



## **Book Excerpt**

### **Chapter 5: Here We Are Now, Entertain Us**

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***Faster Than Forty***  
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**[www.fasterthanforty.com](http://www.fasterthanforty.com)**

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#### **Weeks 28-40**

The setting was Northeastern University, circa 1989, on a particularly boring weekday morning. Given the psychological makeup of the competitive runner, boredom equaled trouble.

I strolled across campus to the track locker room in Cabot Gym just to see if anything was going on. It was pretty quiet there – just a few guys coming in from early runs or getting ready for workouts. Ken Kaczinski was in the latter group. Kaczinski wasn't actually on the team at the time. He was an upperclassman who had exhausted his eligibility (a common happening at Northeastern, which had five-year curriculum). Still, he was always a welcome presence in the locker room and a good source of veteran insight.

On that particular day, he was a good source of something else...

"What's up, Gomes?" he greeted me.

"Nada. What's up, Kaz?"

"Nada. Going for a run. You in?"

"Nah. I've got the day off. What else is going on?"

"Selling my car. Want it?"

"Dunno. What'cha got?"

"1980 Corolla. You can have it for 25 bucks."

(That's right, he said \$25.)

Sadly, even at that price, that was a lot of money for me. At the time, my monthly budget was \$300... for *everything*. I was sharing a basement room in an off-campus townhouse for \$143 per month. I set aside \$100 per month for food and \$40 for utilities. This left roughly \$17 per month for entertainment. I did a quick analysis:

On the upside, despite the initial sacrifice, a car had the potential for a lot more than 1.5 months' worth of entertainment. On the downside, I knew this car had to come with some problems. There was no mention of a title, no mention of a registration – and I knew that Kaczinski (like many of Northeastern's

crazy runners) had no problems interfacing with the various drifters, street people, and other near-dowells that inhabited Roxbury and approached Northeastern students with all sorts of offers for low-cost contraband. But Kaczinski was always good to me, so I was pretty sure the car would have four tires and a steering wheel. For \$25, I figured that was all it needed.

“Deal.” I fished into my pockets and handed him the money.

He handed me the keys. “Here you go. It’s parked out in front of Maxwell Jumps.”

“Thanks Kaz!” I sprinted out of the locker room toward Maxwell’s, the campus bar. My boring weekday morning just received a jolt of excitement... Time for a joyride! I skidded to a halt in front of Maxwell’s and my new set of wheels – which wasn’t hard to identify, as it was *clearly* the only \$25 automobile on the block.

The car was a dull, indecipherable color. The tint looked like spray paint or maybe even house paint. I didn’t take a close look. I was too busy fumbling with the key to unlock the door. Finally, I got into the car and took a look at my surroundings. Steering wheel? Check. Instrument panel? Check. Stick shift? Check... er, wait a minute. The stick shift was made out of copper. Actually, it was a copper pipe. A removable copper pipe. I didn’t care though; I quickly rationalized that the removable pipe was a form of anti-theft device. The car had a steering wheel and four tires, and it was obviously driveable or Ken couldn’t have navigated it to park on busy Huntington Avenue. That was all I needed.

I put the key in the ignition and was happy to hear the engine turn over. A minute later I was driving down the streets of Boston enjoying my new \$25 whip. I took it for a ride around the block and through the Fenway district. As I was looping around the park past the museum, I came to a red light and stopped. Much to my dismay, I was promptly rear-ended by another vehicle.

I got out of my car, and the driver behind me got out of hers. She clearly looked frazzled. There was blood on her hands and a little bit on her face – but it didn’t look like she received the injuries from our very minor fender-bender. It looked like she had killed someone. I wanted nothing to do with that.

I asked myself a quick question. Which was of more benefit: recouping damages to a \$25 car that I probably legally did not own, or getting the hell away from whatever was going on with this woman? I asked her if she was okay, hoping to quickly send her on her way. In a trembling little voice she said, “Yes.”

I told her she could go, and she didn’t hesitate to react. She got back in her car, pulled around my hoopty and was gone. As for me, I drove the car back to campus as fast as I could. I parked it in the same spot where I found it and ran back to the locker room.

Kaczinski was gone, but my roommate Tom Lahive was at his locker getting ready for a run.

“Hey, Lahive,” I said.

“What’s up, Gomser?”

“Wanna buy a car?”

“How much?”

“Fifty bucks.”

“Sold!” (Lahive needed a much shorter cost-benefit analysis than I had needed.) He gave me the \$50, and I gave him the keys.

Lahive was crazy. He was liable to do anything, anytime, anywhere, for any reason. I actually felt bad for that car – but I had just turned a 100-percent profit in less than an hour, a fact that I knew would infuriate Lahive when he learned it later, so I didn’t feel *too* bad. Any concerns I had for the hoopty were soon validated though. Later that night, Lahive grabbed Damon, another Northeastern track guy, and went for a ride. They cruised around the city and eventually found themselves driving around the Fens – the same park district where I was rear-ended earlier.

Tooling around in an illegal ride wasn’t exciting enough for Lahive, though. To spice things up he decided to take the car off road and drop it straight in the swampy pond in the middle of the park. He threw the transmission in neutral, and the car coasted toward the muck. Looking at Damon in the passenger seat, he calmly said, “Get out.”

The car was picking up steam as it rolled downhill toward the water.

“What?” Damon asked incredulously.

