4-1-2013

First and 10

Erikah Haavie

Furman University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine

Recommended Citation
Haavie, Erikah (2013) "First and 10," Furman Magazine: Vol. 56 : Iss. 1 , Article 8.
Available at: https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol56/iss1/8

This Article is made available online by Journals, part of the Furman University Scholar Exchange (FUSE). It has been accepted for inclusion in Furman Magazine by an authorized FUSE administrator. For terms of use, please refer to the FUSE Institutional Repository Guidelines. For more information, please contact scholarexchange@furman.edu.
Bhusker Sharma was looking for a break from the stress of his job as a manager with an information technology company. He found relief in long-distance running. He soon realized he wanted to improve his technique—and his intensity. To help him do so, he devoured a copy of Run Less, Run Faster, a book co-authored by Furman health sciences professors Bill Pierce, Ray Moss, and Scott Murr.

The book, which features training programs and nutritional advice for runners, further whetted Sharma’s appetite. He eventually boarded a plane in Bangalore, India, and crossed the Atlantic Ocean to pursue additional training at the Furman Institute of Running and Scientific Training (FIRST).

Sharma, who recently qualified for the Boston Marathon, says the FIRST program gave him the structure and focus he needed. “Bill Pierce is a very responsive and thoughtful coach,” he says. “I could not have qualified for Boston without this program.”

Sharma’s success prompted him to bring two friends with him on a second visit to Furman in July 2011 for a sort of “train the trainer” program. They are now using FIRST methods to motivate other runners in India.

Heading into its second decade, FIRST has gone international, with queries and interest from throughout the world. What began as a simple series of lectures about running has morphed into a global training program reaching thousands of runners.

And its impact is likely to continue to expand thanks to its latest innovation: a training app.

The FIRST app was designed and developed over several months by computer science professor Bryan Catron and his son, Weston, a 2013 graduate of Greenville’s Wade Hampton High School who plans to major in computer science at Wake Forest University. The app outlines comprehensive 12- and 16-week training programs for 5K, 10K, half-marathon, and marathon runners.

“FIRST is a good, solid program,” says Weston, who has developed several apps for local companies. “It just seemed like a recipe for a successful app.”

In the first three months after its launch at the end of December, nearly 750 runners from 41 countries purchased the $2.99 app, primarily through word-of-mouth advertising.

Jenny Rikoski, a runner from Boston who has run the New York, Chicago, and Boston marathons, attended a FIRST retreat at Furman last May and recently started using the training app on her iPhone.

“The lab tests at the retreat and the feedback from Bill, Scott, Ray and the other experts at Furman helped me realize that with some hard work and discipline I had potential to become an even better runner,” she says.

Since the retreat, Rikoski has set personal records in the mile run, the 5K run and the marathon. “No two runners approach mileage, cross training, nutrition, hydration and recovery the same,” she says. “FIRST recognizes that and, based on science, gives good, practical advice that all runners can benefit from.”
The Furman Institute of Running and Scientific Training has gone international, and a new training app will further spread the word.

FIRST IS DESIGNED to help runners of all ages and abilities achieve their goals and potential and to enjoy lifelong running. FIRST coaches have assisted runners ages 18 to 80.

For each runner, the coaches develop individual training programs based on scientific laboratory and field tests to improve mechanics and maximize performance. In some cases, coaching involves a personal email outlining a training plan for the week. FIRST also offers comprehensive training for groups of runners during intensive four-day retreats on campus.

The concept for FIRST was born on the road, says co-founder Murr, a 1984 Furman graduate who has been Pierce’s running partner since his senior year. One day the two asked themselves, “What can we do to help other runners?”

Drawing on their shared experiences, they began to help friends and colleagues with their running goals, at times writing training plans for them longhand on sheets of lined paper. After a time, Pierce and Murr decided they wanted to formalize the program. Moss joined their team, and with the support of Furman’s administration they established the running institute with a simple theme: training based on science.

A key feature of the FIRST program is the “three plus two” program, or three specific running workouts and two cross-training workouts per week. FIRST coaches also take note of a number of physiological measurements for the runners they work with, including maximal oxygen consumption, lactate threshold, running economy and body composition, and then develop customized programs.

The results are backed by research, namely three different studies of 25 runners conducted over a three-year period. “The results were rather remarkable,” Pierce says, as more than two-thirds of FIRST runners improved their best times.

The program’s big break came in 2005, when Amy Burfoot, editor of Runner’s World magazine and winner of the 1968 Boston Marathon, came to campus for four days and wrote a six-page feature about FIRST.

“The Furman FIRST training programs are the most detailed, well-organized, and scientific training programs for runners that I have ever seen,” Burfoot said. “For many runners, especially those hard-pressed to find time for their workouts, the Furman FIRST programs will also be the best.”

After the magazine hit newsstands, the phone calls and emails just didn’t stop. “It just changed everything,” Pierce says. “It continues today.”

To date, Pierce and his colleagues have received and responded to more than 9,000 emails from runners on six continents. A second edition of Run Less, Run Faster, first published in 2007, was released in 2012, and the book has been translated into German and Portuguese.

The title caught the attention of Furman junior Elisabeth Schlaudt when she saw the book on her roommate’s desk. Schlaudt, a Greenville native, said she began running as a high school freshman, not only to be part of a team, but as an excuse to eat more ice cream.

“Running has since become more of a lifestyle, something I do because I want to,” says Schlaudt.

She began training for North Carolina’s New River Marathon in 2011 and used the book as a guide. Pierce created a training plan for her and offered tips on how to prepare. Her five months of hard work paid off, as she won the race in the 19-and-under category.

“As a marathon ‘newbie’, the FIRST program was a fantastic tool,” says Schlaudt. “It helped turn my rather ambitious running goal into a concrete plan that was easy to follow.”

Which ties into FIRST’s ultimate goal: to promote training with a purpose, and stimulate a love for running.

The author is an assistant in Furman’s education department and a contributor to the university’s online and print publications. Photos by Jeremy Fleming.