

Marathon Man Aims for No. 7, Helps Orphans

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Peers is running for Kostroma kids.

When runners finish a five-kilometer race close to the Kremlin on Sunday, one runner will keep on going. Richard Peers, a 26-year-old Englishman, will have more than three hours left to run as he attempts to complete his seventh marathon in less than two months.

It will be Peers' fourth marathon in Russia as he tries to raise \$50,000 to help local orphans.

Peers decided to raise money after meeting Jody Payne, coordinator of the Kostroma Kids Program, while teaching English in Russia earlier this year.

“[It] stuck with me, and I knew I wanted to do something positive and productive for the issue of child poverty when I next visited Russia,” Peers said in an interview before he ran his first marathon in Moscow last month. He finished that marathon in 3 hours, 53 minutes and then moved on to St. Petersburg to run again before his sixth marathon in Tallinn, Estonia.

Peers, a coach and scout for the Junior Development Centre of the English Premier League club Burnley, started his runs with a marathon in Rwanda where he also trained local kids and helped out in a school. He then moved on to run marathons in Odessa and Krasnodar before reaching Moscow.

Things have not always gone smoothly: The intense heat of Rwanda required more than five hours for the marathon — his first ever — and he was originally supposed to run in Yalta but it proved too expensive to travel and stay there.

Some Russians have been less than friendly at times on the run, but Peers still jumped at the chance to return to run one more marathon. His original plan was to run only five.

Nike, which is organizing the five-kilometer run, invited Peers back to run in the race.

Peers said he hoped that the money raised would be used so that “some good can touch the lives of children that are not blessed with the fantastic education and opportunities that we have in the U.K.”

“Most people make donations, but Richard has decided to go well beyond that in attempting to raise awareness and dramatically expand the pool of donors helping the kids in the orphanages,” Payne said. “A donation of \$50,000 would allow us to greatly expand the number of kids we reach and allow us to increase the number of programs we run.”

“Funds raised for the project are used on clothing needs, personal items, excursions and other activities,” said Jonathan Soverns, chief operating officer of the Ascent Russian Orphan Aid Foundation, which runs the Kostroma Kids Program.

“Jody has focused on one very important aspect of philanthropy, which is the personal touch and interaction with the kids,” Soverns said. “More than anything else, these brave children need to know that someone does care about them and their future.”

If you want to sponsor Richard Peers go to www.europeanruns.com. The Ascent Russian Orphan Aid Foundation also accepts donations at www.russianorphan.org.

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