

Ep #239: How to Process a DFL or DNF



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Jill Angie

[The Not Your Average Runner Podcast](#) with Jill Angie

Ep #239: How to Process a DFL or DNF

Welcome to *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. If you're a woman who has never felt athletic but you still dream about becoming a runner, you are in the right place. I'm Jill Angie, a certified running and life coach, and I teach women how to start running, feel confident, and change their lives. And now I want to help you.

Hey, runners. Big things are afoot here in Not Your Average Runner land. Now, first of all, Andy and I are getting ready to move to Philly. We are both super excited for many reasons. But one really fun thing is that we are going to have tons of new places to run. Now, I've actually done dozens of races in Philadelphia, but pretty much all of them have started and ended at the art museum. And of course, that is a beautiful area, the Rocky statue is there. It's a fun place to run.

But I'm actually looking forward to running along the Delaware River, checking out some of the parks in the south part of the city, exploring our new neighborhood on foot. It's going to be so fucking fun. So I'm going to make sure that I give you lots of updates after we get settled. But for right now, oh my God, I'm so excited.

Now, the other really big news I have is that the Rebel Runner Roadmap is changing her name. Oh my goodness. Now, it's starting with the next class, which is going to be open for registration at the end of March. Starting with that class the roadmap is going to be called Up And Running, because that's exactly what happens when you take the class, you get up and running.

Now it's still going to have all of the awesome content and community that you have come to love. So mark your calendars for March 30th so you don't miss it. Oh, and did you notice that I opened this podcast by saying "Hey, runners," instead of "Hey, Rebels"? That's because I want to make sure that I address you properly.

[The Not Your Average Runner Podcast](#) with Jill Angie

Ep #239: How to Process a DFL or DNF

Now, I know you're a rebel, but not everybody identifies as a rebel, right? Sometimes people are like, "I don't feel so rebellious." But you are a runner, okay? Even if you haven't started running yet. Even if it's the very first episode of this podcast that you're listening to, thinking, "I don't know, maybe I want to be a runner, I'm not sure yet." I want you to start identifying as a runner. You're a runner at heart and I'm going to honor your runner identity. So from here on out, that's what I'm going to call you.

Okay, so today we have a very, very important topic. And that is how to process a DNF or a DFL. And for the uninitiated, here's what that stands for, DNF means did not finish. And DFL means dead fucking last.

Now, a DNF can happen when you literally just can't finish, like something happens and you say, "Hey, oh, I'm done here. I'm out," right? I DNF'd the Philadelphia marathon that way, a few years ago. 13 miles, I knew I was donezo. I had blisters all over my feet, I was like, "That's it, I'm out." I flagged down a van and I got a ride back.

But a DNF can also happen when you fall behind the pacing requirements of the race. For example, with some Disney races you have to make it to a certain point on the course by a certain time or you're going to get swept. And by swept, that simply means they're going to come up to you with a van, they'll say, "Hey, you want to get in the van?" It's not like they're creepy weirdos asking you to get in the van, they're very nice people. But they'll ask you to hop in and then they will fast forward you to the finish line.

So even if you may have been capable of finishing the distance for that particular race, you might also have to finish it within a certain time frame or they're going to tag you as not finishing. And, you know, it's a bummer. But that's also just part of some races. And so when you sign up for a race, you always want to know what is the timeline, what are the limits?

Ep #239: How to Process a DFL or DNF

So DNF, did not finish, simply means you didn't cross the finish line in the allotted time. And there are some races that do have a time limit, but they'll still keep the finish line open for you and count your time even if you go over it. In fact, lots of races are like that actually. The Philadelphia marathon is one of those races. Some of them, however, will count you as a DNF even if you cross the finish line but you crossed it after the time limit was up.

Now, DFL, dead fucking last, is pretty self-explanatory. You were the last person to cross the finish line, that's what that means. And there's actually another term that I should explain, DNS. And that stands for did not start, which is also pretty self-explanatory. For whatever reason you didn't cross the start line and do any part of the race.

Now, I am sure a lot of you have heard that old saying that DFL is better than DNF, which is better than DNS, right? In other words, starting and finishing the race, even if you're last, is better than not finishing. Which is better than not showing up at all. I hate that saying, it's so fucking judgmental. It's like when we say even if you're a slow runner, you're still lapping everyone on the couch.

I hate that saying too, because you know what? First of all, not everybody wants to run. And just because you don't choose to exercise or you don't want to exercise doesn't mean you're lazy, or inferior. Not everyone wants to exercise, okay? Believe it or not, there are people in the world who think exercise is dumb. They think runners are absolutely unhinged, right? They're like, "What is wrong with you? That's a terrible idea."

