

ROAD RACE MINIMUM STANDARDS

When runners gather to participate in running events there are certain things they expect from these races. These are the normal, minimum requirements that make races “legitimate”. On rare occasions a road race is held that fails to meet the normal and usual expectations of the participants. A race that doesn’t provide the BASICS that runners expect reflects poorly on the community, the sponsors and the running community of that area. In an effort to protect the integrity of road racing the running community has developed the following minimum standards that we feel road races should meet in order to gain and maintain the enthusiasm of runners and to reflect favorably on the local running community.

RACE PLANNING

Extensive planning is required prior to putting on a road race. Allow, at minimum, three months for planning before your event. This time frame must allow for securing permits from the governing body and/or police or sheriff, and for gathering the numerous volunteers needed. If you intend on using a nearby running club for your scoring then scheduling of this must be done.

ACCURATE COURSE

Regardless of the length of the race the course MUST be accurate. It can be measured either by using a “wheel” such as contractors use, or a Jones Counter mounted on a bicycle that is calibrated. The course should be measured to the advertised length, i.e., a 5k course should be measured to 5,000 meters, not 3.1 miles. Automobile odometers do not qualify as accurate instruments. Larger running clubs have teams that, for a small fee, will “certify” race courses, giving prestige to an event.

TEE SHIRTS

Registration fees should include a free tee shirt for each registered runner. Tasteful advertising on the shirt is acceptable. Remember, the races that have the best designs and most colors on their tee shirts are the races that draw runners back year after year.

DATE OF EVENT

When picking a date for your event, check with the running community to make sure the date you pick does not conflict with other established races in the area. Road races have enough to compete with without competing with each other. Runners frequently travel 50-75 miles to attend a run, so your run will have a shot at drawing from a wider area than you may imagine. Make sure you don’t split the available runners by conflicting with an established road race.

FUND RAISING

It’s perfectly legitimate to use your road race as a “fund raiser”. Do bear in mind, however, that the costs of holding a race are fairly substantial and the most frequent reason for the demise of road races is that expenses exceed income.

HYDRATION

It is imperative that runners be given an adequate supply of fluid replacement. This should include water before, during and after a race. Isotonic drinks, like PowerAde and Gatorade, should be provided, at minimum, after the race.

REFRESHMENTS

It is expected that race sponsors provide snacks for runners after an event. This can vary from fruit to bagels to other “goodies” that can be easily dispensed and enjoyed by runners.

AWARDS

Awards have long been expected at road racing events. Trophies or plaques, should be given AT LEAST three-deep (1st, 2nd, and 3rd place) in each age group, both male and female. Additionally, overall awards should be given AT LEAST to the first three finishers, both male and female. Most races also give awards for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place in the wheel chair division, male and female. Also, most races give a separate award to the top masters (40+) runners, again, both male and female. Awards for male and female categories should be of equal value. There should be no duplication of awards between the overall winners (including masters) and the age group awards. The overall awards (including masters) are, obviously, more prestigious than the age group awards, and the trophy/plaques should reflect this.

AGE GROUPS

Larger races, say 100+ runners, normally give trophies in 5 year increments. It is, however, acceptable to stretch that to 10 year increments in smaller races. Age groups should be the same for both male and female categories. Races that carry the age grouping through at least age 70 are more attractive to senior runners.

RACE NUMBERS

Race numbers are not absolutely necessary in small races as the simple methods of scoring don't require them. However, race numbers do lend authenticity to your race and they help in dispensing prizes. Small races can frequently get left-over race numbers from nearby, established races where race directors will likely be glad to rid themselves of remaining numbers. Scissors can eliminate any advertising or personalization. If you desire to use your own, personalized race numbers, purchasing sources are available in the back of most running magazines.

TRAFFIC CONTROL

Race organizers have a RESPONSIBILITY to have adequate traffic control to protect runners while on the race course. Runners trying to shave a few seconds off their P. R. (personal record) are in intense concentration and are likely not watching for traffic.

An unsafe course could be a cause for legal action that could affect organizers and sponsors alike.

DISTANCE

Runners compete both with other runners and with the course. They like to compare what their “time” for the event is versus another race of the same distance (yet another reason for an ACCURATE course). There are specific distances that new races normally adhere to. Most are either 5k or 10k races (approximately 3.1 or 6.2 miles). New races would be wise to choose a common distance such as these. Runners will likely not be excited about an unusual length.

ENTRY FORMS

Entry forms should be attractive, simple and easy to understand. If possible, a course map should be included in the race brochure. Brochures should be distributed to area running and fitness centers as well as

RACE COURSE

One of the most difficult responsibilities of race organizers is to pick a good, safe course. Whether rural or urban, the route should be as scenic as possible and should attempt to show off the best areas of the community where the race is held. DON'T have the course cross a railroad. Hilly courses are not popular. Safety, of course is paramount.

Permits are sometimes required for races on public roads. Be sure to check with the proper governing body(s) to determine the need for permits. Also, in urban areas some law enforcement agencies charge a substantial fee for providing traffic control on the course.

Courses can be either “loops” where the runners basically don't retrace their route, or “out-and-back” courses where runners go out half the distance then reverse their course and return via the same route they went out on. Either course layout is acceptable. The very term “road” racing tells us that the route should be paved, or the race should be specifically designated as an “off-road”, “trail run”, “cross-country” race.

The course must be WELL MARKED, either by arrows on the street and/or by course volunteers that direct the runners. A “lead” vehicle should guide, and stay well ahead of, the lead runner. Traffic control personnel should know the course within their areas so they can help keep runners on the proper course. Nothing is more embarrassing than for runners (or part of the runners) to take a wrong turn and get off the course.

Each mile should be **boldly** marked so runners can check their times as they progress through the race.

Other considerations that may aid in selecting a site are:

1. Ease of traffic control
2. Runner safety
3. Availability of parking
4. Location for pre or post race activities

5. Restroom availability

TIMING

Methods abound for timing of the runners. It can be as simple as a stop watch and numbered index cards or as complex as computer chips. Regardless of which method chosen, accuracy is absolutely imperative. Make sure your “timing committee” knows exactly what they are doing. It is very good to have timers at each mile mark on the course calling out lapsed times, but in any event, the mile marks on the course should be very visible to the runners.

ASK FOR HELP

There are resources you can call on to help you organize your race. These include area Running Clubs, other Race Directors and long time runners experienced in road racing. Some running clubs have teams that will put your race on for you or do your timing, all for a small fee. ASK questions as you proceed with your planning. Remember, it benefits all when you put on a well planned run...and it hurts everyone when you don't. So for the sake of your community, the sponsoring organization, the running community and the sport, plan well and adhere to the minimum standards.