

BREAK OUT

After four aching close calls, one last big push to go sub-four

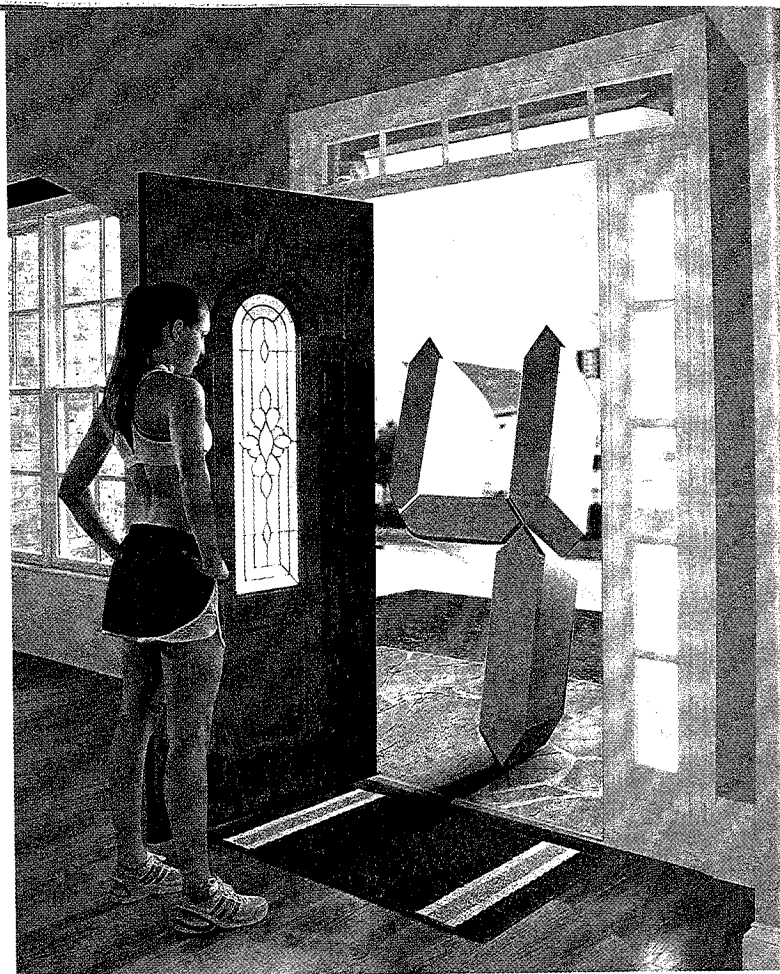
MY MARATHON TRAINING started with tears. With a sage-green chenille throw around my shoulders and my legs curled on an ottoman, I cried as I recounted to a friend the disappointment of once again missing my goal of breaking four hours. I had clocked 4:11 at the 2007 Nike Women's Marathon, which was particularly stinging because I thought I'd trained well. Apparently, not well enough.

From the moment I'd signed up for my first marathon back in 1998, breaking the four-hour barrier was a big deal. Going sub-four would make me feel like more than a casual runner doing one 26.2-miler "just to finish." It would put me in rarefied company for an amateur: In a popular marathon like, say, New York City, only 15 percent of the women's field typically finishes under 4:00. I'd come so close in my third attempt, in 2003, crossing the line in 4:01:02. I knew I could do it, with smart training in good weather on a favorable course.

But as I had learned four times, breaking four hours in a marathon is tougher than it sounds. To clock 3:59:59, you have to run exactly 9:09.6 minutes per mile, easy enough once, but doing that 26.2 times was proving elusive and frustrating. Seeing my pain that evening, my friend, a former elite runner and a casual coach, offered to give me workouts to help me reach my goal. "I'm confident you can do this," she said.

Some months later, we jogged past still-dark Craftsman-style homes on our way to the high school in my Portland, Oregon, neighborhood for a final premarathon track session: 2 x 2 miles, which my coach-pal wanted me to run in 15 minutes or less. My stomach clenched as self-doubt seeped into my mind. We alternated leads on laps, and completed the first two-miler in 14:54. On the second two-miler, as we swapped laps again, I focused on technique, pushing my knees forward and pumping my arms faster to rev up my speed—and my adrenaline. We shaved four seconds off our time. As I shuffled home, I was in disbelief that I'd done such a hard workout. I logged the newly gained self-confidence into my mental reserves.

