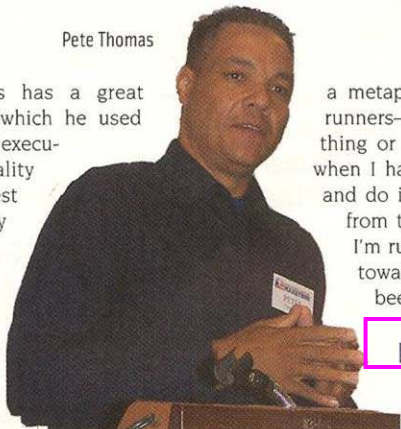


Reality Bug Bites Detroit

Photos and Text by Jennifer DeMoss

Pete Thomas

Pete Thomas has a great sense of humor, which he used to perfection with executives of the reality show "The Biggest Loser" last year. By playing one-liners like, "Men could not have summaries," and "Fat sex hard work," Thomas was invited onto the show and since lost over



100 pounds. The Detroit native is going to be running his first full marathon this year and, no matter what his time, when he crosses the finish line this year he'll be a winner.

Thomas's weight problems stemmed from transient childhood. "I never learned proper eating habits," said Thomas. His mother suffered from mental illness and was sometimes unable to provide the basics for her children.

He was able to cover up his poor eating habits by playing a lot of sports in high school, but when he got married and settled down, the weight started to creep up on him. "My wife asked me to stop playing basketball with my friends all of the time, and I agreed," he said. "Later, she told me that she didn't mean that I should stop exercising at all."

When his wife saw "The Biggest Loser" on TV, she encouraged her husband to try out for season 3. They both auditioned for the show, but only Pete made the cut. Once on the show he toned down his sense of humor and focused on burning calories. Although he didn't win the jackpot at the end of the season, he left 83 pounds lighter.

But Thomas didn't stop there. While on the show he began running. He said he liked the fact that he didn't have to have any special equipment—just a pair of comfortable shoes and miles of road. He lost another 103 pounds on his own exercising regularly and paying attention to nutrition advice he received on "The Biggest Loser." Those extra pounds he lost helped him win \$100,000 at a reunion show.

"I noticed that for me running has become

a metaphor for life," said Thomas. "We're all runners—we're either running away from something or running towards something. On days when I have no motivation I lace up my shoes and do it anyway, and those days I'm running from the old Pete. On days that I feel good I'm running towards something. I'm running towards my future, and for me the key has been just to keep running."

Reality Star or Marathon Director?

Thomas isn't the only person involved with the marathon this year who's participated in a reality show.

Race Director Pat Ball decided to try out for "X-treme Warrior for Women," a new reality show that will be aired this winter, after seeing an ad on TV. "I wasn't feeling energetic. I had no motivation, and I was at an all time low in my ability to get my fitness back to the level that I wanted." She hoped that the reality show would give her the motivation she needed to get back on track.

The show's mission really struck a chord with Ball. "One of the things they were hoping to do was produce a show to motivate people to get up off the couch," she said. "I really found that intriguing because I like to motivate people to be fit, and that matched some of my life goals."

Ball auditioned for the show, which consisted of what she called "nine minutes of pain." A few weeks later she got the call that informed her to meet her fellow warrior women in an undisclosed location, where they all hopped aboard an RV with all of their supplies. "I was thinking, what am I doing? I don't know these people!" said Ball. As soon as she learned their destination she relaxed, thinking that she was getting a free weekend in paradise. In reality, she

was about to face one of the most incredible physical challenges of her life.

The women were organized into two teams. Ball spent the next two days accomplishing feats of strength and endurance that she never thought were possible.

"At one point we had to run into Lake Michigan and when we couldn't run anymore we had to swim," she recounted. "I told Omar that I couldn't swim and he told me to go ahead and try. When I asked him what would happen if I started to sink he said, 'You sink, you die.'"

Because the show has not yet aired, the outcome of that situation and other details will be left to your imagination for now.

Ball said she loved the opportunity to meet and encourage women athletes. "I would say that the most fun thing for me was the camaraderie of women with different strengths and weaknesses. And I learned to box!"

She was even grateful to Omar for the physical challenges. "He was a lot of fun," said Ball. "He's in amazing shape and he understands the power of influencing the body through the mind."

The toughest part for Ball was not the physical effort, but the mental effort. "It was a continual battle with my mind saying 'you don't have to do this' or worse, 'you can't do this, you don't have the strength, you're the oldest, what are you doing here?' There were all of those negative thoughts that we feed ourselves."

Despite the battle with her mind Ball made it through the weekend. She recovered from her experience and has been working steadily on the Detroit Marathon ever since. She said she learned a lot about teamwork and about pushing her body to the limits. So if you see her on race weekend, it may be worth asking if she ever hears Omar's "damn whistle" in her head as she's drifting towards sleep.



Pat Ball