

The “Visible Hand” on the Footrace: Fred Lebow and the Marketing of the Marathon

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During the decade of the 1970s, marathon participation increased dramatically. In 1969, there were fewer than forty marathons in the United States; by 1977, there were nearly two hundred. The Boston Marathon zoomed from 890 starters in 1968 to 4,391 in 1978. More significantly, the New York City Marathon increased from 126 starters in 1970 to 16,005 in 1980.¹ This was the result of innovations and changes in the New York City Marathon that served the purposes of managerial capitalism, the “visible hand,” which, in this case, used capital and technology to meet a demand that was as much created by road racing administrators and sponsors as determined by the market. The New York City Marathon became a business enterprise, which, as Alfred Chandler explains, “did not . . . replace the market as the primary force in generating goods and services ,” but did “take over from the market the coordination and integration of the flow of goods and services.” In the early 1980s, the New York Road Runners Club was given not-for-profit corporation status, and the club’s financial statements were registered with the New York State Department of State. These financial statements show “a hierarchy of salaried executives” and indicate the growth and presence of “distinct operating units,” both characteristics of Chandler’s modern business enterprise.*

The New York City Marathon led the way for a nationwide change, not only in number of participants, but also in restructuring the marathon to validate the presence of many runners of little athletic potential. Before the “marathon boom” of the 1970s, marathoners were competitors who hoped, if not to win, at least to place in the top ten or compete for age group awards. Marathon courses

1. “More People, More Speed,” *Runner’s World* 10 (February 1975): 23; Joe Henderson, “Seven Big Issues for ‘77,” *Runner’s World* 12 (February 1977): 19; David E. Martin and Roger W. H. Gynn, *The Marathon Footrace: Performers and Performances* (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, 1979), 254, 339; “Demographics—1980 NYC Marathon,” *New York Running News* 24, 5 (1980): 134.

*. Alfred D. Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), 1, 4, 6, 11, 498; James Texas, “Take the Money and Run,” *The Runner* 1 (January 1979): 16, 19. The financial statements of the New York Road Runners Club are public record since 1982. Copies are available from the New York State Department of State, Office of Charities Registration, Albany, New York 12231-0001.

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were often closed after four hours, and the times of late finishers went unrecorded.³ However, in the 1981 New York City Marathon, about one third of the field, over 4,000 people, finished after four hours. Race officials stayed to record their times, crowds remained to cheer them, and each finisher was awarded a marathon medal.

New marathon runners often perceived the event less as a competition than as a ritual whose subjective reward was spiritual achievement, “a special sensation that attunes them closer to the world yet also raises their consciousness and provides a sense of elation”; others ran for good health or to relieve tension.⁴ For those less inner-directed, the New York City Marathon provided a festival atmosphere and symbols, such as finishers’ medals and race T-shirts, which assured all who actually completed the course, no matter how slowly, that they were part of an elite group. The New York City Marathon found ways to accommodate and sanction a wide variety of reasons for entering a 26.2-mile footrace.

A single entrepreneur, Fred Lebow, seized control of the New York City Marathon in the mid-1970s,⁵ and enhanced its potential to attract corporate funding by increasing the number of participants—regardless of their athletic ability. When marathon fields were small, they comprised serious runners who were generally blue-collar men; however, a study of the 1980 New York City Marathon field showed those runners to be mostly upper-status men and women.⁶ The history of the New York City Marathon from 1970 to 1980 suggests that the marathon’s directors consciously sought this comparatively affluent population for the purpose of attracting corporate sponsors. In creating new services and presenting the marathon to appeal to upper-status, recreational runners, Lebow changed the nature of the New York Road Runners club, which administers the New York City Marathon, from a volunteer organization serving the athletic interests of its members to a business enterprise with a staff of salaried managers.⁷

The new upper-status runners were most concerned with personal well-being. Having time and money to expend on their health, they were likely to be informed on the matter. Their interest in marathon running was often ascribed to

3. Hal Higdon, “The AAU: Kingdom in Crisis,” *The Runner* 1 (September 1979): 57. Higdon first ran the Boston Marathon in 1959.

Those marathoners in 1959 either were more talented or more dedicated than those of 1979. . . . While winning times may seem slow by today’s standards, almost everybody was capable of marks near 3:00.

For someone to run slower than 4:00—unheard of! The officials, none of whom were runners and all of whom smoked cigars, would never wait around that long anyway.

