Interview with Tensai

RUNNING FOR PEACE

Tensai, could you briefly introduce yourself to our readers?
I started my work with OCHA as a national officer over 12 years ago. Today I work on donor relations in our Geneva office.

How did you start running?
I was introduced to running while at boarding school in the US. I then ran competitively through university. I rediscovered running during the OCHA reform process. A friend registered me for a race as a birthday gift in 2017, which kick started my training. After that, I was lucky to be introduced to two running groups in Geneva in May of 2017, and it has really helped propel my enthusiasm and renewed commitment for the sport.

What do you find to be the most rewarding thing about running? Specifically running long distances?
I love many things about running. I love the health benefits, including being able to sleep better and disconnect from my work life. I enjoy the friends I’ve made through the sport, many of whom are outside the UN. I enjoy competition and the opportunity to challenge myself. And finally, I really enjoy the sense of measurable progress – that I can easily quantify progress in direct relation to my level of effort.

Describe the training process for a marathon. How did you prepare—both mentally and physically?
I’m a marathon newbie – I ran the Geneva marathon last year with no preparation. This year I’m preparing to run the NYC Marathon in November. To prepare for it, I plan to run about 3,000 km. The normal rhythm is six days of running – 4 days very easy while having conversation with friends, 2 days with some kind of harder effort mixed in, and 1 day of a long run (roughly 2 hours). The mental preparation for a marathon is also quite specific – you need to grow more comfortable with some discomfort, and with restraining yourself in the early part of the race. For me, I find my mind always wanders while I’m running, so I need to practice a kind of meditation to help me stay focused, to maintain good running form when I’m tired, and to stay relaxed in the latter parts of a race.

What advice can you give to staff who are thinking to start running?
Two bits of advice – find a friend or a running group – this always makes the experience more enjoyable. Second, start small – the most important thing is to enjoy the experience and do it regularly, so make sure you’re not going too hard or too fast when you get started. This will help you continue to enjoy it, and also reduce your chances of injury.

Many people think running is hard, boring, or both. But for me and most other regular runners most days are just a chance to get out in nature and chit-chat with friends. It is at most 1 or 2 days a week that runners are really supposed to “push themselves” to become better or faster.

What do you think is the biggest misconception about the sport or runners in general?
Tensai’s favorite running app: Strava