

BAN THE 22 MILE CHEATERS FOR LIFE

By DON SIKORSKI
Special to the Bulletin

Finishing a marathon is an outstanding accomplishment. Preparing to run 26.2 miles requires a great deal of discipline, time, and energy spent training the body for such a task. With the exception of the Boston Marathon or an Olympic or World Championship race, which carry a qualifying criteria for admittance, marathon races are open to anyone wishing to compete. However, the Race Director of the U.S. Marine Corps Marathon has recently banned a Toronto-based running group from returning to his Washington, D.C. event, citing "a clear violation" of marathon race rules.

On October 30th, some of the members of the marathon training group JeansMarines did the unthinkable by electing to bypass approximately 6.4 kilometres, or about four miles, of the 26.2-mile Marines Corps Marathon race course. Club founder Dr. Jean Marmoreo had steered many of the group's slower participants, most of which were already walking at this point in the race, to exit the marathon race route near the 10 mile mark by cutting across a park at 17th Avenue and returning at 14 miles just before the 14th Street Bridge. Since the Marine Corps race requires runners to reach the bridge in under 5½ hours, Marmoreo's concern for her team's slower participants drove the decision to seek a shortcut (Marine Corps also has a finish line time cut-off of seven hours). Race Director Rick Nealis, however, was less than impressed with Marmoreo's decision-making.

JeansMarines is a group of females of various ages and running abilities who train together on a weekly basis with the goal of completing the U.S. Marine Corps Marathon. A total of 225 JeansMarines participants were amongst the 20,000+ marathoners that ran the Marine Corps race. What is most troubling about this scenario is the lack of understanding on the part of Marmoreo and her team to entirely grasp the severity of their actions, even after their attempt to cheat was made public. "There are people in the running community who feel some of our runners and walkers did not earn the medals we so proudly wore that Sunday evening," wrote Marmoreo in response of the race's request to return the finishing medals of those runners that did not complete the entire race distance. What part of the marathon equation does she not understand? And credit Nealis for stepping up and defending the integrity of the sport. The accomplishment of those individuals who finished the marathon legitimately should not be diminished by a few who felt 22 miles was just as deserving.

Finally, what was really accomplished by this group? At least Rosie Ruiz's Boston Marathon farce 25 years ago involved her being the very first female across the line. And baseball players may cheat by using performance enhancing drugs, but at least they're playing the entire game. What value do these women recognize in shamelessly parading around with a marathon finisher's medal around their necks knowing very well that they in fact never finished a marathon? Even worse was the fact that as part of the national "Team in Training" program, these runners had solicited funds for charity, donated with the understanding that the participants would be running a complete marathon. Marmoreo and her runners should never be allowed to participate in even the smallest of local 5K road races ever again. The integrity of the sport is far too important.

Racing Roundup

Runners looking to extend their racing season beyond the Thanksgiving holiday can take a trek up to Woodstock, CT for the 2nd Annual Woodstock Academy Football Fundraiser 5K on Sunday, December 4th. The race starts and finishes at Roseland Park in Woodstock, beginning at 10:00am. Contact Keith Pellerin at (860) 779-3248 or go to www.thelastmileracing.com for more information.

Don Sikorski writes a twice-monthly running column for the Norwich Bulletin. His "Coach's Corner" column can be accessed at www.moheganstriders.org. He can also be reached by e-mail at kdcsikorski@netzero.net.