

A Luddite's Guide to the Best of the Running Web

Facts, Figures, Advice, and Discussions About Running Are Just a Keystroke Away.

BY DUNCAN LARKIN

"If the network idea should prove to do for education what a few have envisioned in hope . . . [then] surely the boon to humankind would be beyond measure."—excerpt from J.C.R. Licklider and Robert W. Taylor's seminal article, "The Computer as a Communication Device" in the April 1968 issue of *Science and Technology*.

I'm not sure that I would consider a five-minute marathon PR or the determining of a local race's start time and location to be one of humankind's boons that Messrs. Licklider and Taylor referred to when they first envisioned the World Wide Web. I suppose it depends on whom you ask.

Surprisingly, Web surfing and running can go together. Running-related information efficiently pruned and selectively applied from the Web *can* help you run smarter—perhaps faster, too.

This article is a good place to start. It's a review of what I consider the top 10 running Web sites. It's a guide for those of you who perhaps predate the Commodore 64 or have chosen, anachronistically, perhaps wisely, to leave that wide Web to the rest of the world. It will help those of you who may not have the time or the patience to sit in front of a Google screen and crawl—slowly and painfully—through a googolplex of bytes in search of the perfect marathon plan; it may point you, finally, to the right local race. It could even link you up with some cyber community comprised of fellow like-minded sadists who love to bask in postrun binary commiseration.

As a matter of convenience and to avoid referring readers to raw, unfiltered opinion, I have purposely left out personal Web logs (blogs) from my list and decided to stick with a review of mostly content-related Web sites.

I used the following three selection criteria in choosing the Web sites in order to narrow the list down to the top 10: educational content, entertainment value, and overall usefulness. I also included, in a few of the reviews, some comments from the owners about their Web sites, as well as their general opinions about the running Web. One final word before I start my cyber tour: I've decided not to rank the sites from 1 to 10 and chose instead to just list them in alphabetical order. They are all equally good.

CHASINGKIMBIA.COM

Web site address: www.chasingkimbia.com 

Summary: the ups and downs of a group of Kenyan marathoners living, racing, and training together.

The Web site can be likened to a running reality TV show. It is a collection of video and written essays that are broadcast on the Web via a new online genre that can be called a “blogumentary.” For over a year, the Web site’s founder, Matt Taylor, has taken a camera and laptop along with him, shadowing the sponsored members of the KIMbia Athletics group as they train and race everywhere from Iten, Kenya, to Boulder, Colorado.

What you get by visiting it: a renewed passion for our shared sport.

If you have a bad workout, if you are tired and can’t find the energy to reach into your gym bag to get out your shoes for that dreaded 20-miler, then this is the Web site to click on. These guys train hard—really hard. Their livelihoods are on the line, after all. They have mouths to feed a continent away. (You realize this gut-wrenching reality in the first video you watch.) They will inspire you and make you realize that your workout really wasn’t as hard as you thought it was; they will get you out there on those cold streets late at night or motivate you to do that last mile repeat when your body tells you *no mas*. The site allows you to leave comments or ask Matt Taylor and the KIMbia athletes questions. This unique, participative nature of the Web site gives you a sense of being right there with the runners. It is a one-of-a-kind site and a must watch for marathoners.

In their own words: comments from the Web site’s owner, Matt Taylor:


Regarding chasingKIMBIA’s biggest challenges: “Exposure at both ends of the spectrum. We would love to see the site get more exposure among fans of the sport, but we also struggle with how much we should expose the athletes to the cameras. They train at such an intense level that when they’re not running, they really just want to be left alone.”

On the decision to go from covering collegiate distance running to covering Kenyan marathoners [Matt’s first foray in running cyber journalism was reporting

on the collegiate cross-country running scene via a Web site called *chasingtradition.com*.]: “*Chasingtradition.com* was an experiment. I saw an opportunity to try something different and was sick of hearing myself complain about the coverage given to the sport. I did some things well and I made some mistakes, but when it ended, I knew I had hit on something. People were really interested in the daily lives of the athletes. Around the same time, I got to know Tom Ratcliffe, who heads KIMbia Athletics. We had some conversations about the sport, and it didn’t take long to realize that our ideas were aligned. The opportunity was for us to try something that would introduce the Kenyan athletes to the public. To be honest, we were surprised at how overwhelming and supportive the response was.”

Concerning what the Web site’s best feature is: “The videos combined with the Daily Run are what make the site unique. The videos draw in many people, but the stories keep them coming back. I think we’ve struck on something that the running community lacks: coverage of the lifestyle. You can read only so many statistics and discuss only so many personal records. For the sport to advance, for people to become engaged, they need to know about the athletes on a personal level. People don’t read *ESPN the Magazine* for the box scores; they can find that in the local newspaper. They read it to get a glimpse into the lifestyle of professional athletics. I learned early on with *chasingKIMBIA.com* that people were sincerely interested in the lives of the athletes. They didn’t care how fast the athletes ran; they wanted to know about the culture surrounding it all.”

COOLRUNNING.COM


Web site address: www.coolrunning.com 

Summary: a “one-stop shopping” Web site that can be accessed to find races, results, running calculators, training advice, and a happy bulletin board.

