

Anthony Reed

The First Black in the World to Run 26.2 Mile Marathons on All Seven Continents

Anthony Reed is a CPA, information technology consultant, adjunct professor and international speaker. He has two undergraduate and two graduate degrees. However, his true passions are writing, photography and running. Along with Charlotte Simmons-Foster, he co-founded the National Black Marathoners Association. This is a not-for-profit organization that promotes long distance running and walking.

Anthony has run over ninety 26.2 mile marathons. Along the way, he became the first Black in the world to run marathons on all seven continents, including Antarctica. At that time, fewer than 225 people in the world had accomplished this feat. To put this in perspective, over 2,400 people summited Mt. Everest. About 500 reached the summit in 2007 alone. His adventures were chronicled in his book, *Running Shoes Are Cheaper Than Insulin: Marathon Adventures On All Seven Continents* (available at www.Reed-CPA.com or www.Amazon.com).

BSTM sat down with Anthony away from his busy schedule to talk about one of his passions, running:

BSTM: Why did you start running?

Anthony: I was diagnosed with a pre-diabetic condition around eight years old. The doctors told me that I would be on insulin by the time I was a teenager. Fortunately, I was so active in high school sports that I did not have to take any medications. In college, I read that diabetics, who were physically active, were able to decrease their insulin medication or go completely off of it. So, I decided to maintain a life-long fitness program to avoid becoming an insulin-dependent diabetic. This led to the title of my book, *Running Shoes Are Cheaper Than Insulin: Marathon Adventures On All Seven Continents*.

BSTM: When did you run your first marathon (26.2 miles)?

Anthony: My first marathon was the 1982 Ft. Worth (TX) Cowtown Marathon. I was 27 years old. There were fewer than ten Blacks in the race, including a set of twins. Ricky Cox, a local Black runner, won the marathon. He became a multiple winner. In 1991, Wesley R. Brown became Cowtown's first Black female winner. She went on to win two of next three years. It felt great to be associated with an event that had so many local Black American winners. Wesley may return to Cowtown to help the National Black Marathoners Association (www.BlackMarathoners.org) celebrate our Historic 5th Annual Gathering on February 28. I plan to complete my 100th marathon that day.

BSTM: What's your fastest marathon?

Anthony: It was 3 hours, 36 minutes, and 45 seconds at the 1984 Dallas White Rock Marathon. My slowest was about seven and a half hours at the 2006 Great Wall of China Marathon. I stopped and took over 100 photos during the race and had a great time.

BSTM: What was the smallest marathon in which you have participated?

Anthony: The smallest marathon was probably the 1983 Day Break Marathon in Wills Point, TX. There were fewer than 20 people.



Reed's first marathon - 1982 Cowtown

The race registration was held out of the back of a pickup truck. There were no t-shirts, published race results, certificates or finisher medals.

BSTM: What started you on your quest to become the first Black in the world to run marathons on all seven continents, including Antarctica?

Anthony: It really was not a "quest" to make history, so I did not have a timetable. I simply wanted to be healthy enough to enjoy my life and travel after my children were out of high school. My first international marathon was not completed until 2004. This was 22 years after I started. I took a weekend side trip to run Denmark's Tailwinds Marathon during my first European business trip. There were fewer than 60 people in the race, and I was the only American and Black.



Photo provided by Anthony Reed

Humpback Whale - 2007 Antarctica Marathon

A few months later, I had decided to complete marathons on all seven continents. Although I did not have a timetable, I knew that I wanted Africa to be the final jewel. This goal also allowed me to combine my favorite activities; running, travelling, photography and writing. The one logistical problem was the Antarctica Marathon. It was held every two years. It always sold out as soon as the applications were available. The race was hosted by Marathon Tours and Travels (MTT). The next Antarctica Marathon was in 2007.

BSTM: Where was your next international marathon?

Anthony: For over 20 years, my goal was to run a marathon on my birthday, July 2. Since my 50th birthday was on a weekend, I could not think of a better way to celebrate. There were only two marathons that weekend; the Leadville (CO) and the Gold Coast Airport (Australia) Marathons. So, I went to Australia in 2005.

The day after the marathon, we toured the Lamington National Park. The 2007 Antarctica Marathon application and check were in my pocket. However, I was still undecided about submitting it. After a short hike, the tour guide stopped in front of a tree. It was the *Dicksonia Antarctica* tree. I took this as an omen and submitted my entry form for the 2007 race.

BSTM: Did you run any other international marathons before the 2007 Antarctica Marathon?

Anthony: In May 2006, I completed the Great Wall of China Marathon. The weather conditions were less than ideal. It was hot and humid. There were more than 3,600 steps on the course. At the Great Wall, I met Rudy Smith of Gretna, Louisiana. He became the second Black to complete the seven continents marathon goal at 65 years old. It was a small world.

During my two weeks in China, we went to Beijing, Xian, and Shanghai. This gave us opportunities to see the Olympic Stadium, Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City, and the Terra-Cotta Warriors.

BSTM: How was Antarctica?

Anthony: In February 2007, I departed for Antarctica. We sailed for two days from Ushuaia, Argentina, through the Drake Passage to reach Antarctica. The weather was unpredictable, and I had never been on an ocean bound ship. We were told that we could experience either the "Drake Quake" (i.e. rough seas with 30 foot waves) or the "Drake Lake" (i.e. calm waters). Half of the adventure was just getting to the race location.

