

17 November, 2005

The 30th Marine Corps Marathon (MCM) is The People's Marathon and this event historically showcases the Marine Corps organization skills, promotes community goodwill and highlights the need for a healthy lifestyle.

On October 30, 2005 the community goodwill that is the running community was tarnished as some participants in the MCM, about 325 runners were removed from the database as potential finishers. These cheaters were discovered through systematic research utilizing the champion chip timing mats and analyzing the data of runners pace time.

On a much more serious level that has come to light is the assistance provided by the organizers of Jean's Marines, who were a 2005 Marine Corps Marathon charity partner. The founder and coach of Jean's Marines assisted runners to circumvent a portion of the course thereby not completing the requisite 26.2-mile course. This organization will be banned from being a partner in 2006 for their lack of professionalism and unethical conduct.

Another charity partner Leukemia's Team in Training is being investigated for potential improprieties by one of their coaches on race day. The facts on that inquiry are still being researched.

Overall, charity organizations are great for the sport. They bring new blood into our running ranks, they bring color and lots of human-interest stories and they bring funding for causes that are pursuing a better tomorrow. All of this is outstanding and should be commented.

But the reality is that our sport, the marathon, is for the people: runners, walkers, joggers, athletes, and competitors.

The stories of human interest are generated from the people.

The successes and glory are accomplished by the people.

For the sport it's about distance 26.2 miles ... plain and simple.

For the training its about moral and physical courage and dedication.

For the rules and regulations, it's about running the distance, staying on course, and receiving no assistance from outside sources.

For the reward it's a dream come true. A finisher's medal is a visual display of your achievement. Self-satisfaction that weeks, months, and even years of hard training has paid off with the fruits of victory.

The marathon distance has become one of those ultimate challenges in life that society has recognized has an incredible feat. A very, very, small percentage of the human race will ever say they have achieved this plateau of being a "marathon finisher".

The human element of runner, walker, competitor, organizer and coach will come and go and the record books are filled with their great accomplishments for all of us to witness and remember.

But it will always be the sport, it must be the Marathon that we protect and defend. For without the integrity of our sport our labor/training is fruitless, our rewards and recognitions are successless, our dreams are meaningless.

Cheating at any level even by those back in the pack is not a “victim-less crime” as some might have you believe. We all suffer in some form or fashion. It shouldn’t be our focus to zero in on the winners of awards but to focus on the entire field. Any cancer and in our case, cheaters need to be removed from our finishers files.

I, for one, say “enough.” Runners, event organizers, sponsors, media outlets and businesses involved with the sport must stand up and be counted. The almighty dollar cannot be what drives us in our quest. Product sales, entry fees, sponsorship dollars and charity pledges can’t be the path to justify our actions.

Core values of integrity and honesty are a must. We respect all involved in our sport and knowing that all are giving 100% effort. Competition is good and makes us better and strives harder to accomplish more. And in the end, if we are courteous, and do to others what you want done to you then compassion and fairness and truthfulness and good sportsmanship will be our anchor keeping us fixed on achieving our daily goals.

The Marine Corps motto is Semper Fidelis, “Always Faithful”. The Marine Corps Marathon believes in the meaning of those two simple but oh so powerful words. We must always, always be faithful to our selves, to our fellow competitors, and to our sport. For whenever we sacrifice anyone of those pillars then the integrity of what we believe in will crumble and in the end we will be no better off than if we didn’t even try.

Respectfully,

Rick Nealis
Director
Marine Corps Marathon