

Treadmill champ inspires kids to be fit

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

By HAILEY EISEN, Globe & Mail

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On a cold winter morning, it isn't unusual to see David Deubelbeiss 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. Deubelbeiss. "Once they are running, the children don't mind the cold. They just love being outside."

For Mr. Deubelbeiss, 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. Deubelbeiss 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. Deubelbeiss' 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. Deubelbeiss 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. Deubelbeiss 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. Deubelbeiss 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. Deubelbeiss 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 Deubelbeiss: 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

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

High noon for marathon man

Treadmill champ pants after a new world record It's a passion that means never having to ask why.

CHRIS YOUNG
SPORTS COLUMNIST

Stop the world, he wants to get off.

At precisely noon Sunday, David Deubelbeiss will do just that, marking the occasion with a cold beer.

If it all goes according to plan for Deubelbeiss, it will be the end of 24 hours and upwards of 193 kilometres of running — without ever going anywhere.

Denis Leary once said that these exercise machines have turned us all into gerbils. And now along comes Deubelbeiss on his brand-new, finely tuned Precor treadmill, the magic carpet for his magnificent obsession, looking to become something a little more ambitious: a world-record gerbil. So goes the popular notion, anyway. He laughs softly and nods. He's heard it all before.

"I like the absurdist element to it," he says. Indeed, whenever the subject of this unique combination of race and endurance comes up, there is skepticism.

"The first — the only question anyone ever asks is, 'Why?'" says Monster Gym owner Barrymore Richardson.

Well, yes, there is that. But this would seem to be about more than just running in place. For Deubelbeiss, a 40-year-old ultra marathoner, it might as well be about life itself, where "you're going nowhere, and the hurdles you have to overcome are the ones you put up yourself."

"I see a challenge and I get motivated — and I've always tried to do things outside the box," says Deubelbeiss. "I believe in surrealism, and part of the surrealist philosophy is that there is no right or wrong meaning in life. It's not what you do, it's how you do it — that grace that's contained in it. You could be the world's fastest knitter. Everyone needs a goal in life, a purpose.

"I love movement. I hope my passion and not fitness is what people see. I don't know who said it, but it's just such a great piece of advice about how to go about things — 'To squander your life for a purpose.'"

Or, in this case, to rattle off five miles every hour, hour after hour, all the live-long day. On a treadmill. With nothing to look at but more of the same. Nothing to look forward to but a three-minute walk every half-hour. Nothing to savour except another swig of that carbohydrate drink, the one that looks like antifreeze and tastes like sugarless Kool-Aid.

But there's much more to this than meets the eye, or the feet.

Deubelbeiss, a teacher of phys-ed and English as a second language, is raising money for the recreation centre at University Settlement House, a United Way agency that helps new Canadians with job training and English classes and shelters the homeless. He hopes to distil the journey down to a half-hour film to take to schools as part of a fitness and lifestyle package aimed at students.

"I think it's time for a new participation revolution," he says. "A lot of people over 40 know about this, but young kids don't. They're growing up in front of the computer. One of my goals as a teacher is to inspire others. I was always inspired by people like Al Howie and Jackrabbit Johannsen."

During the summer of 1991, Howie ran across Canada in 72 days, averaging about 100 kilometres, or 2 1/2 marathons, a day. He remains one of the grand figures of Canadian ultra marathon running. Herman (Jackrabbit) Smith-Johannsen was Canada's father of cross-country skiing, designing trails and organizing races in Quebec that remain standards today.

Then there are these endurance events themselves, coming back in a large way. Triathlons, marathons, even ultras — none of these gruelling endeavours are quite so outré any more. Many of the world's races are attracting record numbers. Whether it's just something to cross off a life list or part of a more lasting lifestyle decision, Deubelbeiss figures this small exercise is part of a much larger wave. And to hold a world record — well, that's kind of different, too.

One of sport's oldest saws is that records are made to be broken, and if that's the case this treadmill mark has surely been assaulted into little pieces by now. In October, Gavin Smith of New Zealand ran 169.27 km. American Reg Richard bettered that in November. Then, a week later, Scotsman William Sichel called it a day after covering 180.98 km. American Scott Eppleman's latest mark of a little more than 187 km has yet to be verified.

Deubelbeiss's goal is 200 kilometres, which would indeed be another smash. He will be paced along by two relay teams on adjacent treadmills. Videotapes, logbooks, witnesses and treadmill calibration certificates will all play their part in the world-record verification process.

'I love movement. I hope my passion and not fitness is what people see.'

Little has been left to chance: a new belt for the treadmill and six pairs of shoes on hand; a high-noon start on Saturday; precisely 700 calories of E-Load an hour during those walking breaks, or about 30 litres in all; he'll come to a complete stop to urinate into a bedpan when he has to.

He'll also have posted inspirational aphorisms, along with the countdown time, on a board; humidity and temperature will be recorded and controlled; Led Zeppelin will provide aural fuel.

One thing Deubelbeiss insisted on was contacting those who've gone before him for any useful tips.