What you get by visiting it: a browser bookmark for fast and easy running calculations.

Coolrunning.com provides four handy calculators: pace, caloric, distance conversion (metric), and race planning. Considering that the only thing I remember about long division is how to draw the line, and considering also that the International System of Units is still as foreign to me as determining my European shoe size, I’ve found *coolrunning.com*’s online calculators to be quite handy references to consult when running math is required. Besides the calculators, the site also offers a popular bulletin board for users to share information and advice.

ELITERUNNING.COM

Web site address: www.eliterunning.com 

Summary: News, photographs, and interview Web site.

What you get by visiting it: running pictures—lots of them.


Alison Wade, the Web site's founder and owner, is a freelance photographer who frequents the majority of large road races and track and field events across the nation. After each of these events, she posts her pictures to the site. The quality of these photographs is phenomenal. Another perk: the news links. Updated daily, they offer a running news junkie a good place to get informed first thing in the morning. *Eliterunning.com* is our sport's daily newspaper: after a run, it goes well with a bagel and a cup of coffee.

In their own words: comments from the site's owner, Alison Wade:

About whether or not surfing the running Web can make you a better runner: "I think surfing Web sites can make you a better runner if you get inspiration and new training. However, I also think that some people waste a lot of time surfing the Internet when they could be out there actually doing something physical to make themselves better. It all depends on how you use the Internet."

About the challenges of her Web site and its future: "The biggest challenges are time and funding. Coaching is my full-time pursuit right now, and the amount of time I have to devote to the site is going to continue to decrease."

FLOCASTS.ORG

Web site address: www.flocasts.org 

Summary: a Generation Text-meets-Generation X Web site that posts nearly real-time race footage, photos, and, most important, on-camera interviews with various elite runners and their coaches. Besides running, *flocasts.org* also offers similar coverage of the wrestling and swimming worlds.

What you get by visiting it: our sport in motion.


Before Flocasts, we were left clinging to sparse coverage of running on peripheral television networks such as the Outdoor Life Channel (now called Versus) or Fox Sports 93 at 3 A.M. every third Sunday night. We were left fumbling with that dreaded task (the Luddite's nightmare): VCR or TiVo programming. We were left waiting impatiently for the grainy airing of "The Star-Spangled Banner" to conclude. Flocasts put a stop to that sad, neglected-running nonsense by giving us jerky camera footage of major races piped into our home via broadband 24/7—for free. The site is routinely updated (at least daily). Amazingly, the site's owners, brothers Mark and Martin Floreani, pull off the Herculean feat of providing nationwide coverage of road races and track meets.

In their own words: comments from the site's owner, Mark Floreani:

Regarding what motivated him (Mark) to start the Web site: “Arthur Lydiard came to the University of Texas. I had an opportunity to hang out with him and talk to him about life in general. He was very inspirational and told me that champions were everywhere. He coached three gold medalists within a mile radius of his house. He believed that anyone with the proper training could be a world champion. Two days later, he died. I realized how much he inspired me and how many people could have used that to inspire them and take their running and life to a whole other level. Martin, my brother, had a similar experience talking with a wrestling legend. [The site also covers collegiate wrestling in the same manner.] He came to me one night at 3 A.M. after driving in from Chicago with the idea for Flocasts, and we stayed up all night and worked out the logistics.”

About the site’s biggest challenge: “The struggle to convince our parents that this was the right thing to do.”

LETSRUN.COM

Web site address: www.letsrun.com 

Summary: This no-nonsense Web site is the brainchild of two former collegiate track standouts: Weldon and Robert Johnson. (Like Flocasts, the founders of *letsrun.com* happen to be brothers as well.)

letsrun.com can be considered the Drudge Report of the running world. Why? Like that famous online source for unfiltered news, it’s updated routinely throughout the day and contains simple links to various online newspapers and reports. *letsrun.com* gives you all the breaking news and recent developments—from live race results to pre- and postrace analysis. You should probably start your Web surfing with *letsrun.com*.

What you get by visiting it: the bulletin board, primarily.

But beware—the fact that Weldon allows anonymous posts on it gives it a Wild West feeling. Potential posters, consider yourself forewarned. The dialogue out there can get coarse; the tone leans toward the juvenile. The argument of choice used in most bulletin board debates: ad hominem. Still, it’s worth it. The board is a wonderful resource of free information and dialogue provided by some of the best runners and coaches in the world. For example, one of the first links when you click on the bulletin board is a 113-page, highly informative discussion with Renato Canova, the famed Olympic distance-running coach, about how to improve your lactate threshold. (Coach Canova is a frequent lurker on *letsrun.com*; the term “lurker” in this case refers to famous runners and coaches who monitor the board and occasionally post their thoughts on it.) The bulletin board also provides a categorized list of relevant discussion threads with everything from the training logs of elite runners to injury diagnosis, treatment, and prevention.

In their own words: comments from the site's owner, Weldon Johnson:

Regarding whether surfing Web sites and gleaning information from them can make you a better runner: "Yes, I think the Internet is one of the main reasons behind the resurgence of American distance running. Coaches and athletes now see what people nationwide are doing."

