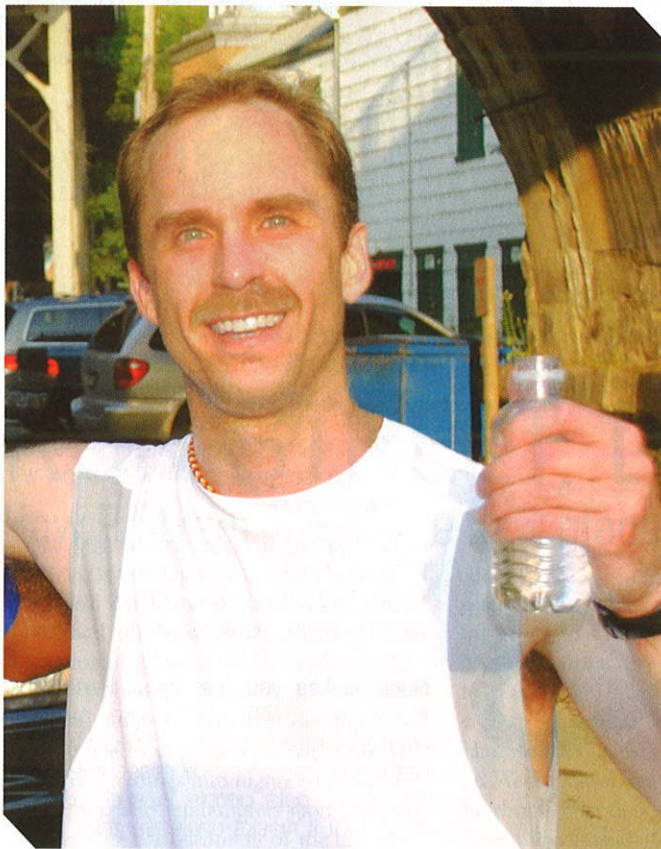


I'M A COMPETITOR

BY MAYA BROWN

CHRIS HATTON

This D.C. athlete took a helping hand to get back on track



It's 5:30 a.m. in northeast D.C., and I'm with 30 or so people huddled in a circle chanting the serenity prayer. We're already sweating from just a few drills and stretches. Looking at all the runners—white, black, thin, a little paunchy—it's hard to figure out a common thread, except that everyone's ready to run.

These are members of Back On My Feet (BOMF), a nonprofit organization that provides services to the homeless, and also requires them to join the BOMF running program in order to “build confidence, strength and self-esteem.”

Chris Hatton, a member since May, just finished his first official race, an 8K, in a speedy 32:59. The race—very different from his running experience thus far—instilled in him a sense of accomplishment and pride. It clearly won't be his last.

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH BOMF AND WHAT DO YOU ENJOY ABOUT IT?

I came to Emery House, a shelter for homeless men who are employed, at the end of March and I heard about the program. It offers grants and helps with getting jobs as well as

providing group support. The networking is really great. It creates a sense of family and lets you know that you're not alone. But I really love to run, so everything else is just an added bonus.

WHEN DID YOU START RUNNING?

About 10 years ago. I played soccer as a youth and was in a marching band and all that. But I really started running when I was incarcerated and truly discovered its benefits. In today's society the doctors just want to give pills to take care of depression or anxiety or whatever you've got going on. But it's really about the whole body. Running helped me to deal with the stress and made me feel good about my body and myself. When I was incarcerated, I found it was a way to relieve stress and escape, to get away. It really helped me to get my self-esteem up and release the issues that I have.

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE LOCAL ROUTES?

I love running on the mall down by the monuments. I went out there on Tuesday; it was really nice. I actually kind of like the summer heat.

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE RUNNING MOMENTS?

The first race I did, like a month ago, was really awesome—just being with this group and the energy of the race, running with a group for a great cause. It's a great honor to be part of this family.

WHAT ELSE DO YOU DO BESIDES RUNNING?

I teach yoga at a gym and it really complements my running. I started running first and then started doing yoga a couple years later.

WHAT ARE YOU TRAINING FOR NOW?

I'm doing a half and a full marathon in the fall.

DO YOU HAVE A GOAL TIME FOR EITHER OF THOSE RACES?

Yeah. I'd like to do at least a 3:15 marathon. For the half I'm not really sure, maybe an hour and a half. I ran a marathon about eight years ago; I was celebrating my 26th birthday while incarcerated. I trained and ran the marathon on the inside. I did 27 miles in 3:19, so I'd just like to meet that or beat it. It was at the end of October on a cool sort of rainy day. I ran on the dirt path we had in there. I had all my bottles and bananas and all that lined up and everybody was like, who is this guy? But I had supporters watching out the windows.

ANY DREAM RACES YOU'D LIKE TO DO?

Just to be able to run in a marathon here in the city. After running around a track for so many years behind a razor-wire fence, it's a blessing to be able to run out here every day. **CM**

Are you a competitor, or do you know a competitor who would like to share his story? Send your ideas to ima-competitor@competitorgroup.com.