



INSIDE

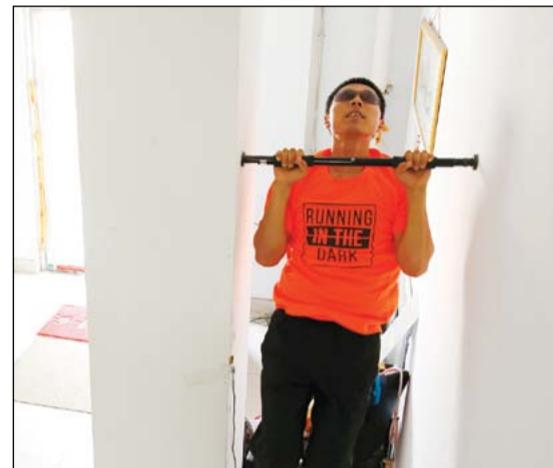
- Warming up to hotpots > p28
- Enduring appeal of TV stereotypes > p29



Yan Wei runs a massage parlor in his hometown, Gaomi, in East China's Shandong province.



Yan (center) was the first blind runner from the Chinese mainland to finish the Boston Marathon. Cheng Yi (left) and Cai Shiyin (right) are volunteers from the nonprofit Running in the Dark.



The marathon runner keeps up his physical strength with daily exercise.

Blind runner breaks boundaries

Visually impaired athlete overcomes adversity to complete 14 full marathons over two years

By **FANG AIQING**

fangaiqing@chinadaily.com.cn

Yan Wei, a 30-year-old blind man from Gaomi, East China's Shandong province, is thrilled. He has just covered the 42.2-kilometer distance in a marathon in Longkou, a coastal city in Shandong, beating his personal record with a new time of 3 hours, 15 minutes and 58 seconds.

While running, he heard the sound of the sea as the race route hugged the coast. He was tethered with a safety rope to two guides to help him. This was Yan's 14th full marathon in two years.

Yan is also known as the first blind runner from the Chinese mainland to finish the Boston Marathon in the United States, the oldest annual marathon and one of the world's six major marathon events.

Yan, who lost his sight when he was a few months old due to a tumor, started running two years ago, after learning that volunteers were available to assist visually impaired runners at the 2015 Beijing Marathon.

When he started training with the help of his sister and parents, he could run only for 2 or 3 km at a time. But soon he improved so much that his sister had to ride a bicycle to stay ahead of him and guide him during training.

It took him just four months to be ready for his first full marathon.

Yan attributes his quick progress to the physical strength gained through a daily exercise regimen that included more than 10,000 jump rope repetitions. Since then, he has increased his pace.

According to Yan, ideally, he would like to run 200 km per month. "I feel



Yan Wei (left) runs a marathon with a volunteer guide in Tai'an, Shandong province, in April. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

uncomfortable if I do not run for two days in a row," said Yan.

But his training is subject to the availability of running guides. And it is becoming harder for him to find running guides for marathons, because there are few guides who can run faster than he can.

They typically need to be in better physical condition than he is and have faster personal times.

Shu Hao, an experienced marathon runner, was one of Yan's running guides for this year's Beijing Marathon. Speaking of how they paired up for the Beijing event, Shu said he first met Yan during the Boston Marathon in April.

As for Yan, instead of trying to prove himself every time he runs, he enjoys the process. He now smiles more often, and this is reflected in

the media coverage he receives.

In September, Yan completed his third Beijing Marathon in 3 hours 40 minutes, despite being tripped up during the race. Yan thought he could have done better, but admitted that he had eaten too much the night before and was also suffering from gastrointestinal discomfort.

As for breaking boundaries, Yan is finding ways to make it more com-

fortable for him to run, while ignoring conventional norms followed by other visually impaired runners.

Speaking about Yan's other strengths, Shu said he is impressed not only by his confidence and determination to train, but also the proficiency with which Yan operates his mobile phone.

The Internet is a key channel for Yan to learn about the world, and the new technologies he uses greatly facilitate his daily life.

Yan has installed screen readers on his phone and computer. He also shops online and buys most of his running gear on the e-commerce platform Taobao. Yan also takes screenshots of his race and training data and sends them to his friends.

In addition, he is able to fix most of the problems that occur on his computer.

In recent years, Yan has turned his attention from books on social sciences, nonfiction and traditional Chinese culture to philosophy.

From masterpieces by great philosophers like Plato, Immanuel Kant and Feng Youlan, he has learned to live his life more positively.

Cheng Yi, a volunteer with Running in the Dark — a nonprofit running group that provides professional running training for the visually impaired — has guided Yan in four marathon races. He is impressed with Yan's mind-set.

"He is very optimistic and rarely thinks negatively," said Cheng.

Yan earns his living as a masseur. And after seven years of working in Hangzhou and Beijing, he returned to his hometown, Gaomi, and opened his own massage parlor.

He considers persistence to be crucial. "I am keen on improving myself in things that really matter to me."