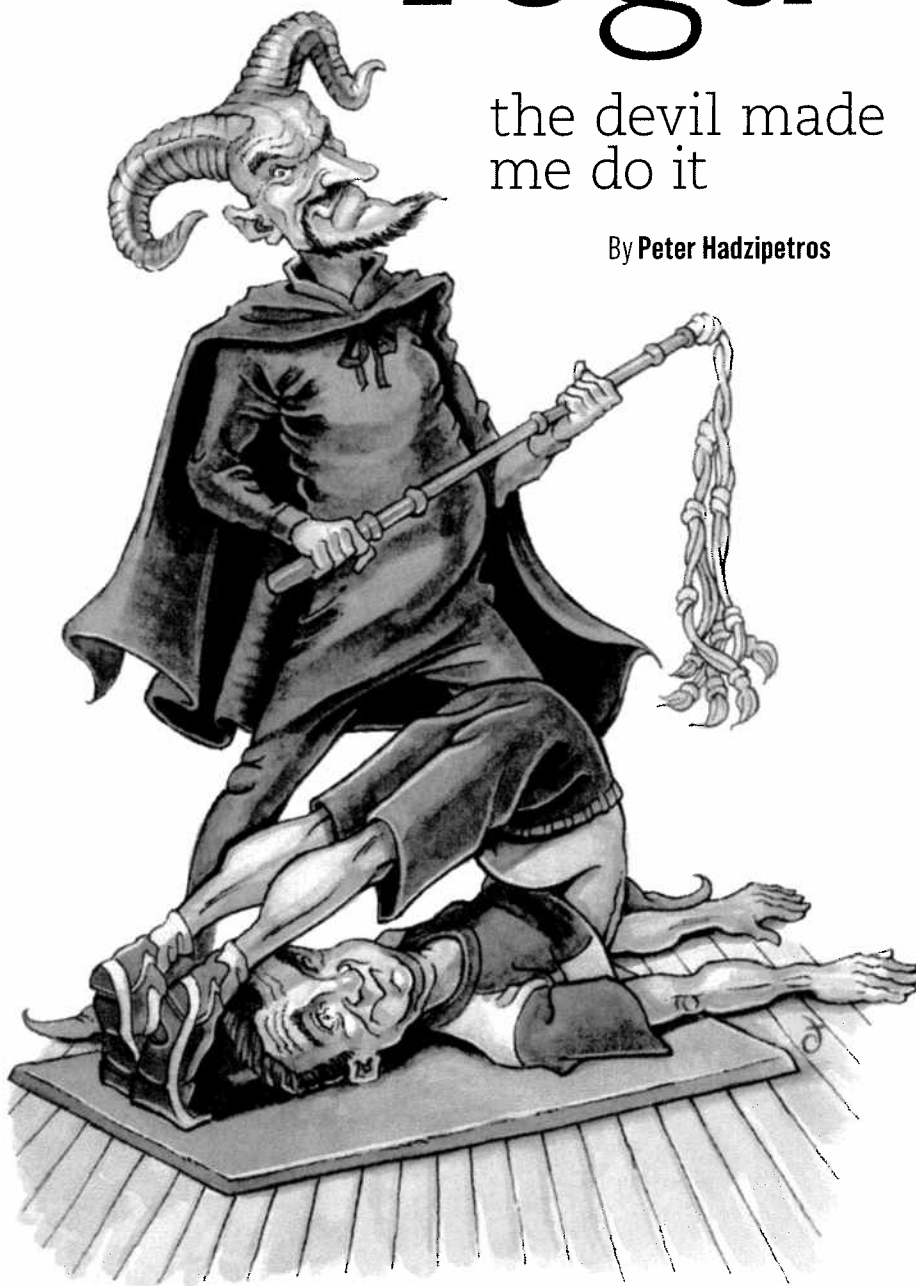


# Yoga

the devil made me do it

By Peter Hadzipetros



RUNNERS ARE A SUPPORTIVE LOT. We're ready to chip in with a piece of advice for buddies who are looking to kick their game up a notch. At the same time, we know our bodies – know what's best for us. So when we hit a rough patch – say, a two-year performance slump riddled with a series of personal worsts – we approach it calmly, logically and confidently.

Yeah, right. We'd sell our souls to the devil if it meant shaving five minutes off a PB.

Did a lot of soul searching after my second consecutive sub-sub-par marathon last spring. Training hard during those dark, cold months of winter seemed to turn things around. It seemed like I was making progress – breaking the hold the slump had on me. But once the gun went off, my body rebelled yet again.

What to do, to turn things around?

As I contemplated this season's plan – just before placing that call to ol' Beelzebub – a friend made a radical suggestion.

"Stretch," she said as she pushed some stretching manifesto into my hands. "Before and after you run."

No way, no how. Dammit, I'm as flexible as I need to be. And besides, I clearly remember age-group ace Ed Whitlock pooh-poohing the "fine art of stretching." Didn't do him any good, he said. Only thing that improved his running was running more. If it's good enough for Ed, it's good enough for me.

Science has yet to prove that stretching will improve your performance and prevent you from getting injured. Still, recovery from this year's Boston was stubbornly slow. A little too much step, step, ouch, step, step, ouch, ouch, step, ouch.

The Prince of Darkness beckoned. Or maybe it was just an online ad. Yoga for Runners. Talk about an oxymoron. Runners run – they don't flit off to some class with their spouse's floral-patterned pink mat slung over their shoulder. No way do they sit in an overheated room with a bunch of aging flower children staring off into space with a foot wedged behind their head.

How's that going to get you across the line any faster? How's that going to fix running that's rotten to the core? Ah, the core. Could it be that one or more of my seven chakras are out of whack and a few well-directed poses will realign them and make me an age-group contender again?

I wasn't ready for an hour and a quarter with Christine the yogic pretzel queen.

"On your back, legs up and apart and grab your feet. Hold the happy baby position. Now push your legs out."

"Ooh, I don't think so," I protested.

Five more poses and all you could hear – besides the rhythmic breathing of the regulars – was my sweat drip, drip, dripping onto my mat.

I don't DNF – not in a marathon, not in a yoga class. And, as I stumbled out of that room on rubbery legs, I vowed to be back. It took years of running to be able to see my toes again. Might be nice to be able to touch them once in while, too.

I'll give this yoga thing a whirl. But stretching? Forget it. ■