Dear Reader,

In a hectic 30 day period between April & May 2018 I set off to endure running 25 marathon distance routes in a city-looping journey around the United Kingdom & Ireland. The challenge not only consisted of the physical demands of running approx. 655 miles (+ some wrong turns!) but the tiresome element of literally travelling place to place continuously too. As somebody living with type 1 diabetes there was another factor added to this already fairly tough mission… managing daily diabetes control throughout the extreme exercise and travels; every aspect had to be considered: what time for meals, what times to inject insulins, how many units of short & long acting insulins to take; how frequently blood glucose levels might decrease during the runs, or how much it could increase post runs; how many calories were being burned, calculating the accurate carbohydrates required, how to avoid hyperglycaemia (low glucose levels)…

I always say: living with type 1 diabetes certainly makes running long distances more interesting!

The journey was as grassroots as it gets; exactly the way I like to do things – hitting the communities head on for the love of doing it! Day after day, location after location, local families and supporters came out and helped; incredible volunteers made this challenge successful – some driving a support car for a whole day and meeting at ‘checkpoint’ stops along the way to hand out drinks or gels, some organising groups to meet at start or finish points, some helping to plan the routes, many support ran alongside for a mile, 5k, 10k… to the point of 18 incredible people, many also living with type 1 diabetes, running a half marathon distance, and a further staggering 21 people completing full marathons! I was blown away and empowered each day by the community support and by how people pushed themselves to their personal accomplishments each day. A fine example is Joss Atkins, she had a fear of hypoglycaemia as a type 1, having once lost a friend also with type 1 who so sadly fell into a diabetic coma. Joss had never ran a marathon before but in Newcastle, despite fibrosis as well, just kept on going to get there and broke down into tears at the end. The craziest one was in London on the final
marathon. I met my 3rd cousin for the first time, 9 year old Harry Heffernan, and it turned out he has type 1 diabetes too and had seen me on the TV. Harry’s mum, Carly, ran half marathon and Harry wanted to keep going… I didn’t think a lad that young would go further than 6.5 miles into Woolwich, but he done the half-marathon without breaking sweat; it wasn’t until the 21 mile mark – much to Simon’s (support running in London) and my own amazement – where he finally said “I’m feeling it a bit now…” and even then he kept going and literally ran the marathon! The most impressive part was that on two occasions after Carly had finished running, Harry stopped and asked Simon and I if he could check his blood sugars – taking his diabetes responsibilities independently into his hands.

On some mornings I felt a little sick, of course I woke with tight legs too – but once I got out and started running each day the same tempo kept flowing. I’ve always been freakish in stamina, driven by this condition more than anything to keep plugging away. The project was called #DiAthlete100 as by completing 25 marathon challenges that totalled my 100th endurance feat for this cause, with the first being 10 years ago running 29 miles in 3 hours 1 minute aged 17.

WHAT WAS THIS ALL FOR? Away from that direct grassroots empowerment factor we hoped to deliver, the most crucial part is the fundraising to help kick start the “LEAGUE OF DIATHLETES.” It has been amazing in a weird way how living with this autoimmune condition has impacted my life; it has opened my eyes up to the world. Over the last 5 years or so I have met so many incredible people, mainly through programmes or volunteer projects globally. The League connects many of the incredible, dedicated advocates I’ve met also living with this condition together, with “T1D Heroes” from across 6 continents of the world who are willing to use their diverse experiences to help generate a positive change and improvement towards type 1 diabetes education. Statistically young adults or adolescents living with this have the highest percentage of mental health related issues associated to any chronic disease. There is an incredible amount to learn when living with such a condition, from calculating every aspect of your meals and the carbohydrate intake, understanding the correct doses of insulin for your body and adapting them to suit your days, to knowing the impacts on glucose levels during various forms of exercises – but the condition is as emotional as it is calculated and if people are not able to feel encouraged to work with this condition, their health will be negatively affected.

The League believes in type 1 diabetes education through empowerment, bringing relatable life experiences to bridge gaps in healthcare and especially support young people head on. There are many forms of challenges faced around the world, in many of the countries where T1D Heroes are from, they do not have an NHS system and the access to crucial supplies depends on wealth that most don’t have. Just last week I received news from the Sonia Nabeta Foundation, a partner to the League in Uganda, that one of their young warriors, Miriam Achieng aged 18, so sadly passed on to the angels after falling into a DKA (diabetic ketoacidosis) crisis. Something, filling my heart with regret, preventable.

In July we will host a training for our T1D Heroes, bringing these incredible, determined legends together to develop their skillets in diabetes education, awareness and advocacy and developing initiatives to produce grassroots, effective workshops and activities to support their local diabetes communities, with the support of our global partner organisations/diabetes centres The training will be in London and representing heroes in the League are currently based across: Australia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, France, Ghana, Greece, India, Kuwait, Pakistan, Romania, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States. It was worth every mile I ran to generate this opportunity.

If able to support in any way, through donations, sharing the giving link and this story across colleagues, connections, on social media, every pound matters. I want to further help fund their workshops – but first thing is kickstarting the League and bringing this typhoon of T1D empowerment together. Thank you.

Gavin Griffiths - Diathlete.org - www.facebook.com/diathlete

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