For my fifth attempt at sub-four, I chose the Eugene Marathon for its proximity to my home, early spring date, and relatively flat course. On race morning, I offered up thanks to the weather gods as heavy rain tapered to a drizzle by the time I shimmied into the corral between the 3:50 and 4:00 pacers. It was 53 degrees. Going out easy, I dodged a few puddles in the cracked pavement. The rain stopped and the sky brightened as I eased into a slightly more aggressive pace around mile three, comfortably clocking between 8:32 and 8:47 per mile. Near the halfway point, I hit a drab residential section of the course and felt my



pace slacken. But almost immediately, Britney Spears snarled "Gimme More" through my earbuds and got my rear in gear.

The next 12 or so miles weren't exactly easy, but I kept passing people, which bolstered my confidence. I looked at my watch at mile 23, saw 3:23, and marveled at how strong I felt compared to how low I'd been at this point in previous marathons. Steps before the 26-mile marker, however, I went into complete shutdown. I managed to shuffle toward the finish line, and through the blur of waving arms and homemade banners, I spotted my friend Joanne in the crowd. In my last marathon, I cried as I crossed the finish line a full 11 minutes slower than I'd hoped. This time, Joanne was jumping up and down with tears streaming down her face. Even through my systems-failure haze, I distinctly heard her shouting, "Sarah, you did it! You did it!"

I had, indeed: 3:52:37. Satisfied? I was beyond thrilled. Of course, now I want to break four hours *again*.



JOIN THE RW CHALLENGE!
For your next marathon, sign up to break 3:00, 3:30, 4:00, 4:30, or 5:00

Want to receive a training plan customized for breaking one of these five time goals; weekly e-mails from Chief Running Officer Bart Yasso; expert answers to your training, nutrition, and health questions; and access to exclusive online training groups? Yes! You can even run with the RW editors at the Toronto (October 17) or Richmond (November 13) marathons. For more, go to runnersworld.com/challenge.

THE PLAN: BREAK 4:00 OR BUST!

The *Runner's World* race-tested marathon-training program will get you to 3:59:59—or better!—with early hill work, later tempo sessions, and strategic goal-pace runs

