



PERSONAL BEST

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"I'd never been in so much pain at the end of a race, but seeing that clock made it all worth it."

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THIS MONTH ▷ *Crush a 5K*



AGONY— AND ECSTASY

How (and why) an RW editor targeted an ambitious 5K time goal

BY HEATHER MAYER IRVINE



When I got back into running after a break in college, I took on half marathons, then fulls, running a PR of 3:31 in the 2014 Chicago Marathon. I trained with the North Brooklyn Runners, and most of my teammates were marathoners. But a coach who ran the 800 in college always said a fast 5K was more impressive than a marathon finish. This stuck in my head, and two weeks after completing the 2016 Boston Marathon, I tested my speed in a 5K, where I ran 20:40—a PR by two seconds. *With the right preparation*, I thought to myself, *I could probably break 20 minutes!*

As a new employee at *Runner's World*, I targeted the 5K at our Half & Festival in October. Using RW's "Break 20" plan as a template, I trained for 10 weeks, logging the same amount of mileage (35 to 40 per week) as I did while marathon training, but spread over

five days instead of four. I did twice-weekly speedwork (with repeats at 19:50 5K pace or faster), a long run of up to 12 miles, three easy recovery runs, and one cross-training day. I fell in love with the short, hard workouts and did not miss the monotonous marathon-training miles.

As race day approached, friends and family asked why I was nervous: "It's only three miles!" But I knew how much pain would be packed into this short race. To calm myself, I asked some of the faster ladies on my team for 5K racing tips. One said to hit

goal pace on the first mile and use it as a confidence boost for the last two. Then, run your heart out and hang on. There's no time to make up for a sloppy mile.

On race day, I warmed up with a mile of jogging, dynamic leg swings, and a handful of short strides. When the gun went off, I bolted. I knew I was moving faster than my goal of 6:26 per mile, but I figured the hills just before mile two and in mile three would slow me down. I ran the first mile in 6:17, the second in 6:18. The final mile was one of the most painful things I've ever experi-

enced. My legs and lungs burned as I made my way up a long, slow climb. With 800 meters to go, I searched myself for any last push, and I crossed the line in 19:46.

That's the PR I'm most proud of: It took more guts to fight the pain without letting up than it took to race any of my seven marathons. I may have another 26.2 in me, but the 5K has my heart—and my newly powerful legs and lungs.

The author trains near her former home in Brooklyn (above) and powers through her goal race (top left). Turn the page to learn how you, too, can clock a fast-for-you 5K.

