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- Division 7 Operator Ted Ball earned his medal as much for his persistence in life as for his participation in the L.A. Marathon.



PHOTO BY GAYLE ANDERSON

Ted Ball's 'Amazing Experience' in Life and the L.A. Marathon

By KIM SIM

(March 19, 2004) Metro Bus Operator Ted Ball is something of a celebrity these days.

The West Hollywood Division 7 operator was profiled in a recent Los Angeles Times sports column, featured on the KTLA News at 10 and called "amazing" by a KTLA anchor. All this before and after the 61-year-old participated in the Los Angeles Marathon, March 7.

Ball finished the 26.2-mile run in 6 hours, 44 minutes and 48 seconds.

For the more than 24,000 people who swarmed the streets of Los Angeles for the annual race, maybe it wasn't that big a feat. But consider this: Ball is a double-lung transplant recipient, who underwent surgery less than two years ago after being plagued with life-threatening asthma all his life.

Before his operation in May 2002, "I was probably two months away from death," Ball says. "I got a transplant and now I'm finally well. What do you do to mark it?"

Ball settled on running in the Marathon.

'An amazing experience'

"It's ego," he says. "I've been sick all my life and I get to do something like this? It's amazing. It's an amazing experience."

He ran and he walked — a tremendous accomplishment for a guy who

Ted Ball nears the finish line of the 19th Los Angeles Marathon in downtown Los Angeles.



used to measure every step and have to guard against losing his breath.

During the race, Ball sucked on salt tablets so he wouldn't be dehydrated. He stopped at every water station for two cups — one to drink and one to douse himself. For nourishment, he ate the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches he carried with him.

By the time Ball got to mile 14, a blister had developed on a toe on his right foot. By the end of the race, the bottoms of his feet were burning.

"The race was incredibly hot and it was a killer," Ball says. "The last four miles down Olympic Boulevard, it was like 92 degrees. It was brutal."

The 5-foot-7, 112-pound Santa Monica resident made it to the finish line, even if it wasn't exactly the way he imagined it.

'Legs were gone'

"I actually was so beat that I walked across the line," Ball says. "I tried to run but my legs were gone (at) around Mile 18."

Ball wore a long-sleeved shirt for the event and women's-size running shoes because his feet were too small, he says.

He also joked that the reason he wore lightweight sweatpants was that, "I got the skinniest legs in the world and my wife says, 'You're not exposing those legs to the public.'"

What Ball did show off to the public was an incredible amount of determination.

Born with asthma and subject to constant infections, pneumonia and bronchitis, Ball developed scar tissue on his lungs from all the infections. His asthma was so severe that anything could cause it to flare up — hot weather, cold weather, physical exertion, diet.

He was a sick child born into an athletic family. In fact, his brother, Jack Ball, is a triathlon coach at UC Berkeley.

Running in the Marathon, then, was a way to prove himself.

Treadmill and weight lifting

Almost immediately after his surgery, Ball worked the treadmill and lifted weights during his cardiac and pulmonary rehabilitation at UCLA Medical Center.

He continued his workout at the YMCA in Santa Monica, running three to four miles a day, at first, on the center's rooftop track and steadily going "up and up" in distance.

Ball made it to 20 miles in February, when he first started to run on the actual streets.

Times sports columnist T.J. Simers wrote a profile on Ball a few days before the Marathon, and a copy of the story is on display at West Hollywood Division 7, where he is a part-time bus operator.

His walk across the finish line was also shown at the end of KTLA's News at 10 broadcast the day after the race.

"That's kind of neat to be recognized," Ball says. "It makes the Christmas letter more interesting."

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