

America resurrects



Marine Corps Marathon, Washington, USA, 28 October 2001

By Norrie Williamson

September 11 had stunned the world with the screeching descent of a hijacked airliner cutting a swathe out of the Pentagon. Six weeks later it was different. "Defending people is what Marines do", and they did it well.

Clockwork organisation ticked through to a successful conclusion for the record 21,000 entrants to the 26th annual 'Peoples Marathon'. Citizens from all 50 states and 39 countries had a close up view of the devastation, and many of them found a welcome release of emotion and the pent-up energy of frustration.

The world's seventh biggest marathon is number one for an event that offers no prize money. There is no focus on the elite here. The 56,000 web hits recorded in one minute during the day that on-line entry opened, are in search of something else.

They are rewarded with a fast flat course, an idyllic tourist tour of the American capital, an inspirational boost of national pride, and the race organisation's military precision. For a staggering 38% of the field this is their marathon debut. The Clydesdale Awards acknowledge the achievement of heavier men (over 85kg) and

women (over 69 kg) and confirm the race focus on everyday heroes.

Military helicopters circled above, and more marines than ever vigilantly checked the runners' see-through baggage bags, but security was overshadowed by the purposeful silence of those gathered at the start. A Marine boomed out the Star Spangled Banner, and all pledged allegiance to the flag. The firing of the 105mm howitzer signaled an emotional explosion which released them on their purposeful journey.

The early leader was three time USA Olympic trialist Paul Zimmerman, returning after a dozen years of elite racing. At 5:20 miling, he was soon on his own, battling the northerly wind. Behind him were paired Hawaii's Farley Simon and Mexico's Juan Lopez, followed by a pack of ten.

Around the Pentagon runners garnered varying of views of the US defence hub. There were gasps, tears, silence, 'USA' chants and anger – the full gamut of emotions were evident as the snake of runners curled its way closer and closer to the wreckage.

Farley Simon, a 46-year old retired marine, had spent time viewing the site the previous day to drain these emotions before the race. He wanted to focus on winning the race, something he had done in 1983 and was now even more determined to do in the wake of September 11.

Crowds seven-deep lined the roads along the Potomac River. Encouragement continued around George Town, the Lincoln



Memorial and the South Mall, but an unusual calm and quiet pervaded Capitol Hill as citizens struggled with their concerns over the anthrax scares.

Zimmerman cramped at 21 miles and by 23 miles he had surrendered his three-minute lead. Simon overtook, and went on to become the race's oldest winner. It was a popular and fitting moment: one of the Marines' own took the trophy on a day that belonged to the Corps.

Lopez was second for the 3rd time, and the Royal Navy's Steve Payne took 3rd to lead the British Navy team home - both in the annual challenge against the US Marines, and to win the

Armed forces Award.

Zimmerman's wife Lori Stich made no mistake, winning from the front in 2:48:13. Tara Pointin came second, only 47 seconds ahead of the Royal Navy's Lindsay Gannon.

For hours afterwards runners climbed the only major hill of the course, past the Iwo Jima monument, treading those final 400 metres with battling determination. The 2001 Marine Corps marathon provided both participants and organizers with a much needed opportunity to vent emotions and to show that they could bring normality back to a shattered nation. They achieved this with flying colours.



New York City Marathon, USA, 4 November 2001

By Norrie Williamson

The New York Marathon was a remedy waiting to happen for a city still in shock over the tragedy of September 11th.

The loss of thousands of lives had kindled an emotional turmoil for which there had been no outlet over the previous seven-week period.

The city was gripped by sadness, grief, fear, anxiety, bewilderment and anger, but there was never any doubt that the New York Marathon would go on. It would be a symbol of resilience for the freedom and diversity that the attack threatened.

With hardly a dry eye in sight, the field of over 25,000 runners edged their way to the start line on the Verranzo Narrows Bridge. 'God Bless America' and the national anthem reverberated, as doves of peace were released.

A simple sign "we can forgive - but never forget" forged a unified purpose. The void on the horizon where the World Trade Center towers had fallen, the crowds lining the route several-deep, and the thanks and applause for international runners making the trip - all impelled the mass of humanity, as if by a magnet, towards the Central Park finish.

