

Running and the philosophy behind it



For enjoyment, for thrill, for competition, for exercise or out of fear, people run. The human body is built perfectly for running, but then people start wearing running shoes, which impedes peoples' natural form and alters peoples' natural foot shape ("The Evolution"). As Christopher McDougall, an avid runner and author of *Born to Run*, states, "From the moment you start going barefoot you will change the way you run" (McDougall 157). The ultra-high tech, modern day running shoe is detrimental to an athlete's feet because the shoes weaken the person's feet. Barefoot running is the "new", innovative way to obtain the maximum benefits of running. Research has shown barefoot running is more beneficial than running with the modern day supportive running shoe that the general public has become accustomed to. All cross country and track coaches should implement barefoot running in their programs to improve efficiency, to increase the speed of runners, and to reduce the chance of injury.

For thousands of years, running was done barefoot or in flat sandals; in fact, it was not until 1970 that the modern running shoe was invented (Doad). Over years and years, running has actually shaped the human body into what it is today ("The Evolution"). These changes in the human body have created unique features that enhance everyone's running ability. One of the unique features that humans have developed over the years from running is extremely strong arches when compared to apes and monkeys. These strong arches allow humans to have an extra spring in their step when they run. Additionally, human toes have changed from thousands of years of running. As University of Utah biologist, Dennis Bramble stated, "The fact that the big toe is straight, rather than curved to the side, suggests that our feet have

evolved from running” (“ The Evolution”). More evidence that the human foot has evolved is in the size of peoples’ toes. Over the years, human toes have become shortened compared to monkey or gorilla toes. This has caused humans to lose the ability to pick things up with their toes, but humans have gained the ability to run efficiently (“ The Evolution”). Not only has the foot evolved from running, but also other parts of the body have changed to accommodate the need for humans to run. The length of the body has increased, and the waist and the pelvis have become narrower. These anatomical changes that have occurred to the human body throughout evolution have equipped humans for efficient running without the need for supportive running shoes (“ The Evolution”).

The evolution of the human foot, through barefoot running, has led to unparalleled efficiency. By running without supportive shoes, the human foot is able to gain strength and agility. Traditional running shoes “ protect” the foot, consequently not allowing the foot to get stronger. Also, the way that the foot strikes is different when running barefoot versus running with supportive shoes. When running barefoot, the foot strikes the ground in the mid-foot region; this alleviates over-striding, so that runners do not have to brake, which slows them down (Wohlgamuht). This type of stride, mid-foot-striking, generates greater energy return in each stride causing a more fluid motion and therefore increasing efficiency. Furthermore, this fluid style of running allows the barefoot runner to maneuver from side to side more efficiently as well. Runners who wear supportive running shoes tend to have a heel-strike. Runners who heel-strike inflict more stress on their knees, back and shins not only reducing efficiency, but also putting the runners at

greater risk of injury. Mid-foot runners have another advantage; they do not use as much of their quads because they do not have to pull their body through each stride like a heel-striker does (Wohlgamht). The Tarahumara, an Indian tribe in Mexico's Sierra Madre Mountains who are devout runners, run so efficiently due to their practice of barefoot running that they can run three-hundred miles at a time (which is twelve marathons back to back) in hot sun of the desert (McDougall 15). It has been scientifically tested and proven in studies by Harvard and the University of Utah that barefoot running increases a runner's efficiency (Boddicker). Since barefoot running enhances a runner's efficiency, it should be applied to college and high school running programs everywhere.

Not only will running barefoot improve a runner's efficiency, but it will increase a runner's speed. The best long-distance runners in the world, the Tarahumara Indian Tribe, run barefoot (McDougall 4). As Christopher McDougall, a passionate runner and expert on barefoot running, once stated, "In long distance races nothing can beat a Tarahumara – not a cheetah, not a racehorse, not an Olympic marathoner" (McDougall 4). McDougall goes on to state that the Tarahumara have extraordinary endurance. Since barefoot runners' feet hit the ground with a mid-foot strike, their feet are able to sense the ground quicker than shod (running with shoes) runners, therefore allowing barefoot runners' muscles to react quicker and tense themselves to affectively cushion the runner, which in turn increases the speed of a runner. Also, barefoot running improves running form, and as a result barefoot runners run faster, since better form correlates to quicker times (Wohlgamht). Additionally, barefoot runners do not over-stride like shod

runners, so they are not slowed down by the braking process that shod runners go through. Furthermore, barefoot running, which forces a runner to land with mid-foot strike, generates greater energy return in each step taken by a runner, therefore resulting in improved running times. As Jen Wohlgamuht, owner of Mojo Running and an expert on running, stated “ Barefoot running is amazing, not only does it reduce injury and improve efficiency, but it also greatly increases your speed, it is like the magic potion or pill for running- if you are a serious, competitive runner or just an everyday morning jogger, barefoot running is the way to go.” Barefoot running increases a runner’s speed because of the improved mechanics and form that a runner experiences when making the switch to barefoot running. Shod runners with high heels tend to lean back, while barefoot runners tend to slightly lean forward, which improves barefoot runners’ speed, since they are running with a natural, open gait (Boddicker). The goal of competitive runners is to become faster, so track and cross country coaches at the high school and college levels need to implement barefoot running into their programs in order to boost the performance of their runners.

