

Marathon training continues, despite winter temperatures

By BENJAMIN DIN, Northwestern University

For marathon runners, it will take more than a heavy snowfall to keep them from training and racking up their miles.

This past weekend, Winter Storm Linus blew through the Midwest, leaving in its wake the fifth-heaviest snowstorm on record for Chicago, according to Weather.com. However, for those looking to participate in the Chicago Marathon this October, they will keep at their training, blizzard or no blizzard.

Although marathon runners train throughout the year, the winter season requires extra precautions. The main concern is footing, said running coach Bill Leach, a former NCAA Division I head coach of track and field and cross country. A slight slip in footing can lead to disastrous consequences, such as a broken arm, and put a runner out of training.

“Sometimes, such as last year, the snow was really bad, and there were just days when all the sidewalks were covered in ice and you can’t run,” said Jason Mast, a Medill freshman. “I came very close to shattering a few elbows, slipping on ice.”

To anticipate weather conditions, Leach uses Tinman’s Heat Index and Running Performance Chart, which allows runners to adjust their pace according to the temperature. According to the chart, 53 degrees Fahrenheit is the optimal training temperature; temperatures above or below will lead to diminished performance. For example, if the temperature is 20 degrees Fahrenheit, running at the same effort it takes to run a six-minute mile in 53 degrees Fahrenheit will net a mile time 10.9 seconds longer. By accounting for fluctuations in temperature, the chart can help prevent overexertion.

Runners will train indoors if weather conditions are too extreme, but reluctantly.

“I don’t ever encourage my athletes to go indoors unless they feel they don’t want to go outdoors,” Leach said.

Jason Riddell, a Kellogg student who is the president of the Northwestern Triathlon Club and a two-time Chicago Marathon participant, said to “get out as much as possible as long as it’s safe.” When the sidewalks are icy and dangerous, an alternative is running on the road, due to cars heating up the pavement and melting the ice, Riddell said.

Theodore Ward, a McCormick freshman who has ran the Chicago Marathon, trains outdoors to simulate a marathon environment.

“I prefer running outside even when it’s cold, like a way of making it almost easier when it’s not as cold, or if you have a bad day when you’re actually running (the marathon), because it can be cold in October and November,” Ward said. “You’re used to it, and it’s not a big deal.”

According to Weather.com, the next few weeks will bring a large range of temperatures, but training for these athletes will go on as usual.

“We can’t take days off – you know, a few days off, but not much,” Leach said. “We’re working toward a goal, the event.”