Stopping seemed as unthinkable as 'the unthinkable' of previous weeks. Hurting limbs were insignificant compared to the emotional trauma and motivational drive that had compelled so many competitors to take up the challenge.

The normal doubts - "why am I doing this?" simply didn't exist. A million or so New Yorkers had at last found something they could shout and scream for, and that powerful energy was transmitted directly to the runners. Although many would burn that energy-boost early on and pay the price later, few of them failed to complete.

A call for increased security jolted a few - after information indicated the chance of a further attack - but over 10,000 international entrants made up 30% of the field. A group of locals on the Bronx bridge bellowing "thank you for coming" put wings on hearts and feet as the runners



surmounted the 'wall' at 20 miles.

It will remain a matter of record that upfront Joseph Karioki set the pace, with Japhet Kosgei taking charge from half way. Then Tesfaye Jifar took control to speed through to a 2:07:43 best for the new course.

In the women's race Kenyan Margaret Okayo increased the intensity after halfway (71:45) to pull ahead of Silvia Skvortsova. The climb up the final stretch of Fifth Avenue and the hills in Central Park took their toll, but cheers and encouragement brought her a new course best of 2:24:21.

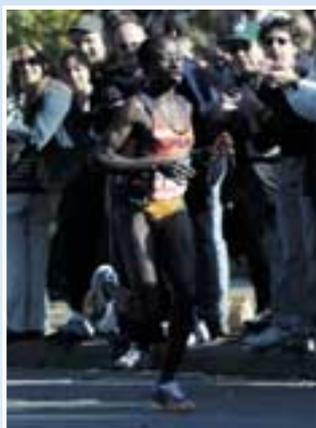
Some ascribed the two new event records to a minor route adjustment that replaced a short but steep hill at 34kms with a more gradual climb. It was as likely to have been the emotional release of the occasion, as pent-

up energy surged from spectator and runner alike.

The race's high profile prize money and the incorporation of the US Championships ensured good elite times. But Sunday 4th November was about remembrance and forgetting, happiness and sadness, and challenging and conquering.

There were as many reasons, motivations and statements as there were runners. It was the day that New York released the safety valve on the pressure cooker, the day the city started on the long road back to normality.

There will be many more New York City Marathons, but few as charged as the 32nd. What happened on 4th November was at the other end of the pendulum to September 11th. It was one of those occasions - you had to be there.



Marine Corps Marathon

MEN:

1	F. SIMON (USA)	2:28:28
2	J. LOPEZ (MEX)	2:29:31
3	S. PAYNE (GBR)	2:31:27
4	F. CABELLO (CHI)	2:32:57
5	D. HOWE (USA)	2:33:14

WOMEN

1	L. STICH (USA)	2:48:13
2	T. POINTIN (USA)	2:54:01
3	L. GANNON (GBR)	2:54:48
4	M. FOY (USA)	3:01:14
5	M. FOON (USA)	3:01:50

ARMED FORCES AWARD (3 TO COUNT):

1	Royal Navy (GBR)	10:50:32
2	US Army	10:53:33
3	US Airforce	10:58:18

New York City Marathon

MEN:

1	T. JIFAR (ETH)	2:07:43
2	J. KOSGEI (KEN)	2:09:19
3	R. ROP (KEN)	2:09:51
4	S. GUERRA (ECU)	2:10:36
5	H. RAMAALA (RSA)	2:11:18
6	J. BROWN (GBR)	2:11:24
7	J. KAGWE (KEN)	2:11:57
8	J. CHEBET (KEN)	2:13:07
9	L. MARIKIK (MAR)	2:13:31
10	S. NDUNGU (KEN)	2:14:21

WOMEN:

1	M. OKAYO (KEN)	2:24:21
2	S. CHEPKEMEI (KEN)	2:25:12
3	S. ZAKHAROVA (RUS)	2:25:13
4	J. CHEPCHUMBA (KEN)	2:25:51
5	E. KIPLAGAT (KEN)	2:26:15
6	L. PETROVA (RUS)	2:26:18
7	D. DROSSIN (USA)	2:26:58
8	E. PARAMONOVA (RUS)	2:30:03
9	M. BIKTAGIROVA (RUS)	2:31:14
10	E. MEYER (RSA)	2:31:50