About whether the future of the running Web lies in less text and more multimedia format: "In the last year, video has become virtually free to do if you use another host like blip.tv or *youtube.com*. So, yes, there will be more video and multimedia on the Internet, but there is always a place for text news on the Web. A lot of people primarily use the Internet to find information. And information is most easily conveyed via text, so that will never go away."

Concerning whether the Wild West nature of the bulletin board discourages some people from posting there: "It may intimidate some people, but by and large we are trying to encourage people to come forward and share information and express their opinions . . . a lot of industry insiders enjoy sharing their opinions, but for various reasons do not want their identities known."

MARATHONGUIDE.COM

Web site address: www.marathonguide.com



Summary: a virtual encyclopedia of all things marathoning.

What you get by visiting it: marathon schedules, results, course and race reviews, and archived history.

Want to check out your marathoning times going back to 2000? Want to try out a new marathon but don't know what you may be in for? Want to see how fast a fellow competitor has run a marathon before? *Marathonguide.com* is the site for all this—and more.

NEW YORK ROAD RUNNERS PROFESSIONAL RACING INTERVIEWS

Web site address: www.nyrr.org/races/pro/interview/index.asp




Summary: a New York Road Runners-sponsored Web site that provides candid interviews with some of the world's most famous runners.

What you get by visiting it: training advice gleaned by reading the featured runner interviews.

The site provides frequent interviews with world-class runners, usually in the lead-up to major races. I like to read them with the expressly selfish purpose of mining for pearls of training and racing advice. The site also provides fantastic

race photography, though it is not as updated as *eliterunning.com*'s race photo section.

RUNNING IN THE USA


Web site address: www.runningintheusa.com 

Summary: the largest online directory of races, results, and clubs.

What you get by visiting it: a simple map of the United States that helps you quickly find future races and past results.

I use this Web site primarily to find races when I'm traveling. I've found the schedules to be quite accurate and very detailed. (Even the least significant 5Ks make their way onto the Web site's list.) When I last checked the site, nearly 9,000 nationwide races were listed. This is a great site to use if you aren't familiar with where you are going and don't have the ability to consult local runners for advice.

RUNNING TIMES


Web site address: www.runningtimes.com 

Summary: an online version of the number two running magazine in the world.

What you get by visiting it: free articles.

The publication puts an incredible amount of its printed content on its Web site—free of charge. My two favorite online articles are Kevin Beck's "Run Your Best Marathon. Really." and an in-depth profile by the magazine's editor, Jonathan Beverly, on distance coach Brad Hudson titled "Everything Matters." The former article is a no-nonsense approach to race-pace marathon training, and the latter is a unique insight into the mind of one of the best distance-running coaches in the nation.

THE ULTRA LISTSERV

Web site address: you can subscribe to the listserv by visiting <http://listserv.dartmouth.edu/scripts/wa.exe?A0=ULTRA> 

Summary: it is somehow apropos that the ultra community keeps informed using a listserv. Ultra runners are purists: they don't care about flashy graphics, fancy JAVA scripts, cute pictures—or even a Web site for that matter!

What's a listserv? According to the founders of the ULTRA listserv, Dave Combs and Joe Jurczyk, a listserv is actually the mailing-list software that hosts the ULTRA

list. When someone posts to the e-mail address, the listserv software gets the post and redistributes it to all the ULTRA-list subscribers' e-mail addresses.

What you get by visiting it: the pulse of the ultrarunning community—tips, commiseration, and race reviews.

In their own words: comments from the site's co-owner, Dave Combs:

About how the ULTRA listserv got started: “The ULTRA list is an offshoot of the Dead Runners Society (DRS) list. The DRS was started in 1991 by Chris Conn, a runner in Austin, Texas, to provide a place for people who just loved to run to talk about what they enjoyed about it and generally just be part of a community of runners. The DRS name was a play on the movie *Dead Poets Society*, which was popular at the time, and was organized for a similar reason. DRS itself was an offshoot of the rec.running group on USENET. The original ULTRA list, started in 1994 by Joe Jurczyk and Joel Zucker, was created because of the high volume of ultra-related traffic in the DRS and rec.running communities. The list was more technically oriented originally, and as a result, Dave Combs created a separate list for more community-oriented ultra discussion, similar to DRS. Joel Zucker passed away suddenly in 1998, so on 1/1/1999, Joe and Dave combined ULTRA with the other list and changed the ULTRA charter to the ‘community of ultrarunners’ form we have now. We’ve shared co-owner duties since then.”

Regarding the benefit of subscribing to the ULTRA list: “It’s a place that runners can ask questions, get training and racing tips, get to know (at least through e-mail) other ultrarunners in their area, find out about races, see race results quickly, and generally get comfortable with the idea of running distances longer than a marathon. It’s [also] a place where you’re not considered ‘weird’ to do this stuff!”

About how many people subscribe to the ULTRA list: “We’re just a bit shy of 2,100. Most of the members are from the United States, but we have quite a few in England, parts of Europe, Australia, Asia, and various other areas.”

