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with all the fundamentals required to master 26.2 miles.”**

—Dathan Ritzenhein, 3-time Olympian

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RUNNING PROGRAM*



HANSONS
FIRST
MARATHON

STEP UP TO 26.2 THE HANSONS WAY

LUKE HUMPHREY WITH
KEITH & KEVIN HANSON

HANSONS FIRST MARATHON

STEP UP TO 26.2 THE HANSONS WAY

Luke Humphrey with Keith and Kevin Hanson



Boulder, Colorado

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3002 Sterling Circle, Suite 100
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Introduction

There's no denying the mystique of the marathon. For many, it is the quintessential endurance event, at the top of bucket lists, running résumés, and lifetime achievement goals. Whatever your pace or finishing time, crossing the finish line of your first marathon can be as much a spiritual experience as a physical one, providing you with a profound sense of meaning, pride, and accomplishment. Despite all manner of newfangled endurance events popping up on race calendars each year, from Spartan races to zombie runs, the marathon remains the gold standard for human-powered locomotion. Entertaining the thought of running 26.2 miles on foot may scare the daylights out of you. Questions abound: Can I really run that far? How do I begin to train for something like that? Will it hurt? What if I fail?

Hopefully among those contemplations of self-doubt shine rays of hope and excitement. That's how Big Goals work—they seem just outside our reach, which is precisely what makes them so alluring. The gravitational pull of the marathon is very strong for some of us. For others, it holds a spot in the “maybe someday” category—a goal that you'd like to tackle at some point, but just haven't yet found the time. If you're in that camp, the fact that you've picked up this book is a good sign that “someday” is a lot closer than you thought.

You certainly won't be alone. The marathon's growing popularity has ushered in an ever-burgeoning number of participants. Today's marathon start lines are populated by all types of runners: hard-core veterans, yes, but also soccer moms and dads, fund-raisers, harriers, and weekend warriors—all on a mission to prove to themselves that they can do it. And guess what: They can. And so can you.

Most of us just need a place to start—terra firma from which to make that initial leap into training for the 26.2-mile distance—and confidence about where we're headed. That's what this book is all about.

Who Should Run a Marathon?

When brothers Keith and Kevin Hanson, coaches and co-founders of the elite Hansons-Brooks Distance Project, first devised their marathon training plans back in 1991, the marathon scene looked dramatically different than it does today. Charity fund-raising for events was but a blip on the radar. Themed races were inconceivable. Carbo-loading involved strictly white pasta and bread. Running shoes were heavier. And moisture-wicking finisher T-shirts weren't even a glimmer in the most experienced runner's eye.

Statistics culled by Running USA provide an interesting window into how the marathon scene has evolved over the past several decades. For instance, in 1980, roughly 143,000 people ran a marathon. The majority of those runners were between 20 and 39 years old, and just 10 percent were women. By 1995, about the time the Hanson brothers penned their first Marathon Method schedules, those numbers had grown a bit. That year there were about 293,000 marathon finishers. The number of women participants had grown to 26 percent, and the number of runners in the masters category (age 40 and up) increased from 26 percent of the marathon running population in 1980 to 41 percent. By 2015, the marathon boasted more than 500,000 finishers for the previous two years, and has remained at that level since. The number

of women participants nearly equals the number of men, and masters runners make up almost half of all finishers.

In addition to a wider demographic, the statistics show that overall pace has also changed dramatically. Today's marathoners are slower on average. In 1980, the average time for women was 4:02 and for men 3:32. By 1995, those numbers had slowed to 4:15 and 3:54 respectively and by 2015, we had become a nation of 4-hour marathoners, with women averaging 4:45 and men 4:20.

What do all these stats say about running marathons today? Prior to the first running boom in the 1970s, the runners who made up that small group of marathoners could only be described as hard-core. It was an insular group, logging many miles in solitary pursuit of their training goals. Back then, most people probably didn't know anyone who had run—or even had ambitions to run—a marathon.

