

# Gold Coast Runners



**Gold Coast Runners**  
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**CLUB MISSION:** *The purpose of the Gold Coast Runners is to promote, encourage, and support the sport of running and walking through a network of people and resources engaged to educate the community on the benefits of the sport.*

## TOUGHEN UP

By Spencer D. West



A reader recently suggested that I focus an article on the art of mental fortitude in running and offer tips on improving performance through improving mental toughness. I write this article using my own experience while running and racing as well, as sharing what I have learned and observed from others whom I think possess that special something that separates them from the rest of the pack.

I've always believed that the ability to deal effectively with pain is the single biggest factor that separates elite runners from others. I've often heard interviews with some of the world's greats who discuss dealing with the extreme discomfort and even pain they feel from the first mile to the last in a marathon. Two hours and more is a long time to be in pain voluntarily. This speaks volumes as to the mind-set that the elite athlete enters a race and what they are willing and trained to deal with to get their desired result. This

ability to deal with pain comes into play in races and hard training sessions, but it's also having the mental toughness that will get you through the often mundane elements of training over months at a time.

For the average runner, the ability to deal with hours of pain is probably not a necessity or a reality, but that doesn't mean that runners cannot use different techniques that strengthen their own resolve and ultimate performance when training and racing. After all, most runners I know are constantly looking for ways to improve their speed and stamina. Front of the pack runners and ultra-runners are a good place to start to get some insight on developing or honing mental fortitude.

Cobi Morales, a top local athlete I've had the pleasure of training with, has told me that when he races he pictures himself in a white room and does not think about anything but that white room while he races. This allows him to filter out all of the other factors that could distract him from his goal at hand. This technique helps him tremendously when the pain becomes intense during a distance race where he is pushing himself harder than his body wants to go. I always try to picture how good I will feel when I'm done with the race and try to focus on nothing else but that. Techniques like these only work, though, if you have the right preparation leading up to the race. This is where mental toughness comes into your training.

I spoke with fellow lawyer and local athlete, Mandy Miller, who holds a Ph.D. in psychology. She points out several important factors to developing the right mind-set to race well. She said that she doesn't have "natural ability" (which I've heard other ultra-runners say about themselves, but am not sure I agree) so she has to develop

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