WEEK	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	TOTAL
1	Rest	4 miles easy (10:04/mile)	Hills: 4 miles	Rest	4 miles easy (10:04/mile)	4 miles easy (10:04/mile)	9 miles (10:04/mile)	25 miles
2	Rest	4 miles easy (10:04/mile)	Hills: 5 miles	Rest	5 miles easy (10:04/mile)	5 miles easy (10:04/mile)	9 miles (10:04/mile)	28 miles
3	Rest	3 miles easy (10:04/mile)	Hills: 5 miles	Rest	5 miles easy (10:04/mile)	5 miles easy (10:04/mile)	12 miles (10:04/mile)	30 miles
4	Rest	4 miles easy (10:04/mile)	Hills: 5 miles	Time trial	4 miles easy (10:04/mile)	4 miles easy (10:04/mile)	10 miles (10:04/mile)	28 miles
5	Rest	4 miles easy (9:58/mile) with 4 strides	Hills: 7 miles	Rest	4 miles with 2 miles @ MP (9:09/mile)	4 miles easy (9:58/mile)	13 miles (9:58/mile)	32 miles
6	Rest	5 miles easy (9:58/mile) with 5 strides	Hills: 6 miles	Rest	4 miles with 2 miles @ MP (9:09/mile)	6 miles easy (9:58/mile)	15 miles (9:58/mile)	36 miles
7	Rest	6 miles easy (9:58/mile) with 6 strides	Hills: 7 miles	Rest	5 miles with 3 miles @ MP (9:09/mile)	5 miles easy (9:58/mile)	16 miles (9:58/mile)	39 miles
8	Rest	5 miles easy (9:58/mile) with 5 strides	Hills: 8 miles	Rest	Time trial	4 miles easy (9:58/mile)	14 miles or 1/2 marathon	32 miles
9	Rest	3 miles easy (9:52/mile) with 3 strides	Tempo: 8 miles with 3 miles @ 8:30/mile	Rest	9 miles with 7 miles @ MP (9:09/mile)	3 miles easy (9:52/mile)	18 miles (9:52 pace), fast finish	41 miles
10	Rest	4 miles easy (9:52/mile) with 4 strides	Yasso 800s: 9 miles with 6x800 (800s at 3:57)	Rest	10 miles with 8 miles @ MP (9:09/mile)	Rest	20 miles (9:52 pace), fast finish	43 miles
11	Rest	4 miles easy (9:52/mile) with 4 strides	7 miles easy (9:52/mile)	Rest	10 miles with 8 miles @ MP (9:09/mile)	4 miles easy (9:52/mile)	20 miles (9:52 pace), fast finish	45 miles
12	Rest	7 miles easy (9:52/mile)	Tempo: 9 miles with 5 miles @ 8:30/mile	6 miles easy (9:52/mile)	Time trial	8 miles easy (9:52/mile)	15 miles (9:52/mile)	46 miles
13	Rest	5 miles easy (9:46/mile) with 6 strides	Yasso 800s: 10 miles with 8x800 (800s at 3:57)	Rest	6 miles easy (9:46/mile)	5 miles easy (9:46/mile)	22 miles (9:46/mile)	48 miles
14	Rest	8 miles easy (9:46/mile) with 8 strides	Tempo: 8 miles with 4 miles @ 8:20/mile	Rest	7 miles easy (9:46/mile)	7 miles easy (9:46/mile)	15 miles or 1/2 marathon	45 miles
15	Rest	5 miles easy (9:46/mile) with 5 strides	Tempo: 5 miles with 3 miles @ 8:20/mile	Rest	5 miles easy (9:46/mile)	5 miles easy (9:46/mile)	12 miles (9:46/mile)	32 miles
16	Rest	Tempo: 5 miles with 3 miles @ 8:30/mile	Rest	5 miles easy (10:04/mile)	Rest	3 miles easy (10:04/mile)	Race Day (9:09/mile)	39.2 miles

KEY **HILLS** Run the mileage for the day on the hilliest course you can find. Hills build a base of strength in the first eight weeks of the program. Focus on sustaining an even effort as you climb and descend. **TIME TRIAL** A one-mile time trial can help you track your fitness and set realistic race goals. Go to a local 400-meter track or any one-mile stretch of road. After 10 minutes of walking and jogging, run one mile, or four times around the track. Over the course of training, your fitness gains will be reflected in your time trials. **MP** Marathon goal pace. Practice the speed you're hoping to hit in the race. Do a one-mile warm up before and a one-mile cooldown afterward. **TEMPO RUN** Run easy for one to two miles to warm up. Then dial into the pace that's given. Run easy for two miles to cool down. The tempo segment should feel challenging but manageable. These tempo runs train your body to sustain speed over a distance. **YASSO 800S** Warm up with two miles of easy running, then run 800 meters at the given pace that's "equal" to your marathon time. Jog 400 meters in between the 800s. Cool down with two miles of easy running. **LONG RUNS** Later in the program, pick up the pace in the last two to three miles for a fast finish.

Your First Day

Here's when to begin training

MARATHON	RACE DAY	START
Twin Cities	10/3	6/14
Chicago	10/10	6/21
Toronto	10/17	6/28
Marine Corps	10/31	7/12
New York City	11/7	7/19
Richmond	11/13	7/26

HAIR & MAKEUP: ELIZABETH YOON; APPAREL (TOPNER): NIKE; SHORTS: NEW BALANCE; SHOES: REEBOK; WATCH: POLAR; APPAREL (INTERIOR): TOP: ASICS; SHORTS: UNDER ARMOUR; SHOES: ADIDAS; RACE CLOCK: COURTESY LEHIGH VALLEY ROAD RUNNERS