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Shredded, sore, successful first-time runner finishes strong

After 9 hours, 9 minutes and 58 seconds, Lisa Newman triumphantly crosses the finish line of her first marathon

BY KRISTA JAHNKEFREE PRESS SPORTS WRITER

By the time Lisa Newman reached Fort and Second Streets, the medals were gone. The crowds of onlookers had gone, too. Workers were almost done tearing down the finish line.

It was all coming down, but Newman wasn't.

She did it.

Six months after signing up for her first marathon, and a year after losing more than 100 pounds, the Roseville woman whose training story has been chronicled in the Free Press since June finished. It took her 9 hours, 9 minutes and 58 seconds. But she finished.

"There were a couple of moments where I was like, 'I don't want to go any further,' " said Newman, 36. "I just wanted to fall into a bed. But I was like, you can do this. You've got to finish what you started."

Out of 4,500 runners in the Detroit Free Press/Flagstar Marathon, she finished dead last.

Without the kind gesture of a stranger, she wouldn't have had a medal; they'd run out hours earlier. But Beth Gilday of Woodhaven, who finished the marathon in less than 4 hours, donated hers to Newman.

"She's been out there forever," Gilday said. "I have lots of medals. She deserves it."

Newman's friends and family waited for hours to see her finish. They found yellow police tape for her to run through, and they held the arch of yellow, red and blue balloons to celebrate her finish. With tears welling in her eyes, Newman kissed the medal, hugged her family and raised both hands in the air.

Then she sobbed. It was a long-coming moment.

In late 2007, Newman weighed more than 300 pounds. A year ago, she'd never entered a race. For anyone with a résumé like that to attempt to finish a marathon was inspiring, said her sister, Stephanie Newman.

"She doesn't have to do this," Stephanie Newman said around Mile 17. "What she's done is already amazing. But my sister is determined."

For much of the race, Newman walked or jogged slowly. She made one mistake in her training: She never included hills. That left her feeling "shredded" when she encountered the Ambassador Bridge only 3 miles in.

She walked for miles after that, just making the cutoff at the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel. "I admit I had some doubt creep in while in Canada," Newman said.

At 10:04 a.m., she hit Mile 9. According to a heart rate monitor on her arm, she'd already burned 1,100 calories. Her sister and her mother, Cheri Newman, walked with her for miles, trying to lift her spirits.

But before the halfway point, Newman was running again. She jogged with Nicole Brewer Gurganious, Damien Gurganious and Carla Triplett -- alumni of NBC's "The Biggest Loser" -- who joked and handed out advice. "Don't stop running for more than 30 seconds," said Damien Gurganious.

"She thinks we helped her today," Harper said. "Really, she helped all of us."

Before the race, after a fitful night of sleep and a few bites of oatmeal for breakfast, she'd gathered with the team from Marathon Mission, a faith-based organization that supports local and national charities. People prayed with her, hugged her. Her mother and a few friends helped her pin on her race number and apply last-minute BodyGlide, an anti-chafing cream.

When it was time to line up, Newman leaned into her mom and told her not to worry. Her mom looked teary, but nodded.

Perhaps with good reason; three male runners died Sunday. Cheri Newman let the tears fall when her daughter finally finished.

"I just thank God," Cheri Newman said. "After those people told me three people died, I just started praying. And I thought, 'Oh my gosh ... it's been a long time.' I was so relieved to see her, and she looked a lot better than I thought she'd look."

Lisa Newman had hoped to finish in 5 1/2 to 6 hours. That mattered little when she reached the end of the course at 4:45 p.m.

"I got a little emotional as I crossed the finish line," Newman said. "It was one of the best feelings I've ever had."



Lisa Newman gets encouragement from her sister, Stephanie, as they emerge from the tunnel.
(ERIC SEALS/Detroit Free Press)