4. Ian T. Macauley, “Marathon Men and Women on Their Marks,” *New York Times* 22 October 1976, p. C22.

5. Paul Milvy, “Milvy to Lebow,” letter from Paul Milvy to Fred Lebow, printed in *Road Runners Club New York Association Newsletter* no. 71 (Spring 1977): 6. Paul Milvy, a biophysicist affiliated with the Mount Sinai School of Medicine, was a runner who assisted the NYRRC with technical matters. In this letter, Milvy, then a member of the NYRRC Executive Committee, decried Lebow’s authoritarian administrative practices.

6. James Curtis and William McTeer, “Toward a Sociology of Marathonism,” *Journal of Sport Behavior* 4,2 (1981): 79. For the lower-status origin of the marathon in social terms, see Pamela Cooper, “Community, Ethnicity, Status: The Origins of the Marathon in the United States,” *International Journal of the History of Sport* 9 (April 1992): 50-62.

7. Thomas O’Donnell with Jinny St. Goar, “Marathon Money Matters,” *Forbes* 132 (24 October 1983): 37. See also New York State Department of State, New York Road Runners Club, Inc. Annual Report-Charitable Organization, for the years ended 31 December 1982 and 31 December 1985, and Milvy, “Milvy to Lebow,” 6.

the marathon's alleged health-enhancing properties. "It does improve the efficiency of the heart," a 1977 *Fortune* magazine article reported on the running and marathoning interest among corporate officers. "Other executives and their wives claim even larger benefits: running has improved their sex lives, made them stop smoking, cured hangovers, jet lag, ulcers, constipation, alcoholism, depression, and insomnia, and prevented the common cold."⁸

The association of running with such values as health, fitness, and feminism made marathoning attractive to upper-status individuals. Sociologist James Curtis, of the University of Waterloo, Ontario, and William McTeer, of Wilfrid Laurier University's Health and Physical Education Department, use the positive correlation of health consciousness with social status to explain their findings of higher-status backgrounds among marathoners surveyed for a 1981 sociological study of the sport. Certainly New York Road Runners Club members were predominantly upper-middle class. A 1983 study of its 21,696 members revealed that almost 90 percent were college graduates, and that their average income was \$40,000.⁹

The new women marathoners also contributed to the overall change in socioeconomic status among runners. In 1977, 2,000 women participated in a relay that conveyed a torch from Seneca Falls, New York, to the National Women's Conference in Houston. When the torch arrived, New York politician Bella Abzug accompanied the runner into the convention hall. The woman runner became a feminist symbol at a time when feminism was mainly a middle-class protest movement, concerned with bettering women's educations, opening the professions to them, and protecting their property after marriage. These opportunities were assumed to be for all women, but often only middle- and upper-class women could take advantage of them. Similarly, upper-status women would be most likely to have the leisure for a time-consuming, financially unproductive amateur sport such as marathon running.¹⁰

In the past, the marathon footrace had been a lower-status event, not only in the economic class of its participants, but also within the amateur sport bureaucracy.¹¹ The principal governing body for intercollegiate athletics, the National Collegiate Athletic Association, ignored marathon running. The Amateur Athletic Union, which managed Olympic sports in the United States until the Amateur Sports Act of 1978, was scarcely better. AAU meets often neglected events such as the hammer throw and the marathon because they were not traditionally profitable as spectator sports.¹²

8. Benjamin G. Rader, "The Quest for Self-Sufficiency and the New Strenuosity: Reflections on the Strenuous Life of the 1970s and the 1980s," *Journal of Sport History* 18,2 (1991): 258-260; Marilyn Wellemeier, "Addicted to Perpetual Motion," *Fortune* 95 (June 1977): 58.

9. Curtis and McTeer, "Sociology of Marathoning," 79; Frank Litsky, "A Second Wind in the Running Boom," *New York Times*, 16 April 1983, C6.

10. Olive Banks, *Faces of Feminism: A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 250; William J. Baker, *Sports in the Western World* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982), 295.

11. Pamela Cooper, "How the AAU Suppressed the Marathon," *Footnotes* 11, 1 (1983): 14.

12. United States, Congress, Senate, Committee on Commerce, *NCAA-AAU Dispute: Hearing before the Committee on Commerce*, 89th Cong., 1st sess., 16-27 August 1965, 523-4 (hereafter cited as *NCAA-AAU Dispute*). This was part of the statement submitted by Hugh D. Jascourt, then president of the Road Runners Club

