

‘This is fine. Everything is fine.’

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Free spirit: Courtney Dauwalter (above) does not have a coach or a strict training plan. She runs in long shorts and baggy clothes because, she says, they are more comfortable. She eats sweets while training and drinks beer afterwards, because that's what makes her the most happy.

Is success all in the mind? Courtney Dauwalter is an ultra-marathon runner. When things get hard, she goes to a place in her head called “the pain cave.”

What’s happening?

Courtney Dauwalter had run 88 miles through the **Colorado** mountains when her eyesight began to fail. “I couldn’t see my hand in front of my face,” she remembers, “but I could still see my toes.”

With 12 miles of the race left, she decided to carry on.

Soon she was 90% blind — but still she did not give up. With another runner beside her describing the ground ahead, she finished the race. Fortunately her sight soon came back.

Find out more

A marathon is 26 miles 385 yards long. An ultramarathon is any race longer than that. Last year Courtney became the first person to win three of the world’s toughest 100-mile races in a single summer.

She had not run further than 10km until one day she decided to enter a marathon. To her surprise, she made it to the finish line. She moved on to a 50km race and then a 50-mile one.

In 2012 she made her first attempt at 100 miles, but had to drop out. Then, she told herself that she could do whatever other runners did. Two years later she had her first 100-mile victory.

“My process is just to start repeating a positive **mantra** to myself,” she says. “You’re fine. This is fine. Everything is fine.”

Is success all in the mind?

Some say

Yes! Courtney would never have finished all her races without her positive mind. Her ability to carry on in moments of crisis is what sets her apart from other runners.

Others think

No! Having a positive mindset is important of course! But you need to be very, very fit to take part in an ultramarathon. Most people will naturally never be able to run that far.

Six steps to discovery

Some people say

“In long-distance running the only opponent you have to beat is yourself.”

1. Connect

How do you feel about this story? - Would you like to run in an ultra-marathon?

2. Wonder

Haruki Murakami (1949 –), Japanese writer

What do you think?

What questions do you have? - For example: Does Courtney stop to eat and sleep?

3. Investigate

What are the facts? - Pick out one thing we know for sure and one thing we cannot say for certain from this story.

4. Construct

What is your point of view? - For a relay race team you have to choose between someone who is fast but lazy and someone who is slower but very keen to win. Think about what you would say.

5. Express

What do others believe? - Should there be more sport at school? Talk about it with your classmates.

6. Reflect

What might happen next? - Imagine you go to work for a sportswear company. Design a running kit for Courtney.

Glossary

Colorado - A state in the west of the US that contains much of the Rocky Mountains.

Mantra - A phrase that is often repeated, like a motto. The word comes from a Sanskrit term referring to a sacred utterance.