Nowadays, there are not only thousands of additional races from which to choose, but also these races are billed as grand events. These aren't your grandpa's races, with 20 people racing each other sans water stops and fueling stations. Many marathons are extravagant affairs that garner millions in charity dollars and other revenue. The loneliness of the long-distance runner has made way for the nation's most well-attended social club. And while there remain some "purists" who scoff at these developments, we would argue that the sport is better for it. The marathon is more inclusive and accessible, inviting a new generation of people to participate in an activity that has proven benefits for both body and mind. In the end, that's a good result for everyone involved. As the saying goes, "a rising tide raises all boats" whether your destination is a fund-raising goal, a personal best, or an Olympic berth.

The primary aim of this book is to show you that, regardless of experience, finishing a marathon is something just about anyone can accomplish. In these pages, you will learn how to do more than simply survive your first marathon and check it off the list. Rather, you will learn how to thrive, by not only learning best training practices, but also knowing what to anticipate during the process.

Along with detailed explanations of why and how to log mileage and properly structure your training, we will dispel common myths and misconceptions and chart a course for a successful finish. We've also polled experienced athletes on what they wish they had known leading up to their own first marathons in order to offer you the benefit of learning from others' mistakes and triumphs.

Where Is My Starting Line?

Who will benefit from reading this book? The short answer is anyone who is looking to run that first marathon. In most cases, you will fall into one of three categories.

The Beginner: Perhaps you've long contemplated taking up running or maybe you've had a sudden spark of insight or a life-changing event, but you have decided that now is the time to take charge and knock off that big bucket list item: the marathon. If you fall into this category, you probably don't have a lot of stored knowledge on best training practices. You may run the odd day during the workweek or on the weekend, but not consistently or with any structure. This book can be a key part of your journey from 0.0 to 26.2—and if the process turns a bucket list item into a lifelong passion, all the better.

The Recreational Runner: You're in the largest group of marathon first-timers. Your typical training includes 2–4 days of running per week and you are familiar with terms like “intervals,” “repeats,” or “tempo runs.” You probably have some 5K and 10K races under your belt and maybe a few half-marathons. Many runners in this category started running for health and fitness, but continued because they enjoyed the sport and competition. If you find yourself in this crowd, this book will show you how to safely and effectively structure your training in order to take that next step on your running journey.

The Competitive Runner: You've logged some impressive personal bests and may even be the top finisher at your local 5K and 10K races, and now you're looking for a new dragon to slay. The marathon is a race that many competitive runners feel a strong pull to attempt at least once, even if they tend to prefer shorter-distance racing. This book will help you bridge the gap between fast racing at shorter distances and proper pacing at the 26.2-mile event.

If Only I Had Known . . .

We have personally coached hundreds of runners through the years, and been introduced to tens of thousands more across a wide spectrum of ability and experience through our books. So we had a large pool from which to draw when we decided to poll athletes about their first-time marathon experiences. What went well? What were the surprises, both good and bad, along the way? What do they wish they had known before they started training? As we collected responses, we noticed a number of common revelations.

The marathon is hard: Many wished they had recognized earlier how challenging the marathon was going to be—and how different the training was from 5K and 10K training. Any coach who tells you that you can train minimally and be successful at the marathon distance is doing you a disservice. The marathon is hard and you need to prepare for that, not just physically, but mentally.

Haphazard training doesn't work: Runners who didn't follow a structured training plan for their first marathon wished they had. A number of runners simply winged it on their first attempt, working off scattershot advice from friends or a simplified plan from the Internet. As with most things, they ended up getting what they paid for. Following a sound, vetted plan that explains the reasoning behind your training, as well as options for individualization, is key to your marathon success.

Marathon training is time consuming: The vast majority of runners surveyed said they wished they had anticipated the significant time commitment that would be required. Think of it this way: While you may have trained for a 5K race before, a marathon is roughly eight times as long. While it won't take eight times the time commitment, believing that you won't need to clear additional time will certainly lead to frustration. Not only is this important in terms of anticipating priorities, it's also vital to set realistic expectations for your family and friends.

