

Domingo Amaison describes the state of running activity in South America, while Marcelo Coultro looks more closely at the position in Brazil, and sees a world of opportunity

Road running has had a long history in South America *writes Domingo Amaison*. There have been two Olympic marathon champions from Argentina, Juan Zabala (1932) and Delfim Cabrera (1948). In Sao Paulo there is the famous Sao Silvestre race, among the oldest in the world after having celebrated its 80th edition on 31 December 2004.

South America held more road races in 2004 than ever before. The 13 continental countries of the South, and the countries of the Central America, organised 2600 races. Brazil alone held 24 races in October, Colombia had 22 in September, Ecuador 22 in August, and Argentina 24 in November. This indicates how road running is spreading throughout different countries of the region.

The number of participants is also increasing. Even the smaller events are reaching 1500 runners. Big events, normally limited to 4000 or 5000 runners, have filled their quotas and have accepted participation from as many as 20-30% more unregistered runners. The domestic road running scene in South America is booming.

The "tourist runner" is becoming more interested in coming to South America. According to registrations of tour operators in Latin America, every year more tourists go to different countries looking for a race to run. The Buenos Aires City Half Marathon, for example, had over 1200 tourists coming to Argentina through 14 different tourist agencies of Latin America, USA and Europe. A group of more than 320 came from Brazil alone. It is interesting to note that 90% of the tourist runners are over 40 years old, and some groups over 60.

*Marcelo Coultro writes:* In the past 10 years we have seen a significant increase in the number of Brazilians interested in travelling to participate in marathons and half marathons all over the world.

In Brazil, especially in Sao Paulo, there has been a huge increase in the number of people practising the sport. In other parts of the country the increase has been less dramatic, but it is a consistently upward trend.

The level of preparedness has improved, especially with the appearance of the personal trainer. Some groups have between 400 and 1,000 runners. A great number of companies now offer employees the possibility of being trained by a personal trainer, who becomes one of the key people in delivering job satisfaction in those companies, and giving employees a certain quality of life. There is even an association for personal trainers who specialise in road running.

Another key factor in the development of the running market are the runners' associations. CORPORE, for example, based in Sao Paulo, registered 85,000 runners in their races during 2004. It is no wonder that some of these runners become interested in races further afield, and this presents opportunities for the tourist industry.

As a travel agent and tour organiser I can positively feel the strong demand of this market. I see that runners wish to participate in as many races as they can, all over the world. We have been developing, among our clients, the culture of participating in an event abroad.

This gives them both a reason and the opportunity to travel around the area where the race is being held. For me, this is an important detail as it generates a significant economic result for all those involved in this process. For the tours that we operate today, we know that 80% of our clients to Europe and USA will spend around six days visiting the country after the race itself.

Race organisers have enormous potential to market their city and their country. Depending on the level of the organisation, they may

be able to increase their income through additional services such as city tours, hotel booking, expos built around the collection the runner number and chip, VIP programmes etc. I believe that there are plenty of opportunities for more sophisticated services, seeking comfort for the runner and the "something else" for the organiser.

Except for the Sao Silvestre race in Sao Paulo races in Brazil still do not have very much international impact. Some races organisers here are working very hard to make their races better known. However, I believe that most of them have not yet appreciated, let alone realised, the potential of bringing in foreign runners and their companions.

The most significant sporting event promotion company in Brazil, Yescom, has good connections with the biggest television network in Brazil. This will provide the key to initiate the process of attracting foreigners to Brazil. Race organisers are the people with the main product to show but their efforts alone will not be enough.

Public agencies and the media have to participate in this effort. The city authorities have to become more receptive and welcoming in order to attract the attention of this public. Brazil had some practice at this in the last two years, in helping to push the 2012 Olympic bid from Rio de Janeiro. The city did not make the final shortlist when it was announced last year, and clearly we have more work to do in generating a sporting profile that has international appeal.

With respect to such points, international sporting bodies like AIMS, with all their experience, should be able to advise. Such an input for race organisers in

particular regions of the world, like South America and Brazil, could contribute much. Race organisers in Brazil are good at what they do, but here and elsewhere they have not yet found a way to appeal to an international market.

In the countries that are still in the process of learning some key international input could help local and regional events to develop relatively quickly into genuinely international spectacles. And that in turn would help the international profile of the sport of road running.

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