

The Triathlon Summit - Learn What Makes This Man Run and Run and Then Run Some More

KERRY: All right guys, you are in the right place to hear the call with Dean. Dean, I've been calling you the endurance machine to everyone because that's what you are. I'm just going to give you a brief introduction here. Here's the list of his accomplishments with endurance running. He ran 350 miles in 80 hours and 44 minutes without stopping. He ran the Northface Endurance 50, which was when he did 50 marathons in 50 days in 50 different states, consecutive days that is too. It's one day after the other. He did the Inaugural South Pole Marathon in running shoes. He did 148 miles in 24 hours on a treadmill. And he single-handedly completed the 199 Providian Saturn Relay 6 times. He did the 100-mile 1-day Buckleholder at the Western States Endurance Run. So basically he's a complete machine. I'm sure he's done some other races since those too. Have you done any other races since those, pretty long endurance events like that?

DEAN: I've been getting after it, yeah. I haven't stopped since some of the things you read about. Last year I ran across the five great deserts of the world. So I ran across the Atacama in Chile, the Gobi desert in Central Asia, Death Valley here in North America, the Sahara Desert in Africa and then the final desert was Antarctica, which people don't realize is actually a desert. It's a cold desert but it's the largest desert on earth.

KERRY: Which one was the hardest?

DEAN: I would say that the Atacama Desert was definitely the most challenging in that it was at elevation, so it's a high desert. It was on a plateau about 7,000 feet above sea level. It was getting up into the low hundreds during the day and then it was below freezing at night. So just the temperature extreme was so intense. It was definitely a challenging one.

KERRY: Wow. Yeah, that's pretty impressive. How'd you get started to these endurance, ultra events, running, all that good stuff?

DEAN: I like to say it started with bad tequila. That's the truth. I was literally in a bar on my 30th birthday, doing what you do on your 30th birthday. I hadn't run in about a decade. That night I said to my friends at about 11 o'clock at night, "I'm going to leave the bar and I'm going to go run 30 miles to celebrate my 30th birthday and kind of reclaim my life, reclaim my health." They said, "God, you're drunk." I said, "Yeah, I am drunk. But I'm still going to do it." I just walked out of the bar and started running. Eight hours later I had actually made it thirty miles. It wasn't pretty - there was some chaffing and some blistering involved, but I made it 30 miles that night. It kind of changed the course of my life.

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KERRY: Wow, that's pretty sweet. So what is a typical training week for you like then?

DEAN: I like to get up early in the morning. I like to get up around 3:30 and I like to try to get in a marathon in the morning. I always fix breakfast and take the kids to school. So I like to come home, every day that I'm not traveling, and get them off to school. Then I go to my office. I've got a home office, which is nice. Then hopefully in the afternoon get a tempo run in, maybe an hour tempo run. Then go pick them up from school and come home and do the homework. The mileage varies radically, from 50 miles a week sometimes to 250-mile weeks, as far as road running.

I also cross train a whole lot on the bike, which I think really helps with injury prevention and having strong quadriceps. So I do a lot of cross training as well.

KERRY: Good stuff. So out of all the races you've done and events that you've done all over the place, what's been your favorite?

DEAN: It's funny. I've literally raced on every continent. In fact, at the end of last year I raced on seven continents in seven weeks. So in a seven-week period I'd been on every continent and done a race. Still my favorite race ever was running a 10K with my daughter on her 10th birthday. Nothing will ever trump that. People say, "You've run hundreds of miles at a time, what's your favorite?" I always come back to that one race. I'll never forget watching my little girl run a 10K. It's something that's burned in my heart forever.

KERRY: Good deal. When you're doing these events then, obviously they're very time consuming, the same with your training and everything like that, you're burning a lot of calories. So what do you eat? And when you're training what do you eat? When you're running? How do you handle all that?

DEAN: I like to follow what I call a Neanderthal Man diet. When I'm in training mode, when I'm not actually out there running or riding, I pretty much only eat foods that are unprocessed and that are organic. Pretty much the same foods Neanderthal Man had access to. No refined grains, no breads. I don't eat pasta or anything like that. I try to eat a lot of wild pacific salmon. I live on salmon. I think the omega-3 fatty acids are really healthy.

Then when I'm out there hammering I like CytoMax. I really like CytoMax as far as an energy replacement beverage and electrolyte replacement. I eat a lot of Cliff Shots and the Shot Blocks as well. So kind of finger foods. Those are for runs that are three to four hours. If I go

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longer than that, if I'm going out for 10, 12, 14-hour runs or an event, I'll definitely have solid food. Just because you need something behind you. You can only eat so many goo packs and energy bars and pretty soon you need something solid.

