NEWS LESSON

How Do You Decide When It Is Time to Stop Racing?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. At what age do people start telling others to slow down?
2. Would you rather beat your own record or win a race?
3. What makes a sports comeback exciting?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**endurance**	☐	A	done for enjoyment, not as a profession
2	**physiology**	☐	B	how the body works
3	**setbacks**	☐	C	a long life or a long career
4	**exertion**	☐	D	a situation where too many people are in one place
5	**congestion**	☐	E	problems that stop you from making progress
6	**spectacle**	☐	F	the ability to keep going for a long time
7	**recreational**	☐	G	hard physical effort
8	**longevity**	☐	H	a big, impressive public event

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Eliud Kipchoge won the Melbourne Marathon in a course record at 41, while other runners reported water shortages. Who decides when a champion should stop?

1 At 41, Eliud Kipchoge was still breaking records. The Kenyan runner won the Melbourne Marathon on 11 October 2026 in 2:09:10, a course record. He pulled away over the final ten kilometres and headed for the finish at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. For a champion facing questions about retirement, it was a forceful answer.

2 Kipchoge's reputation scarcely requires another trophy. The two-time Olympic marathon champion transformed expectations about endurance, lowering the official world record and completing the distance in under two hours at a carefully staged Vienna event in 2019. The latter was not a recognised world record, because the assistance and pacing arrangements differed from those permitted in ordinary competition. Nevertheless, it became an extraordinary demonstration of what preparation, physiology and technology might achieve when brought together for a single purpose.

3 Yet sporting greatness rarely provides immunity from sporting decline. Recent years have brought setbacks, inconsistent performances and speculation about whether his formidable consistency had finally deserted him. Marathon running exposes the body's limitations with particular cruelty. Even the best-prepared athlete must contend with accumulated training stress, the difficulty of maintaining speed and the increasingly delicate balance between exertion and recovery. Kipchoge's victory in Australia was therefore noteworthy precisely because it did not require a return to his former, world-record-breaking pace.

4 His success rested instead on judgement and control. He remained patient while the leading group stayed together, then accelerated decisively late in the race, leaving Australian competitors Thomas Do Canto and Reece Edwards behind. It was a performance that drew on years of experience rather than the illusion of everlasting physical youth. There is an important distinction between remaining competitive and remaining unchanged, one that discussions about ageing athletes frequently overlook.

5 The spectacle also had an uncomfortable counterpoint. Numerous recreational runners complained of water shortages, congestion and inadequate facilities at an event whose appeal had extended well beyond its elite field. Their accounts raised legitimate questions about the responsibilities of organisers when participation grows faster than provision. A record-breaking winner may dominate the headlines, but a marathon's success is also measured by what happens to the less celebrated people behind him. For those runners, adequate drinking water is rather more pressing than the philosophy of longevity.

6 The question of when he ought to stop remains open. The competitive landscape has changed, his own performances have fluctuated and one result cannot erase the consequences of age. What he has challenged is the assumption that decline must make achievement meaningless. There is a quieter kind of excellence in adapting to circumstances without surrendering ambition. Kipchoge is no longer being asked whether he can run faster than any man in history. For now, he is showing that he can still outrun the people standing beside him.

Sources: ABC News Australia. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The writer implies that the amateur runners' difficulties deserve as much attention as the winner's result. T F NG
2. The writer argues that the Melbourne win proves Kipchoge's decline has ended. T F NG
3. Kipchoge's coach advised him to stay with the leading group in Melbourne. T F NG
4. Kipchoge's Melbourne time was slower than his best marks. T F NG
5. Both the Vienna run and the Melbourne race took place under conditions allowed in ordinary competition. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

accumulated **deserted** **dwindled** **extended** **fluctuated** **prevailed** **staged** **transformed**

1. The invention of the carbon-plated shoe has _____ the way distance runners train.
2. His form has _____ wildly this season, with a brilliant win followed by a poor finish.
3. As the storm worsened, the crowds _____ the stadium and left the pitch empty.
4. The protest looked spontaneous, but it was in fact carefully _____ by the party's press team.
5. Her savings had _____ so much interest over ten years that she could retire.
6. The deadline was _____ by a week after complaints from applicants.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. There was widespread _____ about whether the champion would ever race again. (SPECULATE)
2. The coach praised the squad's _____ in a season of unpredictable results. (CONSISTENT)
3. Fame rarely brings _____ from criticism. (IMMUNE)
4. Spectators described the first-aid arrangements at the finish as woefully _____ . (ADEQUATE)
5. Only a handful of athletes sustain such _____ over two decades. (EXCEL)

7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. At C1, learn fixed phrases as a block: tantamount to, contingent on, fraught with, wary of, exempt from.

at by from of on to with

1. Retiring now would be tantamount _____ admitting defeat.
2. The success of the event is contingent _____ the weather.
3. Any attempt to break the record is fraught _____ risk.
4. She was wary _____ announcing a retirement that she might regret.
5. Athletes are rarely exempt _____ the effects of ageing.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Who should decide when an athlete has had enough?
2. Can a slower performance still be someone's greatest achievement?
3. Which ambition would you like people to stop putting an age limit on?

9 Role-play: am I too old to race?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the worried friend

Your friend is 45 and wants to run a marathon in six months. You think it's too hard on the body. Ask at least two questions, then say what you really think.

Student B · the keen runner

You're 45 and you want to run your first marathon. Explain why it matters to you and how you'll train safely. Try to get your friend's support.

Useful phrases

I'm worried that it's too much for you.
I've always wanted to do it.
How are you going to train?
I'll start slowly and build up.
Age is just a number, isn't it?
I'll support you, but please be careful.

Afterwards, tell the class: did the friend agree to support the plan, and was that a good decision?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 F · 2 B · 3 E · 4 G · 5 D · 6 H · 7 A · 8 C

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 transformed · 2 fluctuated · 3 deserted · 4 staged · 5 accumulated · 6 extended

6 Word forms

1 speculation · 2 consistency · 3 immunity · 4 inadequate · 5 excellence

7 Language focus

1 to · 2 on · 3 with · 4 of · 5 from

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