

# Marathon Lessons from a Novice: The Fastest, Oldest, Biggest



By Julianna LeMieux — October 16, 2017



As I have written in my recent posts entitled "Marathon Lessons from a Novice," I am running my first marathon in less than one month. (1) With the event quickly approaching, I have been wondering a lot about marathons in general. How many people run one each year? What is the average finish time? What about the average age of runners? To answer these questions, I looked at the data from marathons run in 2016 in the United States and was surprised by what I found.

## **How many people run marathons and how many marathons are there?**

In 2016, 507,600 people completed a marathon in the United States. Just under half (44 percent) of marathon finishers are women.

There were 86 marathons with over 1,000 finishers. The top five biggest are (in order)

- NYC marathon - over 51,000 finishers (the 2016 marathon was, in fact, the largest marathon ever held)
- Chicago Marathon - over 40,000 participants
- Boston Marathon - over 26,000 finishers
- Los Angeles Marathon and Honolulu marathon each with just over 20,000

## **How long does it take to finish, on average?**

The average finish time in the NYC marathon in 2016 was 4:37:38. The range is anywhere from just over 2 hours to up to 8 (for walkers). A new documentary [Breaking2](#) <sup>[1]</sup> details the amazing effort of the three most elite distance runners to break the 2 hour barrier of the marathon. Spoiler alert - they were not able to do it. So, for now, the marathon remains an event that will take, at a minimum, 2 hours.

### **At what age do people run the marathon?**

The average age of marathoners last year was 40 for males and 37 for women. The marathons typically have a minimum age of 18 for registration. On the other end of the spectrum, 104-year-old Fauja Singh is the oldest marathon runner in the world. As a true testament to "it's never too late," he took up marathon running in his eighties.

Harriette Thompson, a mother of five and a grandmother of 10, became the oldest woman to finish a marathon in 2015. With deep regrets, we report her passing earlier this week at the age of 94. She ran with the Team in Training for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society - raising money as a runner and a two time cancer survivor. She started running the marathon in San Diego in 1999, and ran the race every year through 2015 with the exception of one year when she was undergoing treatment for cancer.

### **Running in the Big Apple**

Some of the information about the NYC marathon is astonishing and makes me incredibly proud and honored to make it my first. For example, the number of countries represented by the participants is 124. The total number of states represented? All of them - plus DC. Any guesses for the country with the most finishers (other than the United States)? Italy, with 2,602.

But, the best statistic that I came across in my research on marathons was that the 2016 NYC marathon had a 98.8 percent completion rate. So, only 1.2 percent of people who started did not finish. And, this does not surprise me in the least. New Yorkers know how to get the job done - even if that job is really hard, takes 5 hours, hurts a lot, and its raining or too hot or too cold. We do not give up and we finish what we start.

Notes:

(1) Other articles in the series are,

[Marathon Lessons from a Novice: Why the Race is 26.2 Miles Long](#) <sup>[2]</sup>

[Marathon Lessons From A Novice: What is Goo and Should I Use it?](#) <sup>[3]</sup>

[Marathon Lessons From a Novice: Does Epsom Salt Work For Sore Muscles?](#) <sup>[4]</sup>

**Source URL:** <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/10/16/marathon-lessons-novice-fastest-oldest-biggest-11956>

**Links**

[1] [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2ZLG-Fij\\_4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2ZLG-Fij_4)

[2] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/10/02/marathon-lessons-novice-why-race-262-miles-long-11878>

[3] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/09/27/marathon-lessons-novice-what-goo-and-should-i-use-it-11879>

[4] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/09/20/marathon-lessons-novice-does-epsom-salt-work-sore-muscles-11842>