KERRY: Yeah. Good deal. What drives you? What is your "why" behind doing these events, all these long-distance, endurance events?

DEAN: You mentioned one of my sponsors, the Northface. They have this wonderful slogan - Never Stop Exploring. I think when you distill it all down, I certainly love to compete. I love the spirit of competition. But I think more I like the spirit of exploring the limits so just seeing how far the human body can go, really testing and expanding the limits of human endurance. It's just a passion of mine. I think that passion is what fuels me. I think that's why I've been able to keep it up for so many years and do so many things. I'm fueled more by my own heart, by my own passion. I just try to do the best that I can in every training event as well as every racing event.

I don't suffer burnout. I've trained with guys that are incredible racers and they live by their heart-rate monitor. They live by the clock essentially. They typically burn out. I've been able to keep that passion, that fire, alive for over a decade.

KERRY: Yeah. How old are you right now? If you don't mind me asking.

DEAN: [Laughs] I'm 44.

KERRY: All right. So for the past 14 years you've been doing these ultra events then?

DEAN: Yeah, I sure have.

KERRY: Good deal. The fire's still there, for sure, right?

DEAN: Oh yeah. It's burning brighter than ever. With the events and with the help of some sponsors and I was fortunate enough to write a couple of bestselling books, I've been able to make a living doing it. I took a leave of absence from my day job, a five-week leave of absence. And that was three years ago. [Laughs] They keep calling me at the office like, "Your computer is still here. When are you coming back?" I tell them, "Stop calling me." If I don't have to go back to a day job I won't. So it's been a pretty good ride.

KERRY: Good deal. And Dean, where can people get your books?

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DEAN: They're pretty widely available. Amazon certainly, any of the big book sellers, Barnes and Nobles, Borders as well as most local, independent book sellers carry by books.

KERRY: Awesome. Do you play any mental games with yourself when you're out there running? I do know some runners that do marathons and longer runs and they'll actually count every step per every mile. I don't know how they do it. And I've heard other people playing mental games like that. So I was just wondering if you do any kind of mental games with yourself like that or what you think about when you're out there for a long time.

DEAN: I try to be in the moment more than anything else, especially when I'm running a marathon distance or further. When you hit the proverbial wall and you feel like you just can't go on, a lot of times what we're doing is we're watching the mile markers or we're looking at our clock and we're counting down or counting laps. Sometimes it's just overwhelming and deflating. It demoralizes you. So I just try to be present and be in the moment and just really savor every footstep, just do my best with every footstep, enjoy the experience, immerse myself in it but don't get ahead of myself. If that's a mental game then that's a mental game. I just literally take baby steps. People say, "How did you run 50 marathons in 50 consecutive days?" I say, "Very easy. You do it one step at a time."

KERRY: Yeah. Awesome. That's cool. So what's been your most entertaining story that you've had while you've been out there running? Or a memorable story?

DEAN: [Laughs] Oh, I've got a lot of them but I think the one I'll never live down is I was out on a long run one time in the middle of the night and I didn't have access to any food. I was out on this backcountry road. But I always have my cell phone and my credit card so I called this pizza joint and I had them deliver a pizza to me out on the road, as I was running. I think I'll never live that story down.

KERRY: That's good. Did you tell them to meet you at an intersection or something?

DEAN: Yeah. I told them my coordinates and where I'd be in about 20 minutes and they showed up with this piping hot pizza.

KERRY: Good deal.

DEAN: It was a beautiful thing.

KERRY: Do you do that a lot?

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DEAN: I do now. It's become kind of a staple. I've got some tips for the listeners. One, Hawaiian style. The pepperoni pizza is too spicy. If you get the Hawaiian style pizza and you ask them not to slice it and you get the thin crust. Then you roll it into this big burrito and you just mow it on the run. It's so good.

KERRY: [Laughter] Good deal, man. All right. That's good. You were talking about running across the deserts and everything, were you camping out at night for those?

DEAN: These are actually pretty competitive events. It's called The Desert Series. They're self-supported 250-kilometer races where you basically get about 3 liters of water a day and other than that you've got to carry everything you need. You're out in the desert, you're racing head to head against guys and you see them in camp at night. They give you tents at night to sleep in. But pretty much all the food, all the equipment, everything you need, your medical supplies, you've got to carry in a backpack, which is a really brutal element because you're out there running in the desert sometimes in knee-deep soft sand and you're having to carry 20 to 30 pounds on your back as you're doing this.

