

Fitness / Cardio

I'll Never Run a Marathon—And That Doesn't Make Me Less of a Runner

Running a half-marathon doesn't need to be a step toward running a marathon. It can be a worthwhile accomplishment on its own

By Robin L. Barton | Oct 31, 2016

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After a long training run one recent morning, I went to my usual local spot to grab breakfast. As I waited in line, the guy behind me asked if I'd had a good run. I told him it was long and hard, but yes, good.

'How long', he asked. 'Almost 11.5 miles', I replied.



He asked if I was training for the marathon, which I assumed meant the upcoming NYC Marathon. I said, 'No, I'm training for a half-marathon that I have in a few weeks.'

His response: 'Oh, only a half-marathon, huh?'

I wanted to punch him in the face.

I'm a proud half-marathon runner. I just completed my 15th half in seven years (the *Runner's World* Half), and I have no intention of *ever* running a marathon.

People—runners and non-runners alike—often treat the half-marathon as a gateway race, like the kind of race you run a few times on your way to becoming a "serious runner" by doing a full marathon.

Thing is, I'm already a "serious runner." I know that if I trained, that yes, I could run a marathon. Hell, if Oprah and Al Roker can finish marathons, I know I certainly could. But I have no desire at all to do so, and there's nothing wrong with that.

I'm not built, mentally or physically, to be a good long distance runner. I'm a solid middle distance runner, who sees a half-marathon as the perfect challenge.

It's long enough that you have to train for it, especially if you're aiming for a PR. But the training doesn't take over your life like marathon training. I have many friends who run marathons and I've seen what a time commitment it is for them. After all, doing an 18-mile training run—and then recovering from it—can easily kill an entire day.

I think that's why the **half is the fastest growing distance race**, with more than 2 million people racing 13.1 miles each year. And the half-marathon has become increasingly popular for female runners in particular.

Don't assume that because I don't aspire to become a marathoner that I'm not serious about running or have no running goals. **My goal is to run faster**—not run farther. And as a serious runner, I've taken steps toward that goal.

For example, I now run five days a week instead of just four, and I started taking a speed work class more than a year ago. The workouts, my great coach, and supportive classmates have helped me set new PRs at all race lengths up to, and including, the half. In fact, I've cut more than four minutes off my half PR. So now I have new time goals for all these races.

Like many serious runners, I've also suffered setbacks and injuries that have sidelined me for weeks. Not being able to train is torture because running is not only exercise to me but also

therapy...meditation...the most effective stress reliever.

My point?



I want respect as a serious runner, whether I ever run a marathon or not. At this point, the only reason I'd consider running a full marathon is to shut people up—and that's not a good reason to take on such a commitment.

Plenty of great, record-breaking, medal-winning runners have never laced up for a marathon. Would you tell Usain Bolt or Allyson Felix, who specialize in distances far shorter than 26.2 miles, that they aren't serious runners? I don't think so.

Let me be clear: I have nothing but respect for marathoners, ultra-marathoners, triathletes and the like. And I know *plenty* of marathoners who are accepting of anyone who wants to join their sport, no matter the distance they choose to run. But sadly, the guy at the cafe that morning wasn't the first to make those kinds of comments. A lot of times, the comments are even well-meaning, but they still come from a place of assuming you're just not ready for a full marathon yet.

Hey, maybe I'm *not* ready for a full marathon—but I don't want to be. That half-marathon I was training for was the hardest course I've ever run, with miles and miles of hills, but I did great! I had no illusions of setting a PR. Instead, I set a modest goal of breaking 2:00—and finished in 1:57:57. And while I'd love to say, 'take that, coffee shop guy!,' at the end of the day, I just need to remember that I'm not running for anyone but me.

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