So becoming a runner, or becoming an exerciser in general, is not a moral victory. It doesn't make you any more worthy of a human because you have said to yourself, "I want to get fit, I want to start exercising," right? That's a personal choice you've made for yourself, it doesn't make you any better than someone who doesn't work out.

[The Not Your Average Runner Podcast](#) with Jill Angie

Ep #239: How to Process a DFL or DNF

Just like being a fast runner doesn't make you superior to a slow runner, okay? There is no hierarchy here. You either want to run or you don't, it's up to you. It doesn't make you any more or less worthy. And also, there are plenty of folks on the proverbial couch who would actually love to run and can't for whatever reason.

So let's stop saying even if you're slow you're still lapping everybody on the couch because it's mean and it's bullshit. Okay? You don't need to make yourself feel better by disparaging somebody else that you don't even know.

Anyway, that was a little bit of a detour. I was saying that some people believe that dead fucking last is better than did not finish. is better than did not start. And I mean, I get it, right? But again, it's applying this hierarchical morality to your results. That's pretty judgy and also it's kind of wrong, because sometimes did not start is better than did not finish.

Why? Well, if you're injured, it's smart to not show up for the race. Or it's smart to maybe show up for the race and cheer other people on instead of trying to run it, right, making your injury worse. Because I've seen my clients do this against my best advice, they're injured or they haven't been training because they're injured. And they say, "No, no, no, I'm still going to give this a try." And they show up and then they end up getting super injured, like even worse, right?

It slows down their recovery, maybe they have to stop running for months to rehab. So in a case like that, did not start is actually a smart decision. It's actually better than did not finish because I'd much rather see you say, "I'm going to prioritize my health. I'm going to prioritize my body. I'm going to prioritize recovering from this injury over some weird pride thing that I need to show up for a race just because I signed up for it." Okay?

Ep #239: How to Process a DFL or DNF

Now, saying that dead fucking last is better than did not finish, again, not always, right? If the reason you came in last is because you were hurting so badly you practically had to crawl across the finish line, well, sister, that is not a moral victory. Okay? If you end up having to rehab yourself and you can't run for months just because you were like, "I got to finish this because I started." That's stupid, don't do that to yourself.

Putting yourself in harm's way just so you can have bragging rights about how much suffering you endured or just so you can say, "I finished it. It took everything out of me, but I finished it." That's kind of a jackass thing to do. So there really are plenty of times when not starting or pulling yourself off the course is actually a really smart decision and takes care of future you instead of trying to placate your inner mean girl, all right?

So there's no hierarchy of one is better than the other, right? Everyone's circumstances are different, everyone's mental state is different. Everybody's choice making process is different. Okay? So stop telling yourself that it's better to start and not finish than it is to not start because there's times when that's wrong. Okay? All right.

So I hope you're on board with that. I'm doing some generalizing here but I just want to give you a way to think about not finishing, or not starting, or coming in last in different ways. Because a lot of us get real wrapped around the axle thinking it was supposed to look like this and it didn't, and now I have failed, right?

And we make it mean about, oh my gosh, it's a failure and I feel so horrible because I'm just so terrible at this, right? We tell ourselves such a shitty story about it. So I want to give you some different ways to think about this that are going to be more helpful for you.

So if you didn't start your race, or you didn't finish your race, or you came in dead last, how do you process that? And basically, those are your

[The Not Your Average Runner Podcast](#) with Jill Angie

Ep #239: How to Process a DFL or DNF

circumstances, right? So I want you to clarify the circumstances in neutral terms. What exactly happened? Rather than saying, "I got swept at mile eight," right? Because I got swept is a very powerless way of putting it, it's not neutral, right?

Neutral is at mile eight my pace was X, whatever my pace was. And the race officials asked me to ride back in the van. That's neutral, that is factual. I got swept is laden with emotion, okay? So I want you to take the circumstances and make them as neutral as possible. Just the facts, no story, no opinion, no emotion. All right, that's where you're going to start.

Then spend some time becoming aware of what you think about those circumstances. And let yourself have all the thoughts here because you're going to anyway, whether you are aware of them or not, they're happening. But sometimes, I don't know, you might think something like, it's not fair, I could have finished. Or why didn't I train harder? I always do this to myself. Or even like, my body betrayed me. Or today was not my day, right?

You could have any of those thoughts. You might have other thoughts, but whatever those are, whatever they are, there's probably going to be more than one, a lot more than one. I want you to notice how you feel when you think them. What is the emotion that is created in your body when you think those thoughts?

Now, there might be a mixture of, I don't know, shame, disappointment, maybe even relief, right? You might even feel proud if you're thinking, "Oh, I didn't finish, but I got farther than I expected to." Right? You might feel kind of proud. So the key here is to remember that all of your thoughts about the circumstance are valid. All of your emotions, valid. All right?

