

10 Days

Steamy Heat Settling into the Mid-South

Extended Period of Dangerous Heat for the Mid-South

Unsettled Weather Pattern Will Keep Mid-South Residents Guessing This Week

I live and run in the Mid-South. During the 100 or so days falling between Memorial Day and Labor Day, I know there will be 10 days perfect for running outside. No, each of those 10 days do not rotate once every 10 days. They appear without notice, bringing a moment's respite from high heat, high humidity, and high dew point levels.

Some summers, those days come in bunches, because of a hurricane from the Gulf of Mexico drags its wet, cool carcass across the deep South through the Mid-South, upwards into the Great Lake states or into the Mid-Atlantic and further north. Other summer times, those days come routinely once every 10 days, brought along by a wind pulling a dying storm across the Plains, from the Atlantic seaboard, or straight up from north. Those 10 days clean out the lethargy brought on by the incessant, constant, never ending, challenging heat.

So far this summer, we've had four: too many too early and not enough. If I could, I would hold those 10 days in my possession, doling each one out separately, evenly spread out, so that just as aggravation would descend, I could have a day's respite. Just a day to recover, getting me to the next perfect summer day. Of course, I wouldn't let any of the 10 days happen while I was away in places where running is easy or not part of the vacation plan. What that those days would be needlessly wasted.

My absolute, straight up, never to be missed, always to be cherished, is when a 10-day shows up on a Saturday morning, arriving via a wet hurricane pattern, bringing heavy doses of water from the heated sky onto what was a dry early morning. Initially steaming the road in meeting up with the hot ground, the windless air becomes a warm, wet blanket from the soft rain falling directly down. I splash in the puddles, feel the rain fall onto my head, my chest, my legs, cooling me while I transform into a child. Those usually come in August.

Yesterday, because a western-based weather pattern won the day, the Mid-South had a drop in overnight temperatures into the 60's and daytime highs remaining in the mid-80's, following seemingly endless days hovering at the 100-degree mark, with daily dew points never getting below the 70's which meant grasses were dried out. Weather updates to follow. Yesterday was one of the 10 days.

Normally for me, yesterday would have been a day at the high school track with repeats following a lengthy wake up leading into a warm up accompanied by strides and quick formwork. But the cooler air brought a breeze just strong enough that the thought of repeatedly running into that breeze coming off the turn was lowered on the daily agenda. On one of the 10 days, the world is my oyster. I chose the shaded riverside running path.

The morning's exhilaration created happiness enough to share amongst those of us venturing out at dawn. On a typical Monday morning, the path would be short on pedestrians, dog walkers, runners, cyclists, and whomever else may wander about. The morning weather brought all of them out at once. On my warm up into my trail repeats, a cyclist coming up behind me exclaiming, "Isn't it wonderful to have morning like this after we've been suffering through two weeks of constant 99-degree weather?" I agreed, though I am not certain he heard me. Throughout the long copse of woods, I saw mama deer playing hide and seek with their fawns.

Five repeat kilometers run in a pace just aggressive enough to be fast and consistent, each followed with a one-minute jog. That was yesterday morning's plan. The first repeat found two jackrabbits trail side, each chewing, watching my go by them. I was quicker than I had planned. Immediately into my one-minute jog, I noticed the recovery pace being quicker than I had projected.

Well into my second repeat, without looking at my pace on my watch, I knew I was quick. I was mid-fall quick, a time when the air is crisp, the humidity has dwindled, and the dew point is well below the 50's. I was breathing fresh air, or, what seemed fresh, all because of the cooler temperature. The same effort bringing hard earned times on a normal summer's day, this morning gave me happy returns on my investment.

My short-sleeved running shirt slowly filled with perspiration, the kind that comes from running, not because I merely left the house. My recoveries were quicker and easier because the cool air was breathable, not unbearable. My repeats were consistently fast, smooth, almost without effort. What a fantastic morning to run in the Mid-South.

10 days in the summer. Always a pleasure. Never taken for granted. Cherished for the moments they bring. I've learned not to miss them.