Dissatisfaction with the AAU's treatment of long-distance runners led to the creation of the Road Runners Club of America (RRCA) by former Olympic steeplechaser H. Browning Ross in December 1957. Interest in jogging in the 1960s strengthened the RRCA's position by creating a new pool of potential long-distance runners who were of higher socioeconomic status than the traditional club runners. While RRCA clubs staged AAU-sanctioned road races, the RRCA also produced "closed" events-for members only-that could be held without AAU sanctioning. Often joggers were introduced to racing by low-key Road Runners events rather than high-pressure AAU competitions. The New York Association of the RRCA, which became the New York Road Runners Club (NYRRC), was organized in June 1958 in order to provide more long-distance races in the area governed by the Metropolitan AAU. The NYRRC was denied affiliation with the Metropolitan AAU, until NYRRC president Aldo Scandurra ran for Metropolitan AAU office and was elected second vice-president, a tactic that he and the RRCA continued and carried through at the national level. The AAU, responsible for ensuring that athletes were eligible for international competition, remained the governing body of marathoning, but, by infiltrating the AAU bureaucracy, the RRCA increasingly controlled domestic aspects of long-distance racing.¹³

During the 1960s and 1970s, the New York Road Runners Club became the pivotal section of the RRCA by moving into all three of the components that Stephen Hardy identifies as constituting the "sport product:" the game form, the goods, and the services. Much of Hardy's explanation of the sport product refers to the economic and business history of sport. He defines the game form as "the rules defining the way the game is played," adding, "Of course, anyone can make up a game, as Professor Naismith demonstrated. But this is of little consequence until rule-making is organized and controlled by particular groups." The NYRRC was one of those groups. It extended its authority over the game form by standardizing course measurement methods. Theodore Corbitt, who became the NYRRC's first president in 1958, published a pamphlet on the topic, *Measure Road Racing Courses*, and the NYRRC supplied expertise and sanctioning on course calibration.¹⁴

The second part of the sport product comprises goods. Hardy lists "Balls, goals, sticks, bats, protective equipment and uniforms . . ." as well as facilities, such as running tracks, that are essential to the contest. The New York Road Runners Club was among the pioneers in the use of computerized finish-

of America.

13. *NCAA-AAU Dispute*, 523-4; "Jogging for Heart and Health-It's Catching On," *U.S. News and World Report* 62 (25 December 1967): 49; Aldo Scandurra, "History of Long Distance and Road Racing," *Long Island Running News* 1(3) (1981): 11. Aldo Scandurra joined the Road Runners Club New York Association (as the NYRRC was then called) in 1960. He also held a number of offices in the AAU, among them Chairman of the National LDR Committee. Scandurra devised the tactic of infiltration of the AAU by the RRCA. See also "Who Is the American Runner?" *Runner's World* 19 (August 1984): 49.

14. Stephen Hardy, "Entrepreneurs, Organizations, and the Sport Marketplace: Subjects in Search of Historians," *Journal of Sport History* 13 (1986): 17; Scandurra, "History of Long Distance," 12; John Chodes, *Corbitt: The Story of Ted Corbitt, Long Distance Runner* (Los Altos, California: Tafnews Press, 1974), 147. Theodore Corbitt, an African-American runner, was an Olympic marathoner in 1952.

line equipment directed at accurately scoring large fields of runners, particularly when several runners would finish at the same time.¹⁵

Although sport services are traditionally defined in terms of such social functions as "education, status, military preparation, urban boosterism, political propaganda, and most extensively, entertainment," Hardy adds that special organizations to promote the sport, and to serve it in ways apart from the game form, are also sport services. One such special organization was the United States Age Group Competitions for boys and girls, originated by NYRRC members Ann and Nat Cirulnick, Barry Geisler, and Joe Kleinerman. This was a significant program for women, because mothers were encouraged to jog with their children in non-competitive Fun Runs. According to Aldo Scandurra, "This was the breakthrough that led to LDR [long distance running] scheduled programs for women."¹⁶

With the rebirth of active feminism in the mid-1960s, as well as the events leading up to the passage of Title IX in 1973, there was increased overall interest in women's athletics. No group has done more to promote long-distance running for women than the Road Runners Club of America. Throughout the 1960s, the RRCA repeatedly challenged the AAU's ban on women's long-distance races. Women were finally allowed to participate in an AAU-sanctioned marathon in Atlantic City on 25 October 1970. Six female RRCA members officially entered through the usual RRCA device: The marathon was a "closed" competition, sponsored by the RRCA.¹⁷

Women runners may have been the first to present the possibilities of the marathon as a profit-making enterprise. In 1972, Fred Lebow of the New York Road Runners Club was approached by the public relations firm of S. C. Johnson & Son, Inc., about staging a marathon for women. Lebow had originally been a textile consultant in New York City's garment industry. He was elected president of the NYRRC in 1972, and still holds that position, once voluntary but now salaried. He left his career as consultant in the late 1970s and now devotes himself to managing the NYRRC. Lebow recognized the attractiveness of a women-only marathon but was also cognizant of the scarcity of women capable of running 26.2 miles. Instead he suggested, and the sponsor accepted, a women's road race of six miles.¹⁸

