

Oakville native closes in on running seven marathons on seven continents

Kristen De Sousa reacted with horror when her mother first suggested running seven marathons on seven continents in three months.

"The thought really scared me," the 15-year-old, Oakville-born runner said recently in Toronto, a stopover on the way to her sixth (held Sunday) and seventh 42-kilometre races.

Her mother, Sharon, mentioned it after she herself ran a marathon last year. She then discussed it with husband Manuel at their home in Dubai, where they moved for work reasons when Kristen was two.

A couple of weeks later, Kristen says, she had a change of heart: "If I don't do this, I think I will regret not taking this amazing opportunity."

It wouldn't be easy. The student still had exams at Dubai College. The family consulted doctors, osteopaths and a sports psychologist. No one under 18 is usually allowed to run a marathon, but Kristen got around this by having her 45-year-old mom run, too.

So far, they have raced together every step of the way — usually recording the same times.

While Kristen's marathon journey is rare, she would not be the youngest to achieve the feat.

Last November, 14-year-old Winter Vinecki, of the U.S., crossed the finish line at the Athens Classic Marathon to become the youngest, male or female, to run the distance on every continent, and in 2010, Sarah Oliphant, also of the U.S., was 15 years and 192 days old when she completed all seven. The De Sousas believe Kristen would be the youngest Canadian to do so.



Kristen De Sousa

Here's the epic rundown:

- It began with the Hamilton (Ont.) Marathon on Nov. 3, 2013, where she finished in 4:34.42.
- On Nov. 24, 2013, the Australia Mingara One Central Coast Marathon in New South Wales.
- On Dec. 7, 2013, the Aspen Marathon in Port Elizabeth, South Africa.
- Four days before Christmas, in Pisa, Italy.
- On Jan. 10, a race in Doha, Qatar.
- The White Continent Marathon on King George Island, Antarctica — held Sunday.

Still remaining: a race in Punta Arenas, on the southernmost tip of Chile, Feb. 2. Along the way, Kristen has suffered heel, knee, ankle and hamstring injuries.

"To run a marathon, a great amount of mental strength is needed in order to carry on putting one foot in front of the other despite how exhausted you are," she says.

Kristen said she misses her friends and had to give up netball and horse riding to avoid potential injury. With no sponsors, her father funded the project until her school's student charity committee worked out a plan to raise money and awareness for Children of the Mountain, a U.K.-registered group that helps provide education for children in Nepal.

More than \$8,000 in pledges has been raised at www.justgiving.com/kristen-de-sousa.

— Toronto Star

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