

## Performance Breakthrough at 40

By Dan Morgado

I was hunched over at the finish line gasping for air as streams of sweat dripped into my eyes. The burning didn't stop me from seeing straight: I just recorded a personal best at a favorite 8K foot race only a few months after my 40th birthday. So what's the big deal about a routine PR? It was everything but routine. I just blew the doors off of my fastest time from 5 years ago by almost 2 minutes!

Okay, maybe it's a little pathetic that I haven't reset my 30:30 finishing time since race day 5 weeks ago, but look, that's a blistering 6:07 pace. Even for a recreational runner, this is truly a breakthrough performance. Every morning since race day I glance at my chronometer display making sure I wasn't dreaming. It's remarkable really. I was fascinated at such a monumental improvement at this stage of my running "career" and can't keep quiet about the secret behind my unexpected success.

The typical reaction I get from my running buddies is, "You must have done one of those weekend running camps, right?" Another good one was, "I heard you talking about plyometrics the other day. Is that your secret weapon?" This guessing game was getting better than "The Weakest Link" TV show and nobody was even getting warm. Heck, talk about being in a state of denial, I still have friends asking me if I have been hanging around the high school track team with Dan "Misery Stick" Petchnick.

The truth is, that's exactly what I did 5 years ago. I would also read running magazines from cover to cover looking for any little trick with even a glimmer of hope to help me break through my current performance rut. A close friend of mine is a Cat-1 bicycle racer. ("Category-One" is only one level below the professional ranks in the world of amateur road cycling.) His trick is to "set your tachometer" the day before your race. "Listen, Dan" he advised, "Warm up for 10 minutes, then sprint, all-out for 60 seconds, recover and repeat. Got it? This..." he wisely professed, "will give you the ability to reach your maximum performance level at your race tomorrow." I cheerfully agreed as if he slipped a gold nugget into my shirt pocket. I was excited and gullible at the same time. The day before the 5K I was ready to "set my tach." The rare trace of falling snow that day certainly wasn't going to interfere with my newfound training secret. I followed his instructions with the precision of a laboratory scientist. The key, he explained, was to run with intensity for very short intervals. "Just short bursts..." his instructions echoed in my head. "This will prepare your body for the following day's demands." After my first "burst" of raw unadulterated speed however, I noticed an interesting twang from deep inside my groin area. So here I am, looking like a rejected dolt that just got cut from the Jamaican bobsled team with a new self-inflicted injury. As it turns out, it was a pulled psoas muscle. Hmmm, funny, I didn't recall discussing the injury potential of this drill with my new athletic advisor. Next.

Petchnick, a Vietnam Purple Heart, practiced most of his "performance enhancing" rituals on anyone dumb enough to listen. I truly believe he devised his cruel and punishing techniques during the war and was eager to apply his time-tested skills on willing victims stateside. "Morgado!" he barked as if mimicking the Drill Sergeant from Full Metal Jacket. "I'm going to put a stopwatch on you!" I let him talk me into one of his trademark training drills. "I'll meet you at the 4-mile marker on Crystal Mountain Boulevard." He ordered. "Jeez, Petchnick, it's freaking February!" I felt as if I had just made a date with The Executioner. "Okay, Morgado!" belted Petchnick. "Run down the hill as fast as you can. You

should be able to run 5-minute miles since gravity is helping you. Just focus on your leg speed! When you get to Highway 410, turn around and run back up the road for an all-out 800 meter effort. I'll be in the car at mile intervals to clock your pace and to make sure you're not doggin' it!" Thanks for going to all the inconvenience, I thought. I never knew the Grim Reaper would be so accommodating. I took off like a scared rabbit, searching for traction on the snowy highway. Hell, I was actually running 5:15 splits on the way down. At the turn-around I wondered if the blood shooting out of my nose was a bad sign.

These are the kind of antics that I willfully enrolled in while in constant pursuit of the ever-elusive Personal Record. Now, please keep in mind that I am no rookie to the game of athletics. I was rudely introduced to the pains of lactic acid and the state of being anaerobic at age 15 by 5000 meter Olympic alternate Greg Brock . He was my first track and cross county coach at Santa Cruz High School and he knew what he was doing. Welcome to the world of puke-inducing intervals! Lovely. As a mediocre 400-meter sprinter, he made me join the cross country team to improve my endurance. Thank god no more blasted intervals I thought. Then I horrifically discovered that the term "speedwork" on the XC team was just a fancy word for longer intervals! After high school I entered the fun-run circuit. Dozens of 5 and 10K's eventually gave way to more challenging half marathons and 100-mile bike rides. I couldn't leave good-enough alone, and the pain junkie that I am caused me to seek the granddaddy of all road races; The Marathon. I rushed my training program a bit in the fall of '99 and entered the Seattle Marathon in November. I finished in 3:45 and discovered an amazing revelation; I learned just how much I loved and missed 5, 8 & 10K running races! The point is this: I ran that 6:07-pace 8K without adopting any cruel or unusual circus stunts. Breakthrough number 2 came just 4 weeks later. For the first time in my life I broke the 40-minute barrier for a 10K road race after trying on-and-off for 20 years. I didn't sign up for boot camp and I didn't climb 3 Northwest volcanos for my training regimen. And I did it at 40 years of age! My secret weapon, you ask? Hold on. You are not going to believe it: CLEANSING. Ridding the body of toxins. Changing the old filters. Cleaning out the salty, old & rusted pipes.