KERRY: What did you pack for yourself? What did you put in your backpack?

DEAN: You try to go as light as you can. I was pretty much eating dehydrated foods, food that you would re-hydrate at night. But people carry different things. The Italian special-ops guys are really strong runners and all they eat for six days is these test tubes, these little vials, of olive oil. They literally subsist on 2,000 calories a day of olive oil, for 6 days, because it's so light.

KERRY: Wow. That's pretty interesting. So what future races do you have?

DEAN: I think my next thing is going to be 50 states, 50 couches, 50 beers. [Laughter]

KERRY: For real?

DEAN: Yeah. It sounds like a good one, doesn't it? I've got a whole lot of things I'm planning. One coming up in May, I'm going to run a race here, I live in San Francisco, I'm going to run a race called The Beta Breakers. That's a 12K run, so a long one, but I'm going to cross the finish line and keep heading south and run from San Francisco down to LA to get there for the LA Marathon. Then I'm going to run the LA marathon and keep going south after I cross the finish line and run down to San Diego to run the Rock and Roll Marathon. So that's about a 500-mile trek in all. That should be fun.

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- KERRY: So how long is that going to take you, running between those cities?
- DEAN: I haven't done all the math but I'll probably average like 60 to 70 miles a day on the way down so probably about a 10 or 11 day trip in total.
- KERRY: All right. And you find 60 to 70 miles a day is pretty easy for you now?
- DEAN: I don't think it's easy. It's definitely challenging. I've never seen it get any easier but I live for the challenge. To me, I love the format of just getting up in the morning and starting to run and running until 2, 3, 4 in the morning, bedding down for a couple of hours and getting up the next day and just repeating the process. Then running a pretty hard marathon and continuing down the coast.
- KERRY: Good deal. So you ran 350 miles in 80 hours. What was going on with that? Was that your most challenging race do you think?
- DEAN: I think that was definitely the most overall challenging, both physically and psychologically. That was 82 hours of continuous running. It was a mental thing as much as a physical thing. It was something that I don't think I'll ever repeat. I was saying that I thought maybe a human could run 500 miles non-stop. After 350 miles I don't think I could take another step. I revised that statement downward.
- KERRY: Good deal. I know someone who is training to run across the country and they're figuring they're going to do roughly around 50 miles a day. I was just curious, in terms of what do you think is possible for you to do consistently day after day in an event like that? Or what have you done? So I guess a two-part question.
- DEAN: I think depending on the route you take, if it's flat, depending on the time of the year, if it's hot or humid, you could definitely average 50, 60 miles a day no problem day after day. I once ran across the country in the late fall, so we didn't have as much daylight as I wanted. I was averaging between 50 and 60 miles a day. It's not that tough. Well, I shouldn't say it's not that tough. It's really tough but if you just stop and then resume running right where you stopped, I think it's doable. With the 50 marathons that I did, it was in all of the 50 US states. The biggest problem was that, especially on the western states, I'd run a marathon and then I'd have to get on a bus and drive 10, 12 hours sometimes to the next state. Just sitting idle like that for so long after running a 3, 4-hour marathon, that was worse than the actually running.
- KERRY: What do you do to recover from events like that and long races that you've done?

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DEAN: I'm a strong believer in ice baths. I think that ice baths are like just miracle tonics. I definitely try to take an ice bath when I can. I also believe in omega-3 fatty acids. I eat a lot of wild pacific salmon. I think the omega-3s are really, really good for recovery.

KERRY: Cool. We've got people on the webcast here asking a few questions. Do you want to take a few questions from them?

DEAN: Yeah, that'd be great. Sure.

KERRY: Okay, cool. We've got Jason from Texas. He says, "You've run many ultra-distance races, swam the San Francisco Bay and cross trained on the bike. Do you have any plans to enter an Ironman?" We've got a lot of triathletes on here so that's probably why he's asking that.

DEAN: I've done Ironman-distance triathlons before. I've never done Kona. Kona is on my proverbial life list. They actually gave me an entry last year, a celebrity entry. I'm like, "No. I cannot accept a celebrity entry. For one, I'm not a celebrity. And two, my friends would give me so much shit if I did that." So I'm going to go out and legitimately qualify. It'd be like me doing Boston without qualifying first. There's no way. So I want to do Kona, that's on my life list.

I also want to do UltraMan. I've done a fair amount of adventure racing, expedition-length adventure racing, which is multi-day racing format and multi-discipline format, as well as the desert series I did. Those races, like Marathon Postopolis, those are six-day self-supported races. So those are a little bit different than just traditional ultra running.