I want you to remember that. Don't forget that. It's your race, you get to decide what you want to think and feel about it. But since I have seen a lot of people get stuck in their thoughts and their emotions about DNS, DNF,

[The Not Your Average Runner Podcast](#) with Jill Angie

Ep #239: How to Process a DFL or DNF

and DFL, and then that affects how they show up for themselves in the future, I want to offer you a little bit of guidance, okay?

And again, you're the authority. You can decide to think whatever the fuck you want, but I'm going to give you some options here that I think might be helpful. First of all, let yourself experience the emotions, right? Don't try to distract yourself from it or pretend like you're not disappointed if that's what you're feeling, right? It's okay. You can be mad, upset, ashamed, guilty. Whatever you want to feel, let yourself feel it.

And actually, let me rephrase that. Whatever you're feeling, because I know you might not want to feel those emotions and you might feel like you have no choice because sometimes we get confused and we think the circumstance creates our emotions. But I'm here to tell you that's not true because if the circumstance of not finishing a race meant that I would feel shame, then when I took myself out of the Philadelphia Marathon at mile 13 I would have felt shame.

I did not feel little shame. I felt disappointment because I thought, "Well, that didn't go the way I wanted it to." I felt a little bit of relief, maybe a lot of relief because I was like, I don't know, I was not looking forward to doing another 13 miles on my blistered feet, right? And I felt, I don't know, I think I felt a moment of regret thinking I really wish I had done more training runs in the rain.

So those were kind of the emotions that I felt. A little bit of disappointment, a little bit of relief, a little bit of regret. And I felt a lot of pride actually, because I was thinking I gave that training my all, the running in the rain notwithstanding, I gave that training my all and I was proud of how far I did get on race day. Okay?

So the circumstance that happens, how far you ran in the race, or whether you rode back in the van, whether you didn't start, whether you came in

[The Not Your Average Runner Podcast](#) with Jill Angie

Ep #239: How to Process a DFL or DNF

dead last. That circumstance is not what creates your emotion. It is only what you are thinking about that circumstance that creates the emotion. Okay?

So, again, let yourself experience the emotions, right? Don't try to distract yourself from it. It's okay, you can be mad, you can be upset, whatever, I'm not going to take that away from you. But there is a big difference between feeling disappointed because you are thinking, "Damn, I wish that had gone differently," and feeling shame because you're thinking, "Everyone is going to think I'm a failure." Right?

In the first case, you feel disappointment, you're like, "Yeah, I really wish that had gone differently. Now I have to train all over again." Right? Like, you've got a lot of thoughts. But disappointment, we can kind of usually move on from that. But shame, shame is like one of those bugs that burrows into your skin, right? It's really hard to get rid of it because we want to hide from it.

So in the second case, when you're thinking everyone's going to think I'm a failure, and then you feel shame, right, you're going to find yourself stewing about it and beating yourself up. And that's going to keep you stuck. And the problem with shame is, again, I'm not going to take these emotions away from you, but I just want you to be aware that feeling shame does not help you and it keeps you stuck. It's going to be a much harder struggle to get yourself back into training if you're wallowing in shame.

All right, so give yourself a hot minute to feel the feels. Maybe, I don't know, sometimes I'll say like I have two hours to wallow. And I will set a timer and I'll just mope and do all the things. And the timer goes off, I'm like, "All right, Jill, let's get to it, it's time to get back on the horse."

So give yourself a hot minute and then look at what you're thinking and notice are you judging yourself? Are you talking smack about yourself?

[The Not Your Average Runner Podcast](#) with Jill Angie

Ep #239: How to Process a DFL or DNF

Because if you are, if you're bitching about yourself to yourself, that ain't helpful. And it's not true either, okay? Because guess what, whether it was a DFL, a DNS, a DNF, any of the Ds, you still put yourself out there.

You trained, you showed up, you did something for you. And sure, it might not have gone the way you planned. That's okay, you're human, you are not going to knock them all out of the park. It's completely impossible. All right? All you perfectionists, hear me, you're human, you're not going to knock them all out of the park.

So I want you to find something that's not awful about the day, all right? Whatever it is, it could be a positive thing, it could be simply a neutral thing, but find at least one thing. So for example, in 2012 I had a did not start. I was signed up for the Philly half marathon. I did not train the way I thought I should so I just didn't go to the race. I didn't even start.

And the morning of the race, everybody else is running, I'm in bed crying my eyes out. I felt so ashamed because I kept thinking to myself, you never follow through on anything. Right? So I was totally judging myself, totally beating myself up over it. But I also realized, about a year later, that a really awesome thing came out of that non race, right?

