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Armstrong runs with a purpose

By Pat Milton, Associated Press
November 6, 2004

NEW YORK - Like a lot of people, Lance Armstrong's former wife took up running as a way to get in shape.

Now, a couple of years later, Kristin Armstrong has other motivations as she prepares for the New York City Marathon on Sunday.

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The 33-year-old mother of three wants to raise awareness and money for Fertile Hope, a group that helps cancer patients preserve their chances of having children.

She also hopes to inspire others to dig deep for an inner strength to go beyond where they thought they could.

And, on a personal note, Armstrong knows running helped on her road to healing from a broken marriage.

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"It's a spiritual experience," she said Friday at the Tavern on the Green restaurant, not far from the marathon's finish line. "It is a way to clear your mind and do something positive for your body and spirit. It makes you feel clean."

Her five-year marriage to Lance ended in 2003, soon after the cancer survivor returned home to his family after a record-tying fifth consecutive victory in the Tour de France. He added a sixth consecutive win in cycling's most prestigious event earlier this year.

"What he did was on a completely different level," she said. "He is so amazing. I'm just doing my own private thing in my own way."

The resident of Austin, Texas, runs 5 to 7 miles a day, five times a week, usually while pushing a three-seater baby jogger carrying her son Luke, 5, and twin girls, Grace and Isabelle, 3.

Armstrong ran in the Dallas White Rock Marathon in January, her first attempt at the 26.2-mile event, after two friends urged her to join them in training for the race. It was a way to get her to take better care of herself when they noticed her losing weight after the divorce.

To her great joy, she finished the Dallas race in 3 hours, 48 minutes, gritting through cramps in her calf muscles.

Two other friends will join her in the New York race: Cassandra Henkiel, a long-distance runner and her coach; and Nancy Hill, an ironman competitor. The three will wear white T-shirts with a blue Fertile Hope logo.

Armstrong said she would not have been able to have children without a doctor making her husband aware of alternatives, such as sperm banks, when he had cancer and received chemotherapy treatment.

"That is why I feel so passionately about Fertile Hope," she said. "It gives those with cancer who want a family a reason to survive, a future, hope."

Her ritual before every race: "A prayer and a peanut butter sandwich," she said.

Before she left Texas for New York, Armstrong said her children hugged her and gave her a stuffed unicorn that delivers a message when it is squeezed: "I love you, Mommy. Run faster."

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