

In recent years, there has been an explosion of Half Marathon (HM) races across the USA. Let's look at the stats. In 2000, there was only one Half Marathon (Indianapolis Life 500) that the total amount of finishers above 10,000, with only 4 with finishers with more than 5,000. In 2007, there were 10 with over 10,000, and 32 with 5,000 or more finishers. The nation's largest, the Indianapolis 500 HM grew from 18,000 to over 29,000 finishers in that time period. So why has the HM increased in participation? Here are my thoughts....

First of all, marathon race directors (RDs) needed something else to gain participation. There were hardly any "in between" races between 10Ks and the marathon. Running a 10K and THEN thinking about the next step to running a marathon became intimidating for most recreational runners. So RDs decided to put in the HM along with their marathon to get more runners involved. The additional expenses are nominal and they basically run the same course. Now you see most city's HM are the same day as that city's marathon.

Secondly, like I just mentioned, is the intimidation factor, or lack thereof. An HM is not a daunting task to train for like a marathon. As I have seen over the years, on a July Saturday morning at Memorial Park, the park is full of wannabe marathoners beginning their training for the Houston Marathon. Then as October and November roll around, it is much easier to find a parking spot as the wannabes become less and less as the miles begin to take their toll on the body. Once runners begin to do double-digit miles every Saturday morning, injuries come up, fatigue, and the motivation factor dwindles. Training for a marathon is not easy, and only the strong survive.

With that goes the training. A lot of moms and dads do the HM because of time constraints to train for the marathon. With soccer, baseball, etc. on Saturday mornings, it is easier to fit in a 10 mile run before the kid's game than a 20 mile run.

Thirdly, there has also been an explosion of walkers to the scene. With some marathons (like Houston) there is a stringent time limit to complete the marathon, and thus walkers cannot complete the marathon (unless their race walking) in under 6 or 7 hours. With the HM, the RDs are a little more lenient with the time constraints and figure most HMers can finish an HM in under 4 hours.

Another point, if there is an HM along with the marathon (like Houston), I have seen other family members who have been inspired to train for the HM and come along and run the HM with the person who is doing the marathon. It can now be a family affair and not just about focusing on the person running the marathon. Everyone wins!

Lastly, a person feels that they are in pretty good shape if they can run 13.1 miles. Whether it was ran in under 1 hour or under 3 hours, a sense of accomplishment has just been made. They feel like a runner now. Every time I run at the park, there are at least a handful of people who are wearing a HM Finisher's T-shirt. They are proud of their accomplishment, AND they want everyone to know it. Yes, finishing a HM is a great accomplishment!