

Last Person Standing Challenge by Jonathan Forest

This challenge was organised by the East of Ireland Marathon Group. They have hosted one of these challenges every 4 months or so since the start of lockdown as there has been no races.

The idea of this challenge is to get out running consistently and follow some sort of structured plan, which gives the volume you need to run each day of the week. At the beginning of the challenge you can have 2 days off, later reducing to one day, then zero days. Also, as the challenge progresses the daily and weekly mileage increases.

There is a Mini and a Maxi challenge, the mini generally has less volume but still reaches a point where certain days are further than a marathon, perhaps broken into 2-3 runs. There is a new challenge starting shortly and it is great to join and be held accountable, even if it is only for 6 weeks.

This challenge was my second attempt. The first time around I lasted about 10 weeks, finishing up on a 64km day, however at this point I was becoming more and more injured and had to quit, finishing in third place. This time around I was determined to go further, and coming into summer certainly helped to make some runs more enjoyable.

As the weeks ticked off, more and more of the competitors dropped out until there was only two left, myself and Mark, however the challenged kept going for another few weeks. The mileage started around 50km a week, hitting 100km after 6 weeks, this seemed like a comfortable distance to maintain. At this point, a half marathon was a shorter day! I often split those days into doubles, managing an easier 10km in the morning and finishing of the rest of the distance in the evening, where I found it easier to go at a faster pace. I certainly noticed my endurance and stamina increasing over this time and only had a few niggles here and there, but nothing that lasted too long.

The Grand Final Week started after we had 2250km in the legs over the previous 11 weeks. The final was a progressive week, each day the distance doubling on the previous day e.g. Monday 2km, Tuesday 4km....., Friday 32km, Saturday 64km and Sunday 128km. Each run was to be completed in a single effort.

The furthest I had ran before this was about 75km in a single day, so this was a big stretch, with the winner being decided on who could run the final day the fastest, with a 15 hour cut off.

The final few days, the strategy had to be balanced between running easy and not being on the go all day, Mark the other finalist seemed happy to go slow and be out for hours and take a few breaks, I assumed that this was about his pace limit.

The Saturday 64km was a dress rehearsal for the grand final day and it was an enjoyable day. I was fairly happy to break a 5 hour 50km and did not really kill myself in the progress, although I slowed a little after this.

Sunday morning was an 8am start where I started in Portlaoise running to Tullamore through Mountmellick and Clonaslee before running back to Portlaoise through Ballinagar, Kille and Rosenallis.

From the start of the day I planned to have a walk break every 26 minutes, talking time to eat and drink and trying to save the legs for later on. I planned on taking in 70-80g of carbs every hour, with sugary drinks and some real food.

The weather was not great in the afternoon, raining for several hours. The water wrecked my phone and therefore I had no more music. I was feeling a little down spirited by this time, but I knew that all I had to do was make it to Portlaoise, hoping that some of the Trilogy crew might meet me and keep me company.

I first met up with Darach Kennedy, and immediately found the going to be easier as we were able to chat and it took my mind off the challenge. Before long, John Lambe joined the crew, then Niall, Madeleine, Sinead, Anne Marie and Gary Condell, all came along to cheer me around, cycling, running and cheering from their cars.

The last 10-15 km still became a grind. My stomach was not the best from too much sweet food, but my energy was being zapped from not eating. But I just broke things down to small chunks and got through those, until finally I had clocked past the 128km mark on my watch, the challenge had finished!

A lovely bottle of Champagne was offered to me to celebrate the achievement, and boy did that taste good. A huge thanks to all who supported me on the day both in person and all the comments on Facebook.

I guess I like to find challenges that push me further than I thought was possible. I got up off the couch about 12 years ago and went straight into a marathon. Then I started looking at Triathlons, with a long term plan to do an Iron Distance event, struggling through to half distance and beyond.

I then saw youtube films for Norseman and Celtman. They became bucketlist events, they are more extreme.

I entered Celtman twice, the first time getting severe hypothermia, spending over an hour in T1 with the medics. The cold gave me amnesia and I can't even remember leaving the swim or most of the next hour, but still got on the bike for 202km and ran a half marathon over the Scottish Mountains before missing the cut off. I went back again, more prepared for the cold water and managed to finish the event.

Ultramarathons also seem like a great way to push yourself, if you can manage a marathon at the end of a 180km bike then you can run an Ultra.

Another Challenge that caught my imagination was an Everesting challenge, whereby you climb a single hill up and down continuously until you have achieved 8,848m of elevation. I did this on Zwift, taking just under 14 hours indoors on a trainer and hopefully I will get one done outside soon.

If other people can do these things then so can you! Pick a big scary challenge and commit to it, if that is your first sea swim, half marathon or something bigger.

My main tip on training is consistency, it is better to do less almost every day than lots for a few days. The good habits build and the rewards will come.