"The main thing (Eppleman) said was not to take any breaks," he said. "Stay on the treadmill. Just keep going."

That shouldn't be a problem. Last year, Deubelbeiss ran the fastest 50-kilometre split in Canada. He celebrated New Year's Day by winning the Orillia Snowflake 15K — barely a warm-up, that — in a course-record time.

He's run 14 marathons, and covered as much as 228 kilometres in an ultra race, but forget about typecasting.

Born on a farm in New Liskeard, and one year back in Canada after living nearly a decade in Europe, Deubelbeiss is a hard fellow to pigeonhole, whether you're talking about distances or the way he lives his life.

"I've always done well running," he said. "I love doing something under your own steam. Two or three times a year I'll take a trip, maybe not in one day, but I've run from here to North Bay, for example. It gets you outside our world, where everything runs according to the clock. I do it, and when I get there, I get there."

In this indoor world, though — the Monster Gym is a round-the-clock, 24-hour place for a round-the-clock, 24-hour effort — the adversary will not be the road, or hills, or rain and snow and wind.

It'll be something else entirely — distractions, either too many of them (the noise and hubbub of the gym, the visitors supporting him, the televisions, the record-keeping) or too few (what's it going to be like at 3 a.m. Sunday morning when your quadriceps are screaming like banshees and there are few around to notice?).

"The first thing I told him when he called me about this was: You've got to be psychologically right," says Richardson.

"But we immediately saw this working. It fits with what we do up here. We're not a social club."

And still the questions follow him around.

"For most people, the natural reaction is 'Omygod,'" Deubelbeiss said. "They think you're nuts."

"The teachers where I work are asking me how long the breaks will be. I don't take breaks. I run the whole 24 hours."

"There's one thing I do think about. One of the status symbols of ultra runners is how many toenails you've lost. Just from training for this, I've already lost two.
"So I hope I don't lose any more. They don't grow back too easily. Your feet start to look a mess."

And you thought all you could drop on the treadmill was a few inches around the middle, a few pounds on the scale.
Sometimes, there's a lot more to this running stuff than just the same old ground.

HE DID IT!

David Deubelbeiss is the new 100K treadmill World Record Holder!

On Saturday January 29th Ultra Runner David Deubelbeiss ran 100K on a treadmill provided by [The Treadmill Factory](#) in 7 hours, 19 minutes, and 10 seconds and set a new World Record in the process. David ran at a staggering pace considering the distance he covered. His pace would result in a 45 minute 10K or a 3:05 marathon, only he ran ten 10K's back to back, or 2.4 Marathons consecutively!

David has been breaking records of this type for many years. Just last year at Sick Kids Hospital, David ran on a treadmill for 24 hours straight, and covered a whopping 230.16 kilometers, in support of his ["Love of Kids" foundation](#) that raises awareness of the importance of physical fitness in today's young people.



Running Free, Adidas, and the Treadmill factory are all proud to have helped David achieve his goal, and wish him the best of luck at the 100K World Championships in Japan in July of 2005.



Toronto Star, Chris Young

Guinness treadmill record claimed in Toronto Teacher David Deubelbeiss

Toronto Star

The loneliness of the long-distance treadmiller. The boredom of the belt turning beneath him, the drone of the fans and the late-night infomercials on the TV above him. Nothing but carbs to drink. Sweat and aches and pains, even doubt.

David Deubelbeiss had to deal with all of that for nearly 24 hours of running in place, and still he found something quite extraordinary at the end: a finishing kick. Hey, it wasn't exactly the thrill of victory. He ended up in precisely the same place he started, the same place he always had been, matter of fact.

There was no multimillion dollar contract or shiny trophy as a reward.

But there was some deep satisfaction at what's being called a world treadmill record - it ain't over until the Guinness Book of Records folks sing, remember - and of course, the agony of the feet, the moment marked by cheers from his support crew and friends and by a pair of dogs that were blistered, barking and rated PG for pretty grim.

"I don't think I want to show my feet in public," said Deubelbeiss, finally sitting down on Sunday afternoon and wondering how in the world he was going to get up on those battered feet. "They're pretty swollen, aren't they?"

Gee, you think? Deubelbeiss's world record of 130.82 miles covered in 24 hours on the treadmill was only matched by the fact that he went to work as usual the next day, starting a new teaching job at Cummer Valley Middle School - even ran a couple laps of the school track.

Deubelbeiss, whose quest for a world record was profiled in these pages a week ago, didn't just break the record. He smashed it, passing the existing standard of 116.05 miles at 7:36 a.m. on Sunday - with more than four hours to spare. From there, though, he slowed to a walking pace and suffered for it, cramping up badly.

"With an hour and a half to go, he was hurting - REALLY hurting," noted Mike Turner, Deubelbeiss's Longboat Roadrunners teammate who served as chief record-keeper, brow-mopper and cheerleader. "He could barely lift his feet. He didn't think he could go another step, but he wanted to be running when the clock struck 12."