



10 Things We Learned Reading Meb's Marathon Memoir

And how they can help your running.

By RUNNER'S WORLD EDITORS MAR 23, 2019



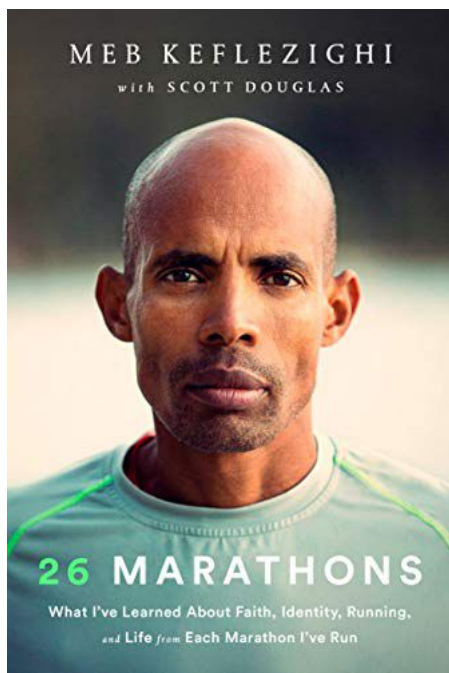
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Meb Keflezighi's new book, *26 Marathons*, tells the story of and lessons from each of the 26 marathons the four-time Olympian ran as a

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we knew his story pretty well. So we were pleasantly surprised to learn so many things while reading *26 Marathons*.



26 Marathons: What I've Learned About Faith, Identity, Running, and Life From Each Marathon I've Run

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He Ran

It's nice to know that even the best runners on their best days have moments of doubt. Meb had that why-am-I-doing-this crisis of spirit in every marathon he ran, even those he won. He overcame the desire to drop out by reminding himself of all the reasons he should finish the best he could that day.

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Meb's 5-Step Plan on Reaching Any Running Goal

Lesson: Be able to clearly articulate why you want to do a specific race. Call on those goals when the inevitable urge to let up or drop out appears.

Here are 10 of those surprises. After each, we've described how to apply them to your running, through both Meb's and our own ideas.

Meb Once Ran a PR With a Breathe Right Strip in His Shoe

It's complicated—Meb explains what happened in his book—but here's the gist: In the second mile of the 2011 New York City Marathon, Meb realized the sensation he felt under his left foot was the Breathe Right strip he'd meant to put on his nose. He considered stopping to remove the strip, but figured he would never catch the lead pack. Meb could feel the hard plastic edges of the strip cutting into his skin every time his left foot hit the ground. Blood was visible on his shoe. Nonetheless, on a day when the course record was shattered, Meb finished sixth in a then-personal best of 2:09:13.

Lesson: Don't let race-day surprises defeat you. (Also, don't store Breathe Right strips in your shoes.)

Meb Had an Actual Dream About Winning New York City

Most of us have had running dreams, and most of them are bad. Two months before New York in 2009, Meb woke one morning with clear recall of a dream that he'd won that year's marathon. The dream became reality several weeks later when he became the first U.S. man to win the race in 27 years.

Lesson: Practice visualization of desired outcomes. Doing so can be so effective that your subconscious becomes a believer.

Meb Thought About Dropping Out During Every Marathon



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Meb Said His First Marathon Would Be His Last

Meb was already an Olympian and American record-holder on the track when he ran his debut marathon in New York in 2002. And he was well-prepared, with years of weekly long runs behind him. But he hit the Wall hard his last 10K, slowing by a minute per mile. Right after the finish he told his parents and coach that the marathon wasn't his race. Spoiler alert: That feeling passed.

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Lesson: Don't make rash decisions about any part of your running in the heat of the moment. Wait a few days for the emotions to pass, and then evaluate where you want to go next.

Meb Usually Had Trouble Walking for Several Days After Marathons

At a 15K in the spring of 2007, Meb's racing shoe aggravated the area under the ball of his left foot. He lost several layers of skin. What he calls "the wound" hurt him during and after most of the remaining marathons of his career. It was especially bad after he won Boston. For the next several days he would excuse himself from being feted to remove his shoe and sock and treat the wound. Meb always waited until the foot allowed normal movement until resuming running, even if he had another race coming up.

Lesson: You might not suffer something so extreme, but you're likely to be damaged goods after marathons and other long races. Give your body the chance to heal instead of rushing back into training.

Meb Almost Retired in 2008

Instead of battling for the win, Meb finished a hobbled eighth at the 2008 Olympic Marathon Trials. By that evening he had to crawl to get around his hotel room. He eventually learned he'd run the Trials with a pelvic stress fracture. Broken physically and mentally by the injury, he contemplated quitting. But he decided he hadn't reached his potential. He rebuilt himself with an hours-a-day physical therapy program and emerged stronger than ever, capped by his 2009 New York City win.

Lesson: Even in your darkest moments, remember what you love about running, and have faith you'll climb out of the hole.

Meb Seldom Had Good Marathon Buildups

Meb often hit significant setbacks during marathon training. There was the ruptured quad, the infected foot, the knee tendinitis, even a nagging hamstring in the last few weeks before he won Boston. But only once, before New York City in 2008, did Meb pull out before race day because of feeling unprepared. Many times, he surprised even himself with a strong showing despite subpar training.

Lesson: Training is almost never going to go perfectly. Unless you're so beat up that finishing a race would worsen your condition, commit to doing the best you can on any given race day.

Meb Jumped for Joy When He Heard Shalane Flanagan Won New York City

In his final competitive marathon, New York City in 2017, Meb stayed with the lead pack through 20 miles, but then struggled mightily. He was willing himself through the final miles when he heard from the crowd that Shalane Flanagan had become the first U.S. woman to win the race in 40 years. He leaped in celebration and felt (temporarily) revived.

Lesson: Everyone needs inspiration. It's all around you if you look hard enough.



Meb Strategically Swallowed Vomit During His Boston Win

Meb's early huge lead in the 2014 Boston Marathon shrank in the final miles to 6 seconds. He was hurting like never before. But he didn't want to reveal weakness to the competitor who had almost caught him. When, in the final mile, Meb's upset stomach made him vomit, he tilted his head back and swallowed the vomit rather than give his chaser a clue about how much duress he was in. The rest, as they say, is history.

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Lesson: Okay, there's no real lesson here. We just thought that was pretty cool.

Meb Ran 6 miles Soon After His "Retirement" Marathon

The morning after [his final competitive marathon](#), Meb woke feeling fresher than after most of his previous 25 marathons. He could walk normally, and found that he wasn't even sore if he did squats. On the Wednesday after that Sunday marathon, he headed out to Central Park for a jog and wound up running 6 miles, for no other reason than that he simply loves running. Meb has continued to run almost every day since "retiring" a year and a half ago.

Lesson: Marathoning and other racing is a great part of being a runner. But it's not everything. The most important race to run is that of being a runner for life.

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