Dayo - The Runner Girl

Adedayo Akinbode is a self trained marathoner and a founding member of the Bridge Pacers Sports Club of Lagos, Nigeria. Little did Dayo know her life will take a new turn when she signed up for the Global Corporate Challenge (GCC) introduced to the workforce by her employers in 2013. The challenge which sought to encourage an active lifestyle among employees entailed that participants log in their daily steps on the GCC platform which is visible to all participants globally. An average of 10,000 steps was the recommended number of daily steps for a healthy life style and she was recording a daily average of 1,500 steps at the beginning of the challenge. This, coupled with the result of her 2012 Comprehensive Health check which had classified her as overweight at 5 feet 2 inches and 68 kg raised warning signals in her.

She wondered why participants from other parts of the world were recording average steps that greatly surpassed the recommended average. She started engaging other participants from different parts of the world and learnt a lot about making healthy choices.The competitive spirit in her spurred her on to device ways of ramping up her steps. She soon discovered that walking from point A to point B rather than driving and using the staircase rather than the elevator gave her an exponential increase of steps. 6 weeks into the Global Corporate Challenge, Dayo had started jogging happily on the streets of Lagos and ramping up her steps. What she did not realize was that she was getting fitter and loosing the weight her doctor had previously advised her to shed. By the end of the 100 days challenge, she had shed 13 kg and her bad cholesterol levels had become normal.

She had unconsciously changed her lifestyle so much that running had now become a hobby even long after the challenge was over.

She was prodded to run her first official race in September of 2013 when she ran a half marathon at the Accra International Marathon. She was 46 years and did not expect that singular experience to take her running to the next level. Over the next few years, she invested more time in training in a bid to improve her finish times. She read widely about the art of running and joined a couple of running fora where she was able to rub minds with diverse runners. Her passion for the sports grew in leaps. One of her greatest challenges in her early days of running were the jeers from passersby and onlookers when she was out running. Seeing a full grown woman running on the streets of Lagos was a strange sight back in the days. And it is quite amazing how that has changed in the last few years as more men and women now come out to run.

Her appearance at her very first full marathon in Dubai had people assuming she was Kenyan. And fellow runners raised quizzical eyebrows each time she responded she was Nigerian. "Nigerians do sprints not marathons" most stated authoritatively. That is the root of her literally flying the Nigerian flag when she runs international races these days. In her words, "I am putting Nigeria in the long distance running space. In addition I know I can't afford to fly my country flag and not put in my very best to cross the finish line".

She has since run full marathons on all seven continents, a total of 73 official full marathons, and an innumerable number of half marathons since her first official race in September of 2013.She sets running related goals which she keeps taking notches higher.

Her current goals are to:

1. Run 12 official marathons every year .
2. Run marathons in countries starting with all the Alphabets.
3. Run a minimum of 100 lifetime marathons.
4. Run marathons in a minimum of 100 countries.

Time and finances are however the constraining factors she says.

Dayo is an advocate of running. She believes that running unites people and keeps them out of trouble. You will never have the time to get into trouble when you spend a chunk of your time running. In addition, the endorphins you generate when you run make you feel good and bring out the very best in you. She has made it her duty to encourage people in her non running community to start running, one mile at a time. Her commitment to running has also meant giving back to her society. While preparing to run her first Ultra Marathon in 2015, she decided to celebrate her 48th birthday by running 48 km in her alma mater, the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife. She implored students to come out and run with her and donated a thousand naira to the University for every kilometer run by everybody. The project was a huge success which raised long distance running awareness on the campus and generated over half a million naira.

Her running club, the Bridge Pacers Club now organizes an annual Half Marathon Event in Lagos which draws people from all parts of Nigeria. Her dream to have runners from all over the world troop to run races in her home country Nigeria, resulted in the birth of Ile-Ife Heritage marathon.

Dayo is a member of the Seven Continents running Club, the Marathon Maniac Club and the Marathon Globetrotters Club.