They told us that more people visit a Walt Disney theme park in one day, than have ever set foot on Antarctica. Our ship, the *Akademik Ioffe*, was a converted Russian research vessel. It was 386 feet long and housed 110 passengers. A Caribbean cruise ship, such as the *Carnival Conquest*, is 953 feet long and houses 2,974 passengers. While our ship was very safe, you could feel the waves. It was not unusual to hold onto your dishes during your meals while we were in the Drake Passage.

We arrived at the Russian research facility, Bellinghousen. Since we were not allowed inside the buildings, we changed clothes underneath them in sub-freezing temperatures. Our clothes remained there during the race. There were no aid stations or portalets during the race. At the starting line, I could not help but notice that I was the only Black in the race. We ran through about 600 feet of ankle-deep mud four times, up an icy glacier twice, and were chased by fur seals. Our spectators were mostly penguins. This was not your typical big city marathon.



Photo provided by Anthony Reed

Young Kenyan fans at the 2007 Lewa SafriCom Marathon

Seven days later, the ship returned to Ushuaia. The next day, I completed the Fin del Mundo (End of the World) Marathon on March 6. Completing marathons within eight days on two continents during one trip was a real experience.

BSTM: What prompted you to run your African marathon a few months after Antarctica and Argentina?

Anthony: The only remaining marathon was Africa. I planned to complete this in 2008. However, two of my fellow marathon tour mates, Jill Parker and Gillian Brewer, encouraged me to finish the African marathon with them in 2007. It would be the final continent for all three of us. We had formed a bond after completing marathons in Asia, Antarctica, and South America together. My girlfriend (now wife), Deborah Valrie, encouraged me to “strike while the iron was hot.”

Kenya’s Lewa SafriCom Marathon was the final jewel. It was held on June 23, 2007, in the Lewa Wildlife Sanctuary, and was rated as one of the top ten toughest marathons in the world. (The Antarctica and Great Wall Marathons were also on the list.) The altitude is over 5,500 feet above sea level. The air was dry, and the temperatures were warm.

Many people had required medical attention after previous races and two had died. The day before the marathon, we saw rhinos, cheetahs and zebras on the marathon course. The animals roamed freely during the race. Needless to say, it was a nerve racking run. This was the first race where I was not in the minority.

It was so inspirational to witness a sea of Black runners. I recently experienced the same feeling at Dallas’ Kwanzaa Fest 5K Race.

BSTM: Tell me about becoming the first Black to complete the seven continents marathon goal?

Anthony: A few weeks after my return to the States, I learned that I had become the first Black to complete this seven continents goal. I was 51 years old at the time. My detailed logs of my journeys helped me to catalog thousands of my photos. Subsequently, this material, including over 250 photos, was the basis for my book, *Running Shoes Are Cheaper Than Insulin: Marathon Adventures On All Seven Continents*.

BSTM: What did you learn from your travels and adventures?

Anthony: It’s one thing to read about history or watch it on TV. It’s a completely different thing to see the sights and experience the surroundings, cultures and people. For example, my wife and I had seen many photos of the Eiffel Tower. However, we did not know that it has a light show at night, until we were in Paris. I have seen silk rugs made by hand in China, Deft dishes hand painted in the Netherlands, avalanches in Antarctica and herds of elephants in Africa. The trips were like living in a National Geographic Special.

BSTM: Did you have any early running role models?

Anthony: My earliest distance running role model in the 1970’s was activist and comedian Dick Gregory. I read about his collegiate cross country running exploits in his book, *Nigger: An*

A Cheetah on the Marathon Course in Kenya



Photo provided by Anthony Reed

Autobiography, while in college. My other source of early inspiration was a book by Sam Greenlee entitled *The Spook Who Sat By The Door*. In his book, he described a Chicago gang member, who was also long distance runner.

BSTM: What was it like to make Black history?

Anthony: It made me feel both proud and thankful at the same time. Who would have thought that a 51 year old, who was raised in St. Louis' inner city, could travel around the world and make Black sports history. My late Aunt, Ressie Kiel, was known as the family international traveler. She strongly believed in sharing her experiences with inner city children and youth.

I spend part of my time talking with inner city and incarcerated youth about my adventures in the hopes that they will venture beyond their neighborhoods and experience the world. My book, *The Achievement Equation: Your Formula For Success*, helps people to reach their personal and professional goals.

BSTM: Do you and your wife exercise together?

Anthony: My wife, Deborah, is a minister and writer. When we first met, she was a swimmer. Afterwards, she added bicycling and running to her workouts. She participated in her first triathlon a few days after her 52nd birthday. This has become her annual event. We go biking and running together. Each Thanksgiving,

we run in her hometown's Turkey Trot race.

BSTM: Did you have sponsors?

Anthony: No. However, I'd like to have some for my future adventures.

BSTM: What's your next goal?

Anthony: The seven continents goal was completed before Deborah and I were married on June 7, 2008. We decided to run half marathons on islands on all seven continents. This might include Madagascar (Africa), Bermuda (North America), Iceland (Europe), and Easter Island (South America). Also, we are talking about running a marathon on Mt. Everest. I have always wanted to see the mountain, so why not run a marathon at the same time?

I would also like to return to Africa with members of the National Black Marathoners Association and participate in a half or full marathon. It would be great to have some bid, spades, and hearts players to help pass the time on the flights.

BSTM: How may people contact you?

Anthony: I may be reached at:
www.AchievementEquation.com or www.BlackMarathoners.org.