I've mixed it up too. I've done some kind of really fun things. One time I ran from San Diego up to Long Beach. So I ran 95 miles and then I hopped in a kayak with Robin Benacacio, a pretty renowned adventure racer, and we paddled to Catalina from Long Beach. So we did about a 30-mile open-ocean paddle. Then we got out of the kayaks and I ran the Catalina Marathon. So that kind of mixed it up. I really dig things like that. I really dig all elements of endurance, beyond just ultra running.

KERRY: Wow. Was that pretty challenging, doing that?

DEAN: Yeah, I'll tell you, after running 95 miles to sit in a kayak, with your legs locked in -- you know what it's like, you're sitting in one position for 8 hours. I thought I had rigor mortis. It was so brutal.

KERRY: Then you ran the marathon. Did you get right out of the kayak and just run?

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DEAN: No, it got even better. I got out of the kayak and then I went to the Marathon Expo and did like a talk. [Laughter] I was drooling on myself, trying to give a talk. I did a talk and then I slept for a couple hours and then ran the marathon which started the next morning.

KERRY: By that time you were fully revived, right?

DEAN: I was fresh, yeah.

KERRY: [Laughter] Good to go. Andrew here from Power Cranks in San Francisco, good man, we like him. He's been very good to me.

DEAN: I know Power Cranks.

KERRY: Oh, good deal. Do you use them?

DEAN: Yeah, good product.

KERRY: Awesome. What's been your experience with them?

DEAN: Is this a plug for these guys? [Laughs] They're good guys. It's been a positive experience. I'll have to hit them up for some samples.

KERRY: [Laughs] Good deal. What's the worse race you've ever done and why? That's what Andrew asks, from Power Cranks.

DEAN: It's funny. The media, as much coverage as I've got, they always talk about these incredible things I've done. I won the world's toughest foot race, 135 mile run across Death Valley. I ran 350 miles non-stop and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. What they never focus on is these spectacular failures that I've had. I think those are almost, to me, you learn a lot more from your failures than you do your successes. I've had some really horrible runs.

I think one of them on the top of my list is this thing called the Leadville Trail 100-mile Endurance Run. It's in a place called Leadville, Colorado. It's 100 miles and when you start in Leadville you're just on this flat plateau and you think, "Oh, no big deal." Well, this plateau is at 10,600 feet and then you go up over a whole pass, you climb up to about 12,500 on this climb. I flew out there from San Francisco, kind of started running this thing and I got altitude sickness like you would not believe. I was just doing projectile hurling in the middle of the night. Just the worse thing you could ever think of. I ended up finishing but it was not pretty.

KERRY: Oh, wow. What are some of the lessons you've learned from those bad

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aces then?

DEAN: The one thing I've learned is that you're better than you think you are and you can go further than you think you can. When you're about to DNF it's kind of this death spiral where you're just thinking, "Oh man, I've completely hit the wall. I'm bonking. I've still got 40 miles in front of me. This is just horrible." If you would just slow down for a second, even walk and just back it off and adjust your paradigm and say, "Okay, it's not going to be my best race ever. I'm not going to win this damn thing but I'm going to get to the finish line." If you can just take that moment to regroup and pull it together, you can get through it.

So often in the early races I would just say, "It's over. I'm done. There's no way I'll make it." I would just drop out. Now I say, "Okay, I've been here before." I think experience matters a lot. You say, "I've been this low before and I've regrouped and got up and finished." So that's one thing I've learned. Just don't give up.

KERRY: Yeah. Do you think that's a natural wave you go through in events like that, where you just hit that wall and it really sucks for a while and then you just kind of snap out of it?

DEAN: You know, it always sucks for a while. Anyone who's done an Ironman or even a sprint distance or a limited distance tri, you're going to feel shitty at some point. There's no mystery there. You know it's going to hurt. It's just that sometimes it really hurts. When things start going wildly wrong, like you start getting nauseous and you're vomiting, when things like that start happening then you really start questioning, "Wow, it's getting bad." That's when you really need to look inside and say, "What am I made of? Can I pull this off?" Once you do it you prove to yourself, "I can do this."

KERRY: Good deal. Kerry in Seattle asks, "How do you keep from getting injured? Have you ever been injured? If so, how do you mentally deal with not being able to run?"

DEAN: I'm knocking on the side of my head right now, knocking on wood, because thankfully I've never suffered an injury. I shouldn't say that because I'll probably walk out of this podcast and break my ankle walking down the stairs or something.

