoms.

By completing these events, I hope to convince and inspire patients that their quality of life can be improved by exercise.

COPD and Running

For most COPD patients, running is not a normal part of life, but there are some who've been able to run or walk different events around the world.

While my main goal is to finish and raise awareness for COPD, my personal goal is to run the race in a time of 5hrs 45mins. I suspect I'll be the first stage IV COPD patient to do this.

The biggest consideration in preparing for this race will to keep my oxygen levels above 92% and heart rate under 150 bpm. My last pulmonary function test result indicated a FEV_1 of 25%, which is not great but is something to work with. My theory of using 100% of the lung function I do have will be put to the test for sure.

New York City Challenges

When I arrive in NYC, I'll be confronted by two major triggers: cold and pollution.

I am planning on combating the cold by wearing appropriate clothing and by doing plenty of night and early morning training during the Australian winter. While the winters are pretty mild where I live, it will help me cope better in New York.

As for pollution, training in an exhaust filled room is probably not a great simulation idea. So we'll explore the option of wearing a mask of some type – not ideal for a marathon but it could be a necessity.

This will be my first race of any type outside of Australia. While being a great adventure, it will also be a little daunting.

I like to see the course I'm competing on before an event so I can piece together how I expect the race to unfold. I will arrive in New York around a week before the race and will be using that time to recover from the flight – over 18 hours flying time on oxygen – and acclimatizing to the New York cold.

Next page: training, the documentary and the support crew.

Training – A New Method

Running a marathon will be very different training regime for me. My previous long events have been Ironman races, which include a swim and ride. While I'll continue to swim and ride once a week for cross training purposes, my total training time will be less than previous events.

My official training will start on the May 1 and will run for the 26 weeks leading up to the race. Many of my training sessions will have a heavy focus on speed work, as I need to increase my running pace in order to complete the race in my time goal.

My coach Doug and I have been working on some new training techniques to increase my speed and so far we've achieved some promising results. I'll be having lung function and exercise stress testing in the near future and again two weeks before the marathon so we can compare results at either end of the training program.

Part of the reason we are adopting some new techniques is to find ways to improve the health of COPD patients in general through exercise. If we can find better ways to train faulty lungs, it would be a great result.

If I can run the New York City Marathon in 5 hrs 45 minutes, then I will be on pace with a lot of people with healthy lungs, and that would be a great step forward for exercise programs for people with COPD.

I'm not suggesting that everyone should go and run a marathon, but the exercise theory we develop could possibly be used on many patients.

The Documentary

Discussing what lay ahead for me over the next six months with my coach Doug, we both realized this would be a great opportunity to record the whole process to turn into a documentary on how some with COPD can train and complete events like the New York City Marathon.

Filming will include both my respiratory tests, training sessions, dietary information, the race, and discussions with experts along the way. At the end of this journey, we will have some very useful information on how my body coped with all the training and race day conditions. This information we hope to utilize for future training programs for patients.

With a documentary on Leonard Nimoy's battle with COPD planned for this year, we hope our documentary will continue to keep COPD in the spotlight in 2016.

The Support Crew

There will be four of us running in the New York marathon under the COPD Athlete banner and all will be helping monitor my progress. My wife has decided to run with me as well, and Coach Doug will be helping set the pace I need to maintain to reach my goal time as well as keeping an eye on my oxygen levels and heart rate.

For this project to succeed, we'll need a good support network in Australia and New York and with the American Lung Association of the Northeast, Dr Noah Greenspan's Pulmonary Wellness and Rehabilitation Center and the National Asthma Council Australia already on board, it's certain to be a success.

If you'd like to help make this project a reality, you can donate here – your donation will be greatly appreciated! Opportunities for corporate sponsorship are still available – inquiries can be made via COPD Athlete.

New York, here I come!