

Why Women are Taking Over the Sport of Running!

Check any local road race or running club registration and you will notice that women may soon surpass men as the largest demographic in attendance. In fact in the 5k distance women make up 60% of the road race participation and are also make up the majority of the field in popular marathons such as Disney.

I think one of the biggest reasons running is popular with women is that no matter your age, fitness ability, or weight, running is a very liberating activity. You don't have to have a lot of skill, buy a lot of equipment, or make an appointment to participate. You can step out of your front door and just go! It is a total body exercise which means you will get a great endorphin release during most runs because you are moving your entire body and breathing deep from your lungs. This is a great way to relieve stress, clear your mind and just feel good about yourself.

It is also a sport/activity that allows for substantial individual achievement. A beginner runner who starts out having to walk every 5:00 to complete a 30:00 run can usually progress to steady running within a 4-6 week period. 12:00 per mile pace lowers to 11:00/mile pace and she feels like she accomplished something..which she did!

Finally I believe the running community as a whole to be a very warm/social group. Just take a look at the atmosphere at any local 5k race. Many people are there for the social aspect as well as the competitive arena. Women are natural social beings...we like to nurture, support, and be a part of something. This makes running a natural sport for us to be drawn to.

For myself, running became a part of who I was at a very early age. I began participating in a track club at age 9. I was lucky to have a little bit of God-given talent so I immediately enjoyed the competition..although it also brought about a certain amount of pressure. What I valued most about the sport as a young girl and now appreciate as an adult woman is that it has always been my way of releasing, playing, achieving, and discovering who I really am..all in one.

Speaking of shapes and sizes I was not always a "fit" runner. My junior/senior years in HS and freshman year in college I was about 20 pounds heavier and honestly quite "chubby" for a Division I runner. I just didn't have the knowledge about eating properly and once I went through puberty the bad eating habits translated into extra pounds. Somehow I kept winning (I won the Delaware HS State Championship in the 800m in 2:18 weighing 155 pounds!). I just have a very strong will to excel and somehow that got me through. But there were many times I heard negative comments from people, was teased by people I didn't know, etc. "Aren't you a little heavy to be a runner?" was a very common comment. "Oh, we like big girls!" was another from a group of guys watching at the track...that one really hurt. The good thing is that running is what actually helped my self-esteem during this crazy period (teen years) when your body is going nuts and you are trying to figure out who you are and what you stand for. I knew I was a runner if nothing else and I knew that it made me feel better when I ran...so I kept running. Finally I figured out the nutrition aspect, made better food choices and within a year (sophomore year of college) I had lost all of the extra weight.

I am sure there are countless other girls and women out there who share similar stories. I believe that the dedication, education, and will power it required for me to be a "lifelong runner" has made me a better person in all areas of my life. I learned to become not only a gracious winner, but also a humble, poised "runner-up" and I want to help others realize the same benefits from running...which is why I started coaching.

Running is a great sport for anyone, but may hold a special value for women because it allows us to focus on ourselves and our own inner power. Who wouldn't enjoy that!

-Sonja Friend-Uhl