

Best of all, it was a safe marathon

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It's nice to have options.

The Long Island Marathon, as roughly 5,000 of the 5,500 entrants in yesterday's damp "Festival of Races" can attest, is not the only event. Only a few hundred participants ran the 26.2 miles on the cool, showery day, and perhaps that's for the best.

Offering the half-marathon and the 10-kilometer races means the casual runner - i.e., you and, maybe someday, me - has a greater chance to finish his or her race, to have that celebratory runner's moment, to raise money for a great cause, which several hundred runners were out doing in the streets surrounding and within Eisenhower Park.

And it also means fewer health issues, which makes these races appeal to all of us a little bit more.

"You used to have people calling us up the day before the race to try and get in," said Dr. Edward Fryman, the medical director for the marathon. "You never knew if they were prepared for a full marathon. You see so many people now who are more sophisticated. They know you have to do a lot of homework."

The news last November of three runners' deaths during and after the New York City Marathon didn't do much for the public's view of marathoning and the toll it can take physically. A runner in last week's Nashville half-marathon collapsed and died of cardiac arrest in 80-degree heat.

With so many running to raise money for charity - Team In Training, a group that raises funds for leukemia and lymphoma research; Friends of Karen, which provides assistance to families, particularly siblings, of children with life-threatening illnesses; and Companions In Courage, Pat LaFontaine's group that funds play-spaces for terminally ill children were just three of the bigger groups that had sponsor runners Sunday - the drive to finish sometimes overwhelms the ability to train properly.

"We had about 90 people out today," said Deanna Mirabile of Smithtown, who ran the half-marathon but has run full marathons in New York and Chicago. "Everyone is really able to go the distance they're comfortable with."

Team In Training had 96 runners on the course Sunday, and only one full marathoner.

"We have a schedule for them, let them know exactly what they need to do to prepare," said David Mammina of Carle Place, one of the Team In Training coaches. "People are usually more afraid of the fundraising at first, but then they realize that's the easy part. The training can be a challenge."

The biggest concern Sunday for Fryman and his medical volunteers was dehydration, which may seem odd on a cold, rainy day. "People are deceived into thinking they don't need as much water," he said.

So the medical tent had more than a few cramped, dehydrated runners, and one of them, a 17-year-old who ran the full marathon, went to Nassau University Medical Center for dehydration treatment. Two other runners were hospitalized, but neither had life-threatening injuries.

"You run more than your body's prepared for," said Hofstra sophomore Phil Giacketti, who joined his cross-country teammates for the half-marathon, "and the rest of your day is pretty miserable."

The only miserable part of Sunday was the dreary weather. Runners finished their races, whatever length they ran, and that made just about everybody happy.