

Famous Faces at the MCM

Ask any MCM runner to name a famous MCM finisher, and the first person that most will name is talk show host Oprah Winfrey for her 1994 participation. Many runners can even rattle off her finish time (4:29:15). What runners may not know is that the MCM has welcomed many famous faces to the start line in its 32 year history.

With a close proximity to Washington, DC, the Marine Corps Marathon has been the perfect fit for many political heavy hitters. Presidential candidate and former Senator John Edwards completed the event in 1982, 1983 and 1999, with his best finish of 3:30:18 in 1983. Former Vice President Al Gore ran the event while he was in office in 1997, along with his two daughters, finishing with a time of 4:54:25. Former Senate Majority Leader William Frist completed the MCM with a time of 4:54:36 when he ran in 2001. Most recently, presidential hopeful Mike Huckabee completed the 2005 event while he was the governor of Arkansas with a time of 4:37:29.

"I have such great memories of running the Marine Corps Marathon," said Huckabee. "Throughout the race, I was inspired by all the Marines around the route, starting at Arlington National Cemetery, realizing the incredible sacrifices people have made so that I could run through the streets of Washington. As difficult as the last 6 miles were, the crowd support was incredible, I just couldn't give up."

Beyond the political realm, many members of the media have taken on the MCM challenge. In 1983, ABC News Anchor and former host of Good Morning America, Charles Gibson added his name to the finisher records when he crossed the line in 3:43:24. Another Good Morning America alumni, Mike Barz, who now anchors the Fox5 news in Chicago, ran the MCM in 2006 after viewers voted on the marathon in which he should participate. The 55% of viewers who chose the MCM were right, Barz enjoyed his experience, and his 3:23:53 finish time.

"I remember standing at the start, looking around at military personnel, hearing the national anthem and thinking of our troops overseas," said Barz. "It inspired me. Suddenly those 26.2 miles didn't seem all that bad. And what better way to celebrate all that America is, than running through the Nation's Capital?"

Even the Washington DC area media have gotten in on the fun. NBC4 meteorologist Chuck Bell ran his first MCM in 2006.

"Last year was my first MCM but it will not be my last," said Bell, who is participating in the 2007 event. "Since I live and train in downtown DC this is the perfect race for me - there really is a home-course advantage. I ran a 3:35:12 last year at age 39, and I am committed to running this race every year from now on for one very selfish reason - as long as I finish the race ahead of my benchmark time from last year I must not be getting any older!"

Bell's coworker, Doreen Gentzler, an anchor for NBC4 has participated in two MCMs. In 2002, she and her husband decided to run the event. When he was injured during training, a friend and previous MCM finisher encouraged Gentzler to finish her training and run anyway. In 2004, Gentzler and her husband gave the idea of running a marathon together another chance. This time they finished with times of 5:31:54 and 5:32:43, respectively.

"The MCM is a fabulous marathon," said Gentzler. "I really appreciated the crowds and the entertainment and the scenery at every turn! It is also very wonderful to have a Marine in uniform help you at the end when you're exhausted!"

Brian Egan, a morning show host on radio station WMZQ has also completed two MCMs. His first marathon, in 2003, challenged him both physically and mentally. Finishing with in just under six and a half hours, he knew he could train better and improve his time. He returned in 2004 having lost weight and properly trained with a series of 5Ks, 10Ks, and group runs with his charity team, St. Jude's Heroes. His original goal of 3:40 had to be adjusted due to heat and humidity, but he proudly crossed the finish line in 4:01:45, knowing he had worked hard to earn his time.

"The marathon is such an accomplishment, and is a testament to the discipline and endurance of each individual who finishes," said Egan. "St. Jude's Coach [two-time MCM winner] Jim Hage gave us such great advice the night before the race at the pre-race dinner. He explained the marathon doesn't begin until Mile 20. Get to Mile 20 feeling as good as possible. And I took his advice. I was only 7 minutes away from negative splitting finishing at 4:01:45. It was so satisfying. Seeing my family cheer me on in Georgetown and at the Finish Line was the best. After the race, I was chatting with the Heroes Team and cheering on the rest of the field. I got the true marathoner experience."

Another radio personality, Jessica Cash of WFLS in Fredericksburg, VA, wins the prize for most MCMs completed by a famous personality. She participated in seven MCMs, running each year from 1997 through 2003. Her best finish was in 1998 with a time of 3:49:28.

"The most important thing was the support that I had from my friends and listeners from the radio," remembered Cash. "Not one year did I go to the starting line feeling like I wasn't well prepared for a great race. Marine Corps Marathon day for me was the best experience ever, all seven years that I ran."

More than just media members and politicians, the MCM has welcomed celebrity faces as well. Country singer Richie McDonald, of the band Lonestar, completed the MCM in 4:35:20 in 2001. Navy lieutenant Andy Baldwin, MD, from the 10th season of the hit ABC show, "The Bachelor" ran his first MCM in 1996 at age 19 when he completed the event with his father, Roy and a few Navy shipmates from Duke University NROTC. He also finished the MCM in 1998 with a time of 3:20:28

“What I loved most about the MCM were the incredible sights,” said Baldwin. “You’re surrounded by American history, memorials and screaming fans, and I felt an incredible pride and honor to be a representative of the United States military.”