

Running through the pain barrier

By Peter Thornton

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Australian expatriate Julianne Wilson is an example of what you can achieve when someone believes in you, before you believe in yourself.

The 55-year-old from Auckland has been training for the past two-and-a-half years with triathlon coach Ben Eitelberg. When she first started, she could barely run a lap of the field.

To make it more challenging, 10 years previously she had broken her ankle and had become accustomed to having pain down the side of her leg for years whenever she'd attempt to run.

"The pain was extreme," she said.

"I had joined a running group and was trying to keep up but the mission was impossible. The pain was sharp and stabbing and it would shoot up my left leg. I had many injuries and they all just seemed to collide at that point. I was totally overwhelmed."

The mother of two is now preparing for her first running event in 15 years as she looks to take on the ASB Auckland Half Marathon.

The operating room registered nurse has progressively increased her running mileage the past two years and is feeling more confident than ever about her running ability.

Wilson has clear memories of life with her injuries.

She effectively gave up on fitness and gained weight. She knew she needed to make a change and it took some time to find the right trainer. A friend introduced her to Eitelberg.

"Her self-confidence had completely deteriorated and she was feeling very self-conscious about her appearance when exercising in public," said Eitelberg, from Fitness Locker.

The pair hit it off and developed a special bond in adverse conditions.

"My memory of those early days are of the two of us in winter in the Auckland Domain in the rain, mud and wind," said Wilson.

Eitelberg took Wilson back to basics with barefoot drills but had to manage her workload on her legs after the injuries. Wilson said the drills were "killers", particularly the step-over exercise but her journey had begun.

"Slowly, really slowly, I was able to run," she said. "The pain became less of an issue but my fitness had suffered so it was a doubly difficult challenge but Ben was just chipping away at it all and I just did what I was told. It took a really long time for me to believe I was even capable of running 5km."



Julianne Wilson is grateful for the assistance of her coach during her preparation for the Auckland Half Marathon.

It has been an emotional and rewarding journey. Wilson is running anything from 8km to 17km and she heads out for a long run on the weekend.

"When I finished my first 17km run I was totally shocked that I had done it. I am amazed but I would never have managed it without Ben. Never. The task was too enormous."

Wilson said she had to continually commit to running because she wanted to be able to run pain free.

"Once you have a good trainer who tells you that if you stay with it, start small, 3km for example and chip away as Ben says, then it is sort of as if it is out of your hands. Someone else is taking charge."

Wilson said the running coach helps as there was a sense of urgency to not let down the people who have supported her through all the tears and the swearing.

"There was also much screaming at Ben. He just took it and was reassuring. He'd always say, 'Come on just keep going, the marathon is not today'."

But in addition to her run coach, Wilson has also been supplementing her running with strength training, with personal trainer Nikki Martin.

"Ben is a strong advocate of including mobility and strength work, and Nikki has been a tremendous help."

Two-and-a-half years later, the leg pain is long gone. Eitelberg spent a lot of time working on her running technique and slowly building up her run duration.

"Her self-confidence still suffers at times but it's been a big shift," said Eitelberg, who in a few weeks' time will be running the Auckland Half Marathon with her.

Wilson has one goal for the run on November 2: to make the finish line.

"She's made incredible progress and our target for the big day, while at the back of the field, will be to come in under three hours," said Eitelberg. "When she finishes the run, I'll be ecstatic and I know it would be a very big deal for her."

Wilson's advice for others who are struggling to get fit: find a trainer like Ben – they are few and far between I can tell you – and just stay with it. Never give up and be prepared for good days and totally horrible days.

ASB Auckland Marathon

When: Sunday, November 2

Where: Marathon and Half Marathon begin at King Edward Parade in Devonport. All races finish at Victoria Park in Auckland City.

What: New Zealand's Premier Road Race comprises five events: Full Marathon, Half Marathon, Quarter Marathon, Heart Foundation 5km Challenge and Kids' Marathon.

For more information visit: www.aucklandmarathon.co.nz

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