In the little training that I did do, I got a taste of what it would be like to really commit to a half marathon training schedule. Because before that I honestly didn't know. I signed up for that race having no idea what I was getting myself into. I just didn't get it, right? So I tried, I failed, I got it. I'm like, oh, this is going to take a lot more commitment, a lot more preparation, and a lot more prioritization.

So the next time I was prepared, I made realistic plans, I prioritized my life differently, I worked on my thinking, I got a coach. I did everything I needed to do to keep myself motivated and committed throughout the training process. So that first race actually turned out to be perfect for me because

[The Not Your Average Runner Podcast](#) with Jill Angie

Ep #239: How to Process a DFL or DNF

it was a bit of a wakeup call, right? It helped me be prepared for the next one, which if I do say so myself, I slayed.

Now, looking for the good or even the neutral, some people might call this delusional positivity, which is a term that Jon Acuff uses that I absolutely love. Because they're like, "Why do you always have to find the bright side? Why you always get to be so positive about everything?" And I mean, here's the thing, you don't. Nobody is saying that you have to be positive about anything.

You can spend all your time fondling your negative stories about your life, I am not going to stop you. But what I want you to notice is that when you go over those stories again and again, constantly agreeing with how awful things are and what a failure you are, right? Guess what? You don't get better at running. You don't magically get better, you don't end up more committed or more motivated. It's just the opposite, right?

Have you ever nagged a teenager to do something and after the 10th time you ask them to make their fucking bed before school, right? Story of my life. They say, "Oh my God, you know what? You're right. I should totally be making my bed before school. Thanks, mom for showing me the light." No, that's not how it ever, ever goes down. The more you nag, the more you belittle, the more you harass, the more you shame somebody, the less likely they are to do what you want them to do.

It creates the opposite effect. They become resentful, they drag their feet, they avoid you, they don't do the thing. Or if they do, they do not do their best work. Okay? Now, that's exactly what's happening in your mind when you focus on all the things that are wrong with you. You nag yourself into a state of guilt, shame, resentment, and unlike your teenager, you cannot slam the door on yourself. You are stuck with you. I'm sorry to tell you this.

Ep #239: How to Process a DFL or DNF

So the concept of finding the good in a race that didn't go as planned, it's not because I want you to be all rainbows and daisies all the time, right, like your life is perfect. I just want you to stop beating the crap out of yourself, okay? Now, yes, you are probably going to judge yourself anyway, this is human nature.

But when you find yourself thinking about how you should have trained harder, or you should have tried harder, or if you'd only lost that 20 pounds, you would have been faster, right? You can notice those thoughts and say, "Hey, that's not helpful, stop nagging." And you can start to turn them around to something more neutral like, "You know what? I didn't finish this race, and that's okay." Or, "I came in last and that's okay."

And that's actually the most important thing I want to give you today, is that you don't ever have to go to a place of positivity about your race. That's not what this is about. I just want to get you out of the judgment zone, all right? Neutrality looks like hey, this happened and that's okay. It's not great. It's not awful, it just is.

Because it actually is okay to not finish, or to come in last, or to not even start. It's not the end of the world. Even if you've been training for this race for two fucking years, it's always okay. You're alive, your life is still intact, you are safe, you are secure. It is just a moment on your timeline. And life is 50/50 my friends. Sometimes we're up, sometimes we're down. It's not all going to be a walk in the park.

None of that means anything about you or your worthiness as a human. You are no less of a runner if you drop out of a race. I mean, in my opinion it kind of makes you even more of a runner because it happens to all of us, even the pros, especially the pros. So here's a fun thought to think, not finishing a race makes me just like the pros. What would change for you if you believed that, right?

Ep #239: How to Process a DFL or DNF

So, all of this to say when you have a DNF, a DFL, or a DNS, allow yourself to feel the feels. Feel the feelings but get the circumstances straight, pull the circumstances, the actual facts out of the story that you're telling yourself.

And then look at that story and say, "If I keep thinking this story, what's that going to do to my running practice? Is it going to keep me from running? Is it going to keep me from showing up for myself? Is it going to block me from training? Or am I going to be resentful about my training? If I keep telling myself this story? What's the ultimate result of that? And do I like that result?"

All right, so use your thinking to process the events and create the outcome, the future outcome that you want for yourself. Okay? All right, my runners, what did you think of today's episode? Did it shift how you think about your race results? If this has been a helpful episode for you, I would love it if you would share it on Instagram and let everybody know. All right, that's it for today. I love you, stay safe, get your ass out there and run.

Oh, and one last thing, if you enjoyed listening to this episode you have to check out the Rebel Runner Roadmap. It's a 30 day online program that will teach you exactly how to start running, stick with it, and become the runner you've always wanted to be. Head on over to rebelrunnerroadmap.com to join. I'd love to be a part of your journey.