IN OTHER WORDS

"The biggest lesson I learned is that willpower alone won't get the job done. Performing well requires a respect for nutrition, body mechanics/ stretching, equipment, and a host of other small details."

—David H.

"Taking pleasure in the process is really important. If you take pride in your training and your discipline, and trust the plan you are following, the race will take care of itself. And it will feel like a real reward, rather than something you have to endure."

—Gildas B.

"I have two phases of my life . . . the person before October 18, 2008 (the date of my first marathon) and the one after. Once I completed the race, I decided that I did not want to go back to being the person that I was before I started running. I feel better, I eat better, my mental outlook is better, my blood pressure is better, and I have more energy. It is never too late to start and it is all possible."

—Craig B.

It was all worth it: Proving to themselves that they were capable of conquering the challenge was a fair trade for the sacrifice and hard work they put in. In fact, the majority of the athletes we spoke to have gone from simply wanting to finish their first marathon to becoming veterans at the distance.

Where Do I Go from Here?

So how do we get from point A to point B—from a desire to run a marathon to crossing the finish line? This book poses several questions to ask yourself before you lace up and head out the door. Your answers will guide you in your initial stages of training, helping you determine things like how long it will take to build fitness appropriate for marathon training and how ready you are to start training today. We will also discuss how to balance ambitions with reality in goal setting, as well as how to stay motivated throughout training. Taking the time to first establish these components will put you in the best position to begin your marathon training.

Let's get started!

About the Authors

Luke Humphrey began running track in middle school and hasn't slowed down since. After several all-state performances in high school, Luke ran for Central Michigan University from 1999 to 2004. There he was a member of several NCAA Division I top-25 cross-country teams, including a 9th place team in 2002. In fall of 2004 Luke competed in his first marathon at the LaSalle Bank Chicago Marathon for the Hansons-Brooks Distance

Project. He ran a debut time of 2:18:46 and was 18th overall. Since then Luke has gone on to finish 11th in the 2006 Boston Marathon, 11th in the 2008 ING New York City Marathon, and 12th in the 2010 Bank of America Chicago Marathon and has also qualified for three U.S. Olympic Trials for the marathon (2008, 2012, and 2016). Luke holds a personal best of 2:14:38 in the marathon. He has a B.A.A. in exercise science from Central Michigan University and an M.S. in exercise science from Oakland University. Luke began Hansons Coaching Services in May 2006 to help runners of all abilities reach their running goals. He and his wife, Nicole, have a daughter, Josephine.



Keith and Kevin Hanson are cofounders of the Hansons-Brooks Distance Project, together coaching the Olympic development team to victories on national and international stages. They also co-own the Hansons Running Shops and avidly support, build, and encourage the running community, coaching hundreds of local runners to their first or 100th marathon.

FINISH YOUR FIRST MARATHON STRONG

with the nation's best coaching team

IT'S YOUR FIRST MARATHON. You want the right coaching and the smartest training program to get across the finish line feeling strong. In *Hansons First Marathon*, the coaches of the acclaimed Hansons-Brooks Distance Project prepare you for race day, showing you how to break down 26.2 miles into a well-executed race and a finish you will be proud of.

The right training gives you the confidence you need to master the marathon. Whether you are new to running or adept at shorter distances but new to the marathon, *Hansons First Marathon* has a program to suit you. With four marathon training plans that range from 12 to 18 weeks, this guide covers everything you need to know, including:

- › Self-tests to determine the best training plan for you
- › Key workouts and how (and why) to do them
- › Science-based fueling guidelines for training and race day
- › Targeted stretching and strengthening exercises
- › Navigating the crucial final 6 weeks
- › Devising a race strategy that puts you in control

How you get to the start line will determine how you finish. Start your marathon journey with *Hansons First Marathon* and set yourself up for success.



TRAIN STRONG, FINISH STRONG

LUKE HUMPHREY is the head coach of Hansons Coaching Services and a runner with the Hansons-Brooks Distance Project.

KEITH & KEVIN HANSON are elite running coaches and cofounders of the Hansons-Brooks Distance Project.