Since barefoot running greatly increases the speed of runners, it has produced numerous champions. Adebek Bikila, a barefoot runner, was the first black African to win an Olympic gold medal. Additionally, Tegla Loroupe, a barefoot runner, is a two-time New York City Marathon Champion, and has also won several world titles at various distances (“ Barefoot”). Anton Krupicka is a barefoot runner who currently holds the world record in the White River Fifty Mile Race (“ Barefoot”). Also, the Tarahumara beat the USA’s and world’s most elite distance runners, including Olympic champions

(McDougall 5). As Vin Lananna, Director of Track and Field for the University of Oregon and seven-time NCAA Coach of the Year, stated, "...I believe when my runners train barefoot, they run faster and suffer fewer injuries." Due to the utilization of barefoot running, Vin Lananna has coached numerous National Champion track and cross country teams (" Vin"). While coaching at Stanford University, Lananna led the men's track and field team to the National Championship in 2000, and the men's cross country team to National Championships in the years 1996, 1997, and 2002. Also, in 1996 Lananna guided the Stanford women's cross country team to a National Championship. Additionally, as coach of Oregon, he led the men's cross country team to National Championships in 2007 and 2008. Furthermore, he guided the Oregon's men's indoor track and field team to the 2009 National Championship and the women's indoor track and field team to National Championships in 2010 and 2011. Throughout his coaching career, Lananna has coached his teams to over forty NCAA Conference Championships (" Vin"). As the greatest track and cross country coach of all-time, Vin Lananna, stated, " Barefoot running keeps my runners stronger and healthier and prevented injuries and since they were injured less, they could train more. Barefoot running has definitely given my runners an edge over the competition." Barefoot running produces numerous champions - world champions, Olympic champions, marathon champions, and more, due to the increase in speed. All cross country and track coaches need to incorporate barefoot running into their programs in order to make their runners' champions.

The greatest benefit of barefoot running other than the greatly improved speed and the unprecedented efficiency is the reduction of injury. Reducing injury is the most vital benefit of barefoot running because an injured runner cannot run. As Dr. Mercer Rang, a legendary orthopedic surgeon and researcher in pediatric development, stated, “ Shoes do no more for the foot than a hat does for the brain” (Boddicker). In other words, a hat does not improve thinking and a shoe does not improve running. Barefoot runners use a mid-foot strike, which decreases impact on the foot, therefore reducing injuries like shin splints and plantar fasciitis (Boddicker). All runners know how painful and how treacherous shin splints are and how they can ruin an individual’s whole track or cross country season; so make the switch to barefoot running and eliminate the pain. Additionally, most running shoes today inhibit the foot from spreading out, resulting in conditions such as bunions and occasionally the loss of toe nails. Furthermore, toe boxes of traditional running shoes misshape peoples’ feet, by squeezing their toes together rather than allowing the foot to spread out (Boddicker). Barefoot running also decreases injury by minimizing the over-pronation of runners with low arches and the supination of those with high arches (Boddicker). Barefoot running reduces the pressure on a runner’s joints, which therefore lessens the chance of injury (Boddicker). Cross country and track coaches at all levels of running must apply barefoot running to their programs, so that their runners will not have to go through the misery of another season ending injury. Barefoot running: the greatest and most effective running technique to tremendously reduce the chance of injury.

Running is not about buying the most high-tech gear, or the top flight shoes. Running is about being free; running is about running in the fresh, open air; running is about experiencing one of the greatest activities known to man. Running barefoot is running free. Running barefoot is fewer injuries. Running barefoot is faster times. Running barefoot is more efficient. Running barefoot is running smarter. Barefoot running needs to be implemented now into the training programs of track and cross country coaches and runners everywhere, for an exceptional running experience. If an individual desires to run correctly, then running barefoot is the optimal way to go, however, if an individual chooses not to go barefoot, then he or she will continue to experience the pain of injury and disappointing times. Athletes should run the way peoples' ancestors ran, the way people were meant to run, the way people were born to run. Barefoot running, benefits an individual's foot, whereas shod running does nothing but hurt an individual. Research by Harvard University and various other institutions, has shown that barefoot running will change the way people run forever. Barefoot running improves all aspects of a person's running experience: speed, efficiency, and the reduction of injury. As the great poet Tao Te Ching once stated, " The best runner leaves no tracks" (McDougall 1).