KERRY: Oh, dude, don't say that. [Laughter]

DEAN: I've been very fortunate. One, I've got good biomechanics. My alignment is really good. I'm lucky there. It's nothing I've trained for. They say one of the best things you can do as an endurance athlete is choose your parents well. Heredity plays a role. I won't deny that good biomechanics

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help. I think also the cross training that I do, and having strong quadriceps muscles, as well as having kind of a more developed upper body. When you look at a lot of these runners...Less so triathletes. Triathletes seem to be much more overall fit because of the swimming. But if you look at a lot of these runners, especially the marathon runners, they just do not have anything going on upstairs. Their upper bodies are really, really underdeveloped. Through surfing, through windsurfing, through rock climbing and some of the other activities I do, my upper body is pretty strong.

It slows you down. Let's face it, muscle is slow. It requires more blood flow to service muscle. But I think in the end it really helps with injury prevention.

KERRY: Good deal, awesome. Andrew again, with Power Cranks, asks, "You speak a lot of the mental thing. What tricks do you use to stay focused during your races?"

DEAN: Again, I'll go back to the concept of baby steps, of just being in the moment. So often we look beyond where we're at at the moment. We look towards the mile marker. We look towards our watch. We start trying to calculate how much further we have to go and our splits and so forth. To me, I always watch my splits but I go back to the very basic baby step of just really being in the moment. Just saying, "My commitment is to take my next best step. My next footstep, my next strike is going to be the best it can be. My next crank is going to be the best crank I've got." Just do that over and over again, instead of looking out ahead saying, "Shit, I've still got 40 miles left on the ride and then I've got to hop off and finish the marathon." So really be present. Be in the moment and really take baby steps. That's the thing I use.

KERRY: Good deal. Do you go through a lot of shoes?

DEAN: I go through about 40 or 50 pairs a year, yeah. I'm sponsored, that helps.

KERRY: So it's roughly one a week almost?

DEAN: Well I do a lot of wear-testing. So, yeah. Sometimes I'll wear a pair of shoes for two long trail runs, back to back, and then they'll be pretty much trashed. So I'll write up a little report about them and turn them in.

KERRY: So basically no break-in time with any of those?

DEAN: No. I'm really lucky with my biomechanics. I don't pronate or supinate. I'm a very neutral runner. I'm kind of an out-of-the-box guy. I can take a pair of shoes out of the box, almost any manufacturer, and start running in them.

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KERRY: Good deal. What's the one piece of equipment or thing that you have to have on your runs? For you personally. Just one thing that you like or have got to have.

DEAN: Well, I've got to admit, I like my iPod. I like to listen to music on the run. I used to love to read, just read tons of books. As an endurance athlete, as you know, that's one thing that goes. You just don't have as much free time because you're training constantly. Now what I do is I download books. Audible or even iTunes has a great selection of books. I listen to so many great books when I'm out on long runs or long rides. It's a great way to get two things done, to multitask. You get a great workout plus you get the enjoyment of listening to a really great story.

KERRY: I actually just started doing the same thing. I was running into the same issue. There were so many books I wanted to read so I started doing that. It works pretty good.

With that, do you have anything else you want to add to anything that we talked about?

DEAN: No. I just want to say that my role, as I see it now, is becoming less about me trying to go out and do these insane events. Let's face it, any triathlete or any long-distance runner will tell you, it's somewhat self-absorbing what we do. I see my role as transforming in regard to trying to bring more attention and more light to endurance sports so that more people can make a living doing what they love. That's really my passion, my mission now, to get additional media attention and money into our sport so that you can maybe take this up as a fulltime vocation and more guys that are trying to be competitive, elite athletes can make a go of it, on all levels. That's really where I want to take my career. I've got to applaud you for doing what you do, for spreading the word. I encourage anyone listening to do the same. Recruit and blatantly invite others to join in what we do. There's magic in misery. I think that any triathlete or any long-distance runner can attest to that.

KERRY: Good deal. That's awesome. And where can people get your books again?

DEAN: Amazon is a great place. Barnes and Noble, Borders, a lot of the independent booksellers carry both copies of my book. As well as I have a DVD out. If anyone is interested they can go to UltraMarathonMan.com and there's more information there.

KERRY: Okay, cool. Awesome Dean. That's great. Thanks for coming on. Thanks for being an inspiration for everyone out there as well. I appreciate you coming on the call.

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DEAN: Thanks for having me as a guest and keep going strong.

KERRY: All right man, talk to you later.

DEAN: All right. Catch you soon.

KERRY: Bye. All right, that's all we've got tonight guys. Thanks for coming on the call. Same time, same place next week and we'll rock it out again. Have a good one.