

Matt is reading an article about marathons. Read the article carefully and choose the best answers for Questions 23 – 28 and complete Question 29.

Running Around the World

Seventeen runners raced the first marathon at the first modern Olympic Games in 1896. The race was inspired by the ancient Greek messenger, Pheidippides. When the Greek army defeated the Persians at the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC, he ran approximately 42 km back to the Greek capital, Athens, to pass on the news. However, he was so exhausted when he arrived. He could only gasp 'Victory' before he **collapsed** and died.

These days, the official marathon distance is 42.195 km – a distance world record-holders can cover in just over two hours. Marathons are now so popular that thousands are held around the world every year. There are the famous city marathons, like those held in Boston, London and Tokyo. There are also increasing numbers of more challenging events.

China's Great Wall Marathon is one of the toughest because racers have to run up and down 5,164 uneven stone steps. In South Africa, the Big Five Marathon is like a safari. Runners on the dusty trail see giraffes, zebras, perhaps a lion. There is also the North Pole Marathon, involving ten laps around the pole in subzero temperatures.

In the past decade, there has been a huge rise in even tougher races, called ultramarathons. Some are 50 km, some 100 km, others five times or more the distance of a regular marathon. There are often mountains, desert, snow or other challenges. The six-day Marathon des Sables covers about 250 km in the Sahara Desert. In 50°C heat, participants run on soft sand hiding scorpions and snakes. Even tougher is the 4 Deserts Race series: four 250-km races across four deserts, including the Gobi Desert and Antarctica, on four different continents.

With distance running events getting longer and more difficult, some people wonder if they are too extreme. But what a way to see the world!