

## THE EXTRA MILE

# Races Should Be More Cherished

More than 90,000 runners — the equivalent of a sold-out FedEx Field — finished the five biggest races in Washington this year. The National Race for the Cure is the largest with some 40,000 official finishers. Next is the Army Ten-Miler with 18,960, this year beating the Marine Corps Marathon, which had 18,271. The Cherry Blossom Ten Mile Run hosted 10,713 finishers and the St. Patrick's Day 8K just over 4,000.

The next five events by size add nearly another 20,000 finishers. So why do newspapers relegate running to the agate page and 10 inches buried in the sports section every other Sunday?

Our humble sport has always failed to generate a meaningful political or financial constituency. The city's most visible runner, D.C. Mayor Adrian Fenty, has helped make inroads into the former, and his participation has also helped ease numerous administrative and bureaucratic hassles for race directors.

In an effort to bolster their economic profile, race directors have taken to citing the financial impact of their events. The 2008 Baltimore Marathon Festival, which features a marathon, half marathon, 5K and relay, touted \$22 million in

economic impact as tallied by RESI, Towson University's economic outreach initiative. The study assumptions were generous — each registered runner is accompanied by two guests, all of whom spend 2.5 days in the city and \$177.50 per day. Not surprisingly, neither municipalities nor event officials quibble about the road to such numbers.

Credibility notwithstanding, such studies help show there's more to races than road closures and traffic hassles. "Especially in this economy, Washington officials should be appreciative of the runners, who have among the highest demographics of fans or participants in any sport, that established races bring to town," Cherry Blossom race director Phil Stewart said.

**BOSTON DEBUT:** American marathon record holder Ryan Hall (2:06:17) announced that he will run the Boston Marathon on April 20. He will be a favorite at the country's oldest marathon, which was last won by an American, Greg Meyer, in 1983.

**TRUE BLUE:** Top age-group competitor Ray Blue, 84, of Oxon Hill, died Nov. 10 after a long illness. Unable to compete in recent years, Blue volunteered at races. Always an iconoclast, Blue requested that there be no obituary, no funeral and no tears. Fond memories remain.

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