

## **Treadmill champ inspires kids to be fit**

### **There's nothing like a Guinness World Record to get youngsters' attention**

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On a cold winter morning, it isn't unusual to see David Deubelbeis and his 24 Grade 4 students running laps around the yard of Rose Avenue Junior Public School in Toronto. They call it "the lap attack" and it encourages the children to keep track of improvements in their physical activity.

"I don't have any moaning and groaning with my kids," said Mr. Deubelbeis. "Once they are running, the children don't mind the cold. They just love being outside."

For Mr. Deubelbeis, who has been running marathons and beating records most of his adult life, it seems unnatural for anyone to be confined to a room for three hours at a time, especially children. So this 42-year-old teacher leads his students by example, encouraging continuous physical activity and lots of outdoor play.

"They see me run to school every day with my pack," he said. "They see a healthy individual who has a good relationship with his body, and that's paramount."

A strong opponent of childhood obesity, Mr. Deubelbeis is concerned about the lack of public space available for children. "I find it incredible that when I go to do my track workout, I have to jump over a three-metre fence to use the track," he said. "Sometimes, kids will run along the outside of the fence shouting, 'How did you get in there, mister?'"

Mr. Deubelbeis's students live in the Bloor and Sherbourne area in downtown Toronto, one of the most densely populated places in Canada, which doesn't help their physical activity. "Some of my kids are very closeted up at home," he noted. "They come from financially challenged families who often live 11 people to a two-bedroom apartment." His students need to be encouraged to lead active and healthy lifestyles. Having been a teacher for 10 years, Mr. Deubelbeis has discovered he can use his personal accomplishments to help motivate students.

"People tend to drop their jaw when they hear that I ran on a treadmill for 24 hours," he said, referring to a Guinness World Record that he set in January of 2003.

But he is convinced anyone can do what he did. "I think we tend to underestimate our capabilities."

He has noticed that children are enthralled with Guinness world records and so he tries to share his success with his students as much as possible.

"I would always win medals, and I would bring them to the class to motivate the kids," he said. "I found that when a child had a medal around his neck, he instantly became uplifted, somehow stronger and more empowered. This was a great motivating tool." He knows the importance of motivation. After he completed his anthropology degree from the University of Waterloo, he went to work in construction because he could see concrete results from his work. "I just love physical work," he said. "I guess I was brought up like that."

At a young age, he learned the meaning of hard work. "One of the best things that ever happened to me was growing up on a farm with a very strict father who worked me to death when I was eight," he added.

Mr. Deubelbeis believes the physical stresses put on his body at a young age gave him the strong frame he needed to succeed as a runner. It also taught him to concentrate on a given task and to work for hours on his own, both good qualities in running long distances.

His construction career came to an abrupt and untimely end when a fall from the fourth floor of a building left him with a punctured lung and broken ribs. While the accident put him in hospital and took him out of commission for about a year, he believes his injuries helped make him a stronger athlete.

"If you are healthy, then your body responds to trauma in the proper way," he said. "My best years of running were those that came directly after my recovery."

It is this attitude that keeps Mr. Deubelbeis running an hour a day, even when he is feeling under the weather. "Being sick is part of our health," he said between strides on the treadmill. A 25-minute run on a sick day is nothing for this ultra-runner.

Ultra-running usually occurs at any distance over that of the standard marathon, which is 42 kilometres, he explained. "But I think of ultra-running as about 100 kilometres, which is about 2.5 marathons."

In late January, even though he was not feeling 100 per cent, Mr. Deubelbeis became the new 100-kilometre treadmill world record holder. In an event at Running Free, a Markham running store that has sponsored him for the past three years, he completed a

100-km run in 7 hours, 40 minutes and 48 seconds, more than an hour faster than the existing Guinness World Record holder, and more than five minutes faster than the best previously verified and recorded (but not submitted to Guinness) time.

"It's mostly about deciding and committing," he said of his dedication to his sport. "As, I tell my students, 'Be a committer, not a quitter.' "

## **PROFILE**

**David Deubelbeis:** 42

**Currently:** elementary school teacher

**Previously:** construction worker

**Goal:** to encourage physical activity in children and take action against childhood obesity; he hopes his fitness success will motivate others to push their own limits

It's all about attitude . . . we can do so much more than we think.