

Running Shoes Are Cheaper Than Insulin: Marathon Adventures on All Seven Continents

Running Shoes Are Cheaper Than Insulin: Marathon Adventures on All Seven Continents (280 pages, \$19.95 trade paperback) by Anthony “Tony” R. Reed, CPA, is sort of a bound scrapbook of Tony’s own personal grail: to be the first African American runner to run a marathon on all seven continents. The book takes you on that quest as Tony runs marathons in North America (Cowtown, Fort Worth), Europe (Denmark’s Tailwinds), Oceania (Australia’s Gold Coast Marathon), Asia (Great Wall), Antarctica (Antarctica Marathon), South America (Argentina’s Fin del Mundo Marathon), and Africa (Kenya’s Safaricom Lewa Marathon).

The title of the book comes from the fact that as a preteen, Tony was diagnosed with a prediabetic condition so he began playing sports, headed off insulin dependence, and hasn’t stopped since. We know some diabetics who run ultras, and exercise is certainly an excellent way of preventing diabetes from getting worse—especially from getting worse when there is also excessive body weight involved.

Tony’s book is pedestrian in that it is a step-by-step journal of each of his seven marathons toward spanning the continents. There aren’t a lot of subtleties in the narration and no profound themes: “Buenos Aires, Argentina—February 20: I’m writing this while watching *The Simpsons* in Spanish . . . They’re dumb in any language.” Tony is moved by seeing so many black runners in the marathon he runs in Kenya: “Midway up a long curving [of] the hill, my eyes began to tear up. As I looked in front and behind me, I saw a long stream of Black runners. In 25 years of running 86 marathons and 150 races, I had never seen this many Blacks in a distance race. Unforgettable.” True enough. There have been very few African Americans running marathons, and fewer still who ran them well. The legendary Ted Corbitt (the father of American ultrarunning, a cofounder of the RRCA, and a 1952 Olympic marathoner) comes to mind, as well as Herm Atkins (who since 1979 has held the record for African American marathoners with a 2:11:52).

Tony Reed has attempted to inspire more African Americans to run marathons as a cofounder of the National Black Marathoners’ Association. The group designates a specific marathon each year where members can congregate and offer

support. Some African American marathoners (such as Lancelot A. Smith, <http://harlemrunner.blogspot.com>) are critical of Tony Reed's efforts, saying the NBMA has too much self-promotion and pays too little attention to the history of African American long-distance runners such as Bunion Derby runners Toby Joseph Cotton Jr., Samuel L. Robinson, and Eddie "The Sheik" Gardner, as well as former college president and marathoner Dolores Cross, and of course, Corbitt. The chief benefit of Lancelot Smith's Web site is that it gives valuable information about other African American long-distance runners. Tony Reed's organization promotes everyday African Americans running marathons or planning to do so.

—*Rich Benyo*