

HOW HALF-MARATHONS CAN INFORM RUNNING PERSPECTIVE

We often hear people refer to the half-marathon as the “ideal distance.” , the manageable distance, the run that doesn’t require the demands of hard training unlike marathons and ultras. However, this view really depends on your perspective as a runner and what suits you and your style. For many, the 10k is their ideal distance while for others the 5k is short, swift, and more satisfying.

Very often runners can become fixated on P.B.’s and unintentionally fail to notice the other rewards that they have gained. Those “other rewards” are often what informs and sustains us though, not merely as runners, but as people who love the outdoors and are constantly in pursuit of new challenges. This, I feel is a topic which has much to offer in relation to how we approach our running and how a deeper understanding of it could help to sustain our love of the sport well into the future.

Since January of this year I have participated in a number of half-marathons. For me, this has always been a distance I enjoy. Run over 21k 097m, it gives you plenty of time to assess your running form and your ability to adjust your mindset to the challenges and demands that the half marathon will present. Very often the markers are based on miles and so as you commence your countdown of those 13 miles your thoughts will conflict and will very often, betray your best motives and running instincts. For example, the urge to sprint at the commencement of a race, to follow the crowd and to get caught up in the adrenaline rush at the start line.

These are just some of the temptations that must be overcome if one is to stay focused on their own individual plan. It is very easy to lose sight of the pace you had planned and is very tempting to allow the overall atmosphere of the race to dictate your run. Sometimes it is only afterwards that we realise the level of self-discipline that is actually required.

March 30th. 2025 was the date set for the inaugural Dublin City half marathon and while it was challenging in many respects, it was a most enjoyable race. The Dublin supporters never fail to lend their uplifting cheers to the multitude of runners who traverse the streets and pavements of the capital. This is something we have come to expect from them and is definitely an aspect of the entire experience that makes it so memorable.

It was an early start and we congregated in O'Connell street from 6:30 a.m. onwards. This was a new event and a new route. There was a great sense of anticipation and it could be felt by participants and spectators alike. The theme was "Run Together - Thrive Together" - and we certainly embraced it. The last water station was located close to the prom and views of the Irish Sea to our left and the motion of the rolling waves, helped to propel us forward and inject a boost of energy to the finish line. It was wonderful to be in the company of other Athenry A.C. members who proudly sported their club singlets and colours. Afterwards we managed to meet up and share the joy of yet another race completed. This is one to mark on next year's running calendar.

Limerick half marathon was, as always, memorable for numerous reasons. This event just keeps getting better and better. Each year the organisers seem to improve it in every respect. The support is consistently apparent around the streets of Limerick. However, it cannot quell the challenge of those two hills that rear their heads within the last 5 kilometres. However, back to the start of the race and one feature to note in particular and that is, the atmosphere that is unequalled on that start line in Limerick.

Last year I ran the full marathon there and while all races have their own particular feel, you tend to think the longer distance creates more of an internal level of expectation. However, I felt the same sense of expectation this year at the start of the half. Participants were eager and wholly enthused. The start line was electric and the vibes were great. One couldn't help but be enveloped in its fervour and zeal. Once again, Athenry AC. were well represented both from the perspective of participants and supporters. It is a great boost for any runner to hear the supporting shout "Come on Athenry".

There is always a thunderous cheer and applause from the thousands of onlookers on the run-up to the finish line in Limerick. Tired legs and flailing arms are forgotten as the clock comes into view. This year the beautiful sunshine and the tremendous outpouring of support made the Limerick half marathon very special.

Further south in May, the Killarney Half or “Run Killarney” as it is referred to, was probably the most scenic run of all. I always try to participate in this race. It probably is somewhat of a tradition now (similar to the Fields 10k which continues to improve each year). Killarney promises great views of the lakes, mountains and parks. Except for the early morning midgets who proved somewhat of an irk, there was little to find fault with. Once again, this year, Athenry were represented with great collegiality and pride. One aspect of this race which is notable, is the level of support and encouragement we receive from their very experienced pacers.

Stories during the course of the run of pacing the London and Dublin marathons abound and before we realise it we are turning at that much anticipated cone for the downhill and the last 11k of Run Killarney for 2025. A notable feature of this race is, how deceptive those "hills" in the National Park are at this stage. It is, I think, a logical conclusion that, the reason they seem so is that, the legs are so tired that all reserves must be utilised to maintain stamina at this point. However, the distractions of Muckross house and its surrounds more than help and before we know it we are on the last 2k. This is an uphill drag though and can be the most difficult part of the race.

Overall, this is a very satisfying half marathon and one which sells out fast (as indeed do all races nowadays it seems). Run Kilkee is its sister-event and this also sells out quickly. Great rewards await each runner at the finish line, notable among them is a unique medal, zip-top, and other food and beverages. Overall, I have found this Half Marathon (as Limerick) ,continues to improve on all fronts and even though the route has changed in recent years, it

has continued to offer participants a great variety of experiences and guaranteed satisfaction.

These are just three of the five half marathons I raced this year so far and three very memorable events they were. There have been other races since January too which were also thoroughly enjoyable and made more so by the camaraderie of fellow athletes from Athenry A.C. I suppose it would be amiss of me not to reiterate my point of introduction and that being the emphasis I place on enjoyment and preferred distance. The half marathon is my preferable race. I stress here that, this is my view, but one which I hope others share too. Running, I have always believed, is a privilege. It challenges us to become better versions of ourselves in so many ways.

The longer distance enables us to build stamina and improve our mental strength which is often called upon when the challenges are greatest. However, the days when things don't go our way or go to plan are great days too and it is often on such runs that you discover your true self and your hidden capabilities. Every runner knows the feeling of wanting to stop when your legs are screaming at you to finish, when your internal monologue is anything but positive, and, if we are honest with ourselves, we will acknowledge that we may have had more of those runs than we care to remember. That, however, is quickly forgotten as soon as we cross the finish line and within hours we find ourselves reaching for the phone to register for yet another promising and gratifying HALF.....

BY: MARIAN SPELLMAN