The focus of the cleansing program is about removing toxins that have accumulated in our bodies for literally decades. My first question was, "What toxins?" After some research, all we need to do is look at the labels of any processed food product and the mystery becomes horrifically clear: MSG, aspartame, preservatives, artificial flavor, artificial color, hydrogenated vegetable oil, caffeine, mercury, chlorine, and arsenic. Next look at the deodorant we use; aluminum is deposited directly into two of our body's largest ports; under our arms. Don't kid yourself, just because we don't stuff it in our face it doesn't mean we're not eating it. We are! We are truly ingesting aluminum and placing it right into the bloodstream. Countless pesticides are sprayed onto our veggies in the billions of gallons annually. Pollution is absorbed right into the biggest organ we have; our skin. Insect repellent? From the skin into the bloodstream. Lip balm and lipstick? From the lips into the bloodstream. Chlorine? From the hot tub into the skin and then direct-deposited into the bloodstream. It's all around us and we are exposed and absorbing it every minute of every day.

Enough of the doom and gloom, already. What can we do about it? Simply engage in some basic house cleaning once in a while, and that's all. Change the oil every 3 months or 3000 miles. It's as simple as a little spring cleaning. My next question was, "What do toxins have to do with running performance?" Check this out: The chemicals that our bodies cannot process are sealed in layers of fat and mucus to protect our precious bloodstream. Our bodies literally manufacture fat to store the toxins like a nuclear toxic dump site. According to Ph.D. John Gray, in his latest book, *The Mars & Venus Diet & Exercise Solution*, he states, "One of the ways the liver deals with excess toxins is to increase

body fat and enfold these toxins and to protect the body from their influence. To protect the body from toxins, the liver triggers fat production in the gut to store the toxins. This toxic build up causes that bulge so many people get at the waistline as they get older. Practically no amount of exercise will make the liver gut go away.” Bingo.

Our bodies hold all the keys to our biological chemistry and we can't trick them, at least not for very long. Like an ingenious lab scientist, our bodies sense the presence and level of toxic waste in our systems and increase the manufacture of fat and permanently increase the amount of water retention in an attempt to dilute the percentage of toxicity. Prior to cleansing I was puffed-up and I was pudging out. No matter how many miles I ran during my training days, no matter how many miles I biked, no matter how many miles I hiked and climbed, the little spare tire would not go away. I cut back on calories and alcohol. It didn't matter. I increased my weekend workouts, also to no avail. My body was making a statement. It was trying to tell me the fat I was trying so desperately to lose, was actually doing me a favor. It was actually protecting me from the accumulated toxins I had willfully ingested over the past 3-plus decades. It was whispering in a very soft voice, “Dump the toxins, then I'll let go of the fat, but not a moment sooner.” The stubborn fat that most active people work so diligently to shed becomes “metabolically inactive.” Due to the high presence of chemicals stored there, our bodies refuse to use it as a fuel source. Our brain actually breaks off all communication with the chemical-storing fat.

I completed two 48 hour cleanses 5 days apart and I dropped 9 ½ pounds in only 9 days. Later I learned that our colon accumulates massive amounts of plaque build-up. One of the colon's primary functions is to rehydrate the body and absorb nutrients, but it can't when its porous fibers are sealed off like 8 layers of lacquer on a new pine-top picnic table. It works so hard to literally pull nourishing elements out of the food we eat. But the only diet it really gets is rotting and decaying remnants from meals consumed 4-6 days previous. It's shocking, but true. We can store up to 8 partially digested rotting meals in our colon. No wonder we feel so lousy. No wonder our PR's evade us. Go ahead, throw a sausage biscuit burger-muffin with ham and cheese on the sidewalk and let it sit there for a few days in the hot sun and see how appetizing it looks. The same rotting, bacteria-infested poisons are leaching into our “nutritional pipeline.” 4 weeks later, I cleansed again and lost an addition 5 ½ pounds. I didn't say fast, I said cleanse. The program I followed provides 6 twenty-calorie protein “snacks” that are eaten every 2 hours or so during the cleanse. This helps prevent your metabolism from shutting down. The cleanse involves drinking a natural concoction of ionic minerals, aloe vera, key digestive enzymes and special botanicals four times a day for 2 days. The special combination of ingredients safely breaks down the plaque in the colon while keeping the body nourished. As the plaque breaks free, the poisonous toxins leave the body. Drinking lots of water is critical during the cleansing to minimize the affects of toxins exiting the body and to help the flushing process. During the 5 days between cleanses more housekeeping is in order. A special mixture of whey protein for muscle retention and an enzyme transport & delivery system does the trick to righting the ship that had gone listing so badly over the past 30 years of dietary abuse. I hadn't seen my abs since the days that Brock pushed me to exhaustion at Santa Cruz High, but at age 40, they're back and they're back with a vengeance! Oh, the miracle of renewal, rejuvenation and revitalization! I'm more alert, think crisper, feel 15 years younger and run again like a high school kid.

Daniel is a running shoe product tester for a leading athletic equipment manufacturer. He vacations with his wife Shelley, an accomplished athlete and bodybuilder in Hood River, Oregon. They reside at the foothills of Mt Rainier.