“I said, get out!” Any friend of Lahive was no stranger to insanity, so Damon jumped quickly from the moving vehicle. Lahive jumped as well, just seconds before the car careened into the pond, but much to his dismay, it didn’t sink... at least not as fast as he had hoped. The windows were up, which may have slowed its descent, so Lahive rolled up his pants legs, wrapped his hand and arm with his shirt, waded into the shallow mire, and smashed the driver-side window. Water started rushing in, much to Lahive’s delight.

Damon, now fully emotionally invested in the destruction, raised his leg and karate-kicked through the passenger-side window. Unfortunately for him, a large shard of glass opened up a nasty gash the full length of his lower leg. When it was all said and done, the car sunk, Lahive was happy, and Damon’s track season was over. It was not the strangest thing to have happened...



**Technical Tip** – *The biological/physiological effects of driving and destroying a stolen car don’t vary much from the biological/physiological effects a runner feels as he lines up for a big race. The bigger the stakes, the bigger the body’s chemical reaction. Score-oriented sports may provide a one-two punch. The first punch is the fear. Stepping to the track with a championship at stake, with fans and family watching and teammates depending on you, causes a certain degree of fear... and fear produces a triumvirate of chemical goodies: endorphins, dopamine, and norepinephrine.*

*\*The endorphins mitigate pain while the dopamine and norepinephrine act as performance enhancers. The second punch is the reward. If you win the race, the resulting boost of additional dopamine makes you crave more. The greater the release, the greater the addiction-like symptoms. This cycle can repeat with greater magnitude until the athlete stops winning – but the effects of a loss can be devastating. The brain can cut the dopamine supply in less than two seconds, and euphoria can change to depression.<sup>†</sup> This may explain the bad behavior in many athletes; when the chemical connection is cut, they need to replace it fast... on or off the track or playing field.*

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\* Source: [Google: psychology today + adrenaline + dopamine]

† Source: [Google: money.cnn.com + dopamine]

## Training Log Week 28

Day	Date	Notes	Mileage
Thurs.	8/13/09	5.2 miles on the roads with Ryan O'Connell <sup>‡</sup> and Steve Carnevale, two of Coach Dave's guys from Coyle & Cassidy High School. My quads were sore before I finished. I may have to combine elliptical work with quad strengthening exercises to be ready for the roads.	5.2
Fri.	8/14/09	Quads sore from yesterday, so I only ran 4 miles, albeit at a brisk pace (6:28).	4.0
Sat.	8/15/09	Started my workout with a barefoot mile on the treadmill in 8:00. A lot of research indicates barefoot running will strength muscles in the feet and assist with Achilles issues. After that, I hit the elliptical for an all-out 7-miler. I finished that in 39:55 (5:42 pace) -- very fast, hard workout.	8.0
Sun.	8/16/09	Easy 9 miles at 6:59 pace. The last mile was my 1,500th since my comeback started.	9.0
Mon.	8/17/09	Pretty easy 8 miles at 6:44 pace. Nothing exciting.	8.0
Tues.	8/18/09	Last wk I missed my yoga/Pilates classes. I got back to the full program today, starting with 8 miles on the elliptical at 6:38 pace, then class -- with an emphasis on leg strength and stretching, which I like. Class ended with a heavy dose of abs, which was tough. I felt sick/exhausted after, but the improvements are noticeable.	8.0
Weds.	8/19/09	Terry joined me for a 1-hr session on the elliptical. He's definitely getting in shape... hung with me for 6 miles, at which point I started picking it up. I got through 8 miles in 54:30, which left the door open to complete an extra mile before the hour was up. I busted out a 5:23 to complete 9 miles in 59:53. A good workout considering yesterday's butt kicking. (My hamstrings were sore and tired all day.)	9.0



**Technical Tip** – I researched the use of painkillers as they relate to hard workouts or racing. Using painkillers is not a good idea before workouts or races. There is no evidence that painkillers decrease race-related pain. However, there is ample evidence that taking painkillers before workouts or races can have pretty significant negative effects, which include increased inflammation and increased time to recovery.<sup>§</sup> There is one potential exception: chronic cramps or stitches. In an Internet forum, Coach Tom Cotner advised a runner who suffered bad cramps

to consume two Advil prior to longer races. (This advice was in conjunction with additional abdominal workouts and specific in-race breathing techniques to ward off the cramps as they came on.)



**Food Tip** – Caffeine activates fat reserves and encourages muscles to use that fat as fuel (instead of glycogen). This enables the body to conserve glycogen and therefore perform over a longer period of time before running out of energy. This can be helpful in getting through long Sunday runs or races exceeding 15 minutes in duration (probably the 5K and up for most runners). Glycogen is unlikely to be depleted during a short race.\*\*

Caffeine should only be used once in awhile (to avoid building a tolerance). It should be ingested an hour before performing to optimize its effect. More importantly, caffeine is a blood acidifier. As a result, in shorter races, where lactic acid has the greatest negative impact, caffeine may actually work with hydrogen ions to acidify the blood, causing an athlete to hit the wall sooner.

<sup>‡</sup> Ryan O'Connell ultimately garnered a third-place finish in the Mass. State Meet for Coach Dave and went on to run for Springfield College, where he qualified for the NCAA D-III nationals multiple times. His PRs as of this writing were 1:56 for 800 meters and 3:51 for 1,500 meters.

<sup>§</sup> Source: www.tampabay.com; [Google: "tampa bay times" + "pain killers" + athletes]

\*\* It should be noted, I *did* find additional studies that indicated caffeine ingestion *could* improve performances at shorter races -- but the researchers could not pinpoint the reasons why performances in those studies improved.