
International Students Take up the Challenge of Volkswagen Prague Marathon

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Everyone who enjoys sport or be physically active admits that a big part of it is the challenge – and marathons have always been considered a top target amongst sportsmen and women. Whether you're young or old, experienced or totally new, the challenge of training for and completing a marathon brings together everyone who embraces the joy of running and of achievement. This year, at the Prague Marathon, this was clear in the self-motivation, determination and cheerful smiles of all its participants at the starting line. And, amongst these thousands of people, 10 exchange students of Charles University in Prague from all over the world decided to show what they are capable of and be a part of the Volkswagen Marathon Weekend 2014, which was celebrating its 20th anniversary.



<blockquote class="rightfloat"> <p> The first 20km were okay. I had a good pace and breath. But after that it went worse. I was really tired and after finished, I felt so relieved. </p> <cite>Joao Carvalho</cite> </blockquote>

From the early morning hours, Old Town Square was crowded and preparations were in full swing, organising supplies of energy drinks, nutritious food and setting up various health related stalls and stands. Everywhere you looked, there were runners warming up with their supportive friends or families. This year, the event had something for everyone including a full marathon, a relay, team competitions, a family mini-marathon and even a dog walking race – the only thing required was some energy and encouragement!

Four enthusiasts from the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports – Spanish students Oscar Chouza and Alberto Cuadrado, French Morgan Zugasti and Canadian Colin Davey – did us proud by training hard together and taking up the relay marathon, which entailed teams of 4; 3 of which were running 10 km each and the last finishing off the final 12.195 km. When I asked the students what were their motivations, they simply said: to be a part of it and to try something new and ambitious during their Erasmus stay in Prague. “It is something to remember”, commented Alberto.

Each of them have their sporting interests in different fields including rugby, football and tennis. Previously, their only experience of relay races were at school and some of them hadn't even attempted a 10 km distance before! Nevertheless, they had their fitness behind them from their regular sporting activities and time as Physical Education students, and the opportunity to participate seemed to excite them a lot more than achieving a world record breaking finish. "I just want to take some pleasure in running with a lot people and to benefit from this beautiful city that is Prague", said Morgan.

Still, this international team appeared more than happy with their 10th best finishing time of 03:15:33, completing each segment of relay in 43-54 minutes, by vocally encouraging each other along the way and keeping up a fighting spirit throughout.

<blockquote class="rightfloat"> **<p>** I was actually quite tired after the run; however, I don't really have an excuse because everyone around me had just completed a full marathon... which was much longer than the 12 km I completed! **</p>**
<cite>Colin</cite> **</blockquote>**

Another amazing international team of Charles University consisted of six friends from six different European countries, all hosted by the First Faculty of Medicine – Florian Wartenberg (Germany), Branko Popadic (Austria), Louise Lenoble (France), Joao Carvalho (Portugal), Francesco Antolini (Italy), Kyril Boschung (Switzerland), who all decided to take on the whole 42.195 km distance and have been busy preparing since the early spring, training 2-3 times per week. Florian and Kyril held the most experience in the group from their previous marathons, but the rest of the team were sure used to endurance sports – Branko plays basketball, Francesco enjoys swimming and water polo, Joao is keen of skiing, and Louise already had a half marathon under her belt. For them, the marathon was an irresistible opportunity on Erasmus for furthering their personal endeavours and creating unforgettable memories. Unfortunately, the team didn't quite finish as it started, as Branko had an injury during his training and was unable to participate. But this still didn't stop him from turning up and cheering on his friends. Louise also later had to stop due to an injury she had not recovered from, so the remaining four pioneered on with the rest of the crowd, taking 15 minutes to depart from the starting line due to the volume of runners! They finished to the sound of applause, overwhelmed from their accomplishment of 03:47:43, as they were predicting a finish in 4-5 hours. Happy with their result, they said they can't wait to do it all again.

With high emotions, a sensational atmosphere, and cheers all around from friends and family, the day had been truly inspirational. It was a pleasure to see such passionate people running for both fun and for success. Congratulations to both international teams and good luck with your future sporting ambitions – you've convinced me to get my running shoes on now!



By: Edvinas Vensas is a 3rd year BA student in Physical Education from Lithuania currently studying for 1 semester at Charles University, Prague. He enjoys various physical activity, travelling, learning new things and challenging experiences. Edvinas is aiming to write articles about physical activity and has decided to join iForum because he wants to gain journalistic skills.



Proofreading: Poppy Gerrard-Abbott is an Erasmus student studying BA Humanities at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University and her home university is the University of Essex in England. She chose to write for the iForum to build on her journalism skills and meet other aspiring journalists; to grow closer to the social and creative life of Charles University and to learn more about Czech culture and life in Prague through attending local events and researching Czech issues and current affairs.

Poppy saw the iForum as an exciting opportunity to pursue her interests in politics, culture and history whilst meeting other Erasmus students. She thinks it's a very worthwhile and fun experience that has brought some exciting opportunities her way, extended her writing skills and her knowledge of the Czech Republic, and hopes Charles University continues to offer such placements to future students.