

This family has made running a day to enjoy



Maria Martinez, left, Victor Palma, back center, and Eva Contreras are not only competitive runners, but they have made running a family activity. Usually, three of Eva's four children will run and both of Maria's will. Maria's daughter Daisy, 14, (in the dark/light pink jacket) has been posting some fast times since she was 12. Maria and Eva, sisters, have been running competitively for only a relatively short time, but already they've logged quite a list of achievements.

By Charles Clines

While some family's activities might include watching TV together and chomping on snacks, sisters Maria Martinez and Eva Contreras take their children to road races to run. ``It's our family activity," said Maria, who has become one of the DFW's better runners since she began running competitively about three years ago. They said the races are ``our family time and it's a healthy activity."

``I think they enjoy just as much coming to the park (Trinity Park) and having fun," said Eva, who also has become one of the better runners since she began competitive running about a year and a half ago. ``And I think they want to be like mom and dad...run fast, wear bibs and look like actual runners." Eva has four children from ages 14 to 4 and Maria has two from ages 14 to 9. Her daughter Daisy, 14, already has posted some fast times since she was 12 and is gaining back speed after taking some time off from competitive running. ``I think she was getting burned out a little," Maria said.

Maria began running when husband Victor Palma ``made her." She said it wasn't much fun at first, but now ``I'm addicted to it."

``Now I can't stop her," Victor said.

``It's our addiction," Eva said. It must be considering their devotion to the sport. She and Maria must fit in their training runs about 4:30 in the mornings before they have to get their children ready for school.

Maria has run four marathons and won the Fiesta Marathon in December (2009) in Victor's home town of McAllen. She ran a 3:32, about two minutes slower than her PR she set at the Fort Worth Marathon a month before Fiesta. She and Eva are planning to run the Cowtown Marathon. Eva has run seven marathons and set her PR of 3:04 in her first attempt at the 2008 San Antonio Marathon.

Both were not complete novices when they started running competitively, though. They said their dad had taken them running since they were about six years old. They would run about a mile or mile and a half. ``And that's a long way when your six and seven," Maria said. Neither ran track or cross country when in school.

Eva said she jumped into a competitive mode when she began trying to catch Daisy. ``I told her I'd catch her one day. It took me a little while, but I finally did."

Their most recent marathon was at Waco on Jan. 31. Even though Maria won the 30-34 age division and Eva was second in the 35-39 division, both ran almost an extra mile after taking a wrong turn. ``We were running together, talking and just having fun," Maria said. Instead of paying attention to the markings on the course, they followed two men in front of them when they made a turn, except it was the wrong way. After it finally dawned on everyone they were going the wrong way, then retraced their steps to return to the course. They figure they ran about 27.1 miles that morning.

Victor ran track in McAllen and said their teams usually qualified for state. He said he is nursing a sore knee and will miss Cowtown. He has run three marathons and has a 3:04. His goal is to dip under the three-hour mark and he wants to run Boston in 2011. Victor said his kids were introduced early to running when he'd take them out in jogging strollers. And they've been going out ever since. ``They like it."