

# **We named our dog after Zátopek**



## **Interview with Alberto Salazar**

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We are less than 22 hours away until the start of the Prague Marathon and Galen Rupp is testing the roughness of Prague cobblestones. He is trying to get used to the uneven surface that aggravated his foot injury last year during the Prague Half. He does a few strides, running back and forth in one of the busiest parts of the city just outside the Florenc metro station. Hundreds of people are passing by yet nobody recognizes the Nike Oregon Project Star. Of course, there is one more person around that deserves recognition – his coach Alberto Salazar and so our interview begins.

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*Last year you did not travel with Jordan and Galen to the Prague Half so what made you come here this year for the marathon?*

I wanted to go even last year but I had some health problems. As a matter of fact, I was hearing about Prague since I was a kid. I have an older brother Ricardo who introduced me to running and he was a big fan of Emil Zátopek and told me all these stories about him and he ended up naming his first dog Emil. You know people call their dogs all sorts of names but then he named his first son Emilio. (laughter)

So, I have always thought of Zátopek as the beast of Prague. I remember pictures of him grimacing and I always tell people it's important to have a good form but there was a guy who did not a had a great form but was the toughest and would run through the forest with his wife on his back and in his army boots. He was just very inspirational.

*Galen said that Prague would be his first marathon where he can rely on pacemakers. How much could that help him? How do you like the paced races as opposed to championship style races?*

I think it's good to go after fast times if that's exciting. However, with a lot of the major marathons where they use pacemakers you know even halfway through the race that there's just two or three people and really the only sort of drama is whether they can run a certain time of who's going to win out of these two guys.

That's why it's also good to have championship races where you have no idea who is going to win because there are so many people up there and the whole race is tactical and more dramatic. I mean who would have picked Kawauchi to win Boston?

That being said I am happy that tomorrow Galen will work with the pacemakers and go out at 2:06 pace.

*Just a couple weeks ago we saw pacemakers messing up the world-record attempt at the London Marathon ...*

Yeah, they went out to fast. You got to be very careful because you never know in what shape they are. If you tell pacemakers to run the first half in 62:30 even 63:00 could be still okay but if they run 62:00 it could just ruin the race from there.

You have to get pacemakers that are good and make the selection based on their recent results because a lot of times they ran well before but now they're not in shape so they will press really hard to make sure they hit the target but end up running too fast.

Let's say you want a pacemaker to run 63 minutes then you should look for someone who ran 60–61 minutes recently. Not someone who ran 59 minutes a year ago because he has no idea what shape he's in.

*You're right. I was surprised that even such a big organisation as London Marathon could get it so wrong.*

Yeah, you know I coach two Ethiopians (*Sifan Hassan and Yomif Kejelcha*) and I know from them that their idea of where they are in terms of fitness could be all over the place. They run a few workouts and think oh I am gonna run well because they look at just those one or two workouts before they ran a certain time and think that they are ready to do that again but they don't look at the two months of work they did before that time. One single workout doesn't mean anything because you could be very rested and relaxed ... so anyways often they're not misrepresenting their shape but they just don't know.

*You are known for giving your athletes quite impressive post-race workouts. Could you explain the psychology behind that?*

It is a very simple concept. Every two weeks we believe you have to do about 10K of intervals in one training session. Let's say you run a 5K race and get 5K of intervals after that. A hard day turns into a very hard day but then you have a week with just one short workout and you're ready to run the next race. Whereas if you don't run

that 10K worth of intervals that day you're are not gonna do it 3 days later (4 days before the next race). So you either do it on that day or you're not gonna do it. It's just a matter of ticking off that box of workouts that we want to get in. There's nothing physiological about a post-race workout that is creating some extra effect.

*Back in the day running was very simple and mostly about chasing fast times. How do you feel when you watch today's marathons where people dressed like clowns are walking 6-hour marathons.*

I think it's fine! If anyone wants to jog it, walk it in a costume – I am all for that.

There are a lot of running purists who think that everybody's got to be very serious about running and always pushing hard. I probably used to think the same back then but now I am almost sixty and I only run every other day.

The whole world is getting out of shape and obese so the important thing is to be active, go out there and do whatever you can. You know it's always better to run in costume than to sit on the bench. So I'm all for mass participation.

*We are living in the age of social media. Do you use it or maybe even follow your athletes?*

No, I don't go on it. I think you should be running for your own reasons and purposes. This idea that you are promoting yourself is very distant to me. I think that you should let your results speak for itself instead of thinking whether to post this or that.

Also, other than for a few at the very top I never seen anyone a get contract from a large shoe company just because they have a big social media base.

*I know you have a priest with you in Prague and that he brought you luck in Chicago last fall where Galen took the victory ...*

(laughter) Yeah, Pat (*Patrick Conroy – the Chaplain of the U.S. House of Representatives*) is a good friend and a former runner. Galen really enjoys his company. He keeps us relaxed and loose. He will do a mass for us today and

tomorrow. He prepares us psychologically and spiritually. Also, today he and I are gonna go sightseeing and I am very much looking forward to that.

*We are doing this interview in the Czech Republic which is said to be one the least religious countries in the world ...*

I did not realize that until yesterday when me and father Pat were eating at a restaurant and there was a church across the street and he asked the waiter what the name of the church was and he had no idea. Pat than explained to me that after 40 years of the communist rule and discouraging religion a lot people in the country lost their faith.

It was interesting to me. I came from Cuba when I was two and there the communists did the same thing and we left because of that. My father was an engineer and was told by Fidel Castro not to build any more churches so he said I am not gonna stay here.

*Will Cuba ever have its "Velvet Revolution"?*

I think it's starting to open up. Raul Castro stepped down and there's a new president (*Miguel Diaz-Canel*) that seems to be a little bit more open to business and hopefully he can change the country. I haven't gone there since we left but I am hoping to go in the next year or so.

*What's the update on Jordan Hasay after her withdrawal from Boston?*

Jordan is doing fine. She has no more pain and is going to start running soon. I think I overtrained her a bit and she went to visit her family in California and she was running on some hard surfaces that I did not know so we have to be a little bit more careful next time.

*This week Prague has been struggling with a high amount of pollen in the air. How much could that affect Galen's performance?*

I am not worried about that. I looked it up and the pollen levels are higher but not as much for grass pollen which has always caused problems to Galen. Also, he would feel it now already.

*Your marathon PB is still a about 30 seconds faster than Galen's. Is that going to change tomorrow?*

I think Galen has the potential to run 2:05 ... at least. He just needs to get into the right race. If the weather stays the same, this will be by far the best conditions he had for a marathon. So yes, I firmly believe that tomorrow he will run faster than ever before.

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*It's been about 7 hours since Galen won the Prague Marathon in 2:06:07 (third-fastest American all time) and we are walking from the hotel down the Sokolovská street. After ten minutes we arrive in front of the Church of St. Cyril and Method. The evening mass is about to start and we shake hands one last time. What a Sunday that was.*

Foto: Tomáš Luňák