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# Once A Runner: A Novel



## Synopsis

Originally self-published in 1978, *Once a Runner* captures the essence of competitive running and of athletic competition in general and has become one of the most beloved sports novels ever published. Originally self-published in 1978, *Once a Runner* captures the essence of competitive running and of athletic competition in general and has become one of the most beloved sports novels ever published. Inspired by the author's experience as a collegiate champion, the story focuses on Quenton Cassidy, a competitive runner at fictional Southeastern University whose lifelong dream is to run a four-minute mile. He is less than a second away when the turmoil of the Vietnam War era intrudes into the staid recesses of his school's athletic department. After he becomes involved in an athlete's protest, Cassidy is suspended from his track team. Under the tutelage of his friend and mentor, Bruce Denton, a graduate student and former Olympic gold medalist, Cassidy gives up his scholarship, his girlfriend, and possibly his future to withdraw to a monastic retreat in the countryside and begin training for the race of his life against the greatest miler in history. A rare insider's account of the incredibly intense lives of elite distance runners, *Once a Runner* is an inspiring, funny, and spot-on tale of one man's quest to become a champion.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

There are 87 other reviews here, so all I will do is offer the following breakdown for people interested in buying this book. Put yourself in one of these categories: a) Competitive runners: this is an incredible book, period. The best part about it is reading about a little tiny nuance in

Quenton's running life and saying to yourself, "I know exactly what he's talking about, wow", which will happen literally hundreds of times. Your hopefully already-substantial appreciation for the sport will likely increase tenfold with this book.

b) The casual runner, recreational, or other athlete: this is an excellent book and is very highly recommended. You probably will not appreciate it to its fullest extent, but there are aspects of the story and how it is told that will be enjoyed by anyone with the capacity for excitement from sports or human physical endeavors.

c) The non-athlete: this book may not make sense to you. Not in the literary sense, but it may seem as though there is little direction in the story, and you might read it and then find yourself thinking that nothing interesting really happened, and you are not really to blame for this. There is still a good chance that you will find it enjoyable, but if you are looking for a piece of literature based on traditional merits (plot, character development, etc) there are likely better books out there for you to spend time on. Clearly I thought this book was one of the best I've ever read. However, I hope this breakdown about who in particular might enjoy it the most was helpful. -Andrew

I'm a sophomore in high school and I'm also an extremely dedicated cross-country and track runner. This book has changed my life! The inspirational story of Quenton Cassidy's runner career left me breathless! The first chapter gave me goose-bumps because it described the start of a race perfectly. I read chapters from the book every night before a big race. Reading about Cassidy's determination gives any runner a boost. This book has to have the most accurate description of a runner's mentality ever written. This is the best book about running I've ever read!

The book was great, easily one of the best I've ever read. The only times I ever put it down were to eat, sleep and run. There was one quote from Cassidy that I feel sums up the book, the main character, and competitive running. I don't know how some one can read this and not be in the mood to run. "It's a simple choice: We can all be good boys and wear our letter sweaters around and get our little degrees and find some nice girl to settle, you know, down, with...take up what a friend of ours calls the hearty challenges of lawn care...Or we can blaze! Become legends in our own time, strike fear in the heart of mediocre talent everywhere! We can scald dogs, put records out of reach! Make the stands gasp as we blow into an unearthly kick from three hundred yards out! We can become God's own messenger delivering the dreaded scrolls! We can race dark Satan himself till he wheezes fiery cinders down the back straightaway! They'll speak our names in hushed tones, 'Those guys are animals' they'll say! We can lay it on the line, bust a gut, show them a pair of clean heels. We can sprint the turn on a spring breeze and feel the winter leave our feet. We can, by God,

let our demons loose and just wail on!"

If you're thinking of buying this book because you like to run and think it will be about the love of running or anything even remotely like that, don't bother. I'm 38 and have run throughout my adult years after I stopped smoking in my 20's. Running has always represented so many different things to me - about goal setting, accomplishing what I thought wasn't possible, and about the meditative nature of the journey of the long run and being alone with my thoughts while purifying my body. This isn't a book about any of that. This is a book about the elite runner and the near-mythic life they lead and the select group of running gods they surround themselves with (poorly written in a high-school-and-college-were-the-best-years-of-my-life kind of way replete with fraternal shenanigans and the smugness of the naturally gifted). People like me are dismissed in the first chapter as pathetic specimens using running to achieve some other ends that people like the author just can't comprehend. I'm not knocking all of the work these elite athletes do, and realize it's not all just handed to them, but the tone of this book is just off. Instead of opening up that world and exploring, this book just has the feel of exclusion and exclusiveness. I'm definitely not inspired.

Once a Runner is the best running book I have ever read. Unlike training guides or running stories that spend far too much time explaining the beauty of running and trying to introduce people to the wonders of jogging around, Once A Runner really goes into the life and mind of a runner (though the book uses fictional characters, they are easily recognizable and realistic). It describes the dedication, hard work, and goofiness that is required to be successful and what makes runners a very unique, though certainly interesting breed. The story itself, of a young college-aged runner and his quest to run the fastest mile he could while in school and after he got kicked out, is extremely well paced and smoothly written, just as a good race. It is a fantastic book and I would highly recommend it for beginners, enthusiasts, or someone who just needs a little motivation.

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