The public relations firm mailed thousands of invitations to women in local high schools and colleges, while Lebow demonstrated his own aptitude for promotion, handing out entry blanks and flyers all over Manhattan, occasionally taping them to light poles. He encouraged six Playboy Bunnies to run in the

15. Hardy, "Entrepreneurs," 19; Paul Milvy, "How the Mini Kept Score," *Runner's World* 12 (August 1977): 51-53.

16. Hardy, "Entrepreneurs," 18-19; Scandurra, "History of Long Distance," 16.

17. Scandurra, "History of Long Distance," 15-16; Rat Tarnawsky, "What's This? Women Welcome!" *Runner's World* 6 (January 1971): 22. Title IX of the 1972 Educational Amendments Act requires that all high schools and colleges receiving federal monies do not discriminate against students and employees on the basis of gender. In sports, this meant theoretically equal opportunities and facilities.

18. Fred Lebow with Richard Woodley, *Inside the World of Big-Time Marathoning* (New York: Rawson Associates, 1984), 61-2. David G. Santry, "The Business of Running," *New York Running News* 21 (December 1979): 11.

race, and recruited the patrons of a rock-music nightclub. The result of this feverish activity was a field of seventy-eight women.¹⁹

This was the first running of what would become a prestigious annual ten-kilometer competition: the Women’s Mini-Marathon, popularly known as “the Mini.” By the late 1970s the event would draw over 6,000 participants to a single 6.2-mile race, but in 1972 it was memorable mainly for its farcical elements. The sponsor insisted that the runners wear identical white T-shirts with their numbers stamped below the name of the product-“Crazy Legs,” a shaving cream for women. A male runner decided to pace first woman Jackie Dixon through the race, leading what Tom Derderian (husband of second woman Charlotte Lettis) said “looked more like a comic refugee regiment slowly plodding around the park in identical jerseys.” Denied her right to break a tape, Dixon had to burst through a huge paper banner advertising Crazy Legs, her win subjugated to the needs of the sponsor’s product. Promoting long-distance running for women was going to require even more effort and imagination, or perhaps a little less.²⁰

In 1973 and 1974, Olympic Airways gave some financial support to the New York City Marathon in return for race-day publicity. In 1975, however, the marathon lost that sponsor and had to rely on numerous small donations from members. The *New York Times* commented on the incongruity of the loss of corporate sponsorship “at a time when more New Yorkers than ever are embracing a run-for-fun philosophy.” In responding to its need to attract sponsorship, the New York Road Runners Club became an entrepreneurial organization, “one with a high motivation,” as Philip Kotler explains in *Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations*, “and capability to identify new opportunities and convert them into successful businesses.”²¹

The New York City Marathon’s limited spectatorship and low number of participants (just over five hundred in 1974 and 1975) influenced sponsors’ perceptions of the marathon as an event that would have little commercial value. On the positive side, joggers and, increasingly, competitive long-distance runners were already considered upper-status individuals, important as consumers. Frank Shorter’s gold medal in the 1972 Munich Olympic Marathon was a form of testimonial; the twenty-four year old, Yale-educated law student on the winners’ stand provided a role model for young professionals interested in marathoning. Affluent earners could, and would, be enticed to recreational running through careful presentation of the services of the sport: cardiovascular fitness, weight control, and the companionship of other upper-status persons.²²

19. Lebow with Woodley, *Big-Time Marathoning*, 45-6.

20. Tom Derderian, “Women’s Day in Central Park,” *Runner’s World* 12 (August 1977): 49; Charlotte Lettis, “Promoting Women’s Running?” *Runner’s World* 7 (September 1972): 44.

21. Neil Amdur, “Area Marathons Feel Money Squeeze,” *New York Times*, 3 June 1975, p. 38; Philip Kotler, *Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1975), 113.

22. *U.S. News and World Report* 62 (25 December 1967): 49; P. Rosenfeld, “Cooper’s Cohorts Run Down Heart Disease,” *Saturday Evening Post* 249 (September 1977): 18-20. See also Dave Prokop, “Frank Shorter,” *Runner’s World* 11 (January 1976): 46.

In order to be recruited for the marathon, the well-to-do had to be made aware of the event as an attractive achievement that was accessible to them.

The New York City Marathon had been an inconspicuous event for the first six years of its running, held within the confines of Central Park, comprising a bit over four laps of the Central Park road. In 1975, even though the New York City Marathon was also the Women's National AAU Championships, it still was given very little attention. Horseback riders, bicyclists, pedestrians, and dogs freely crossed the runners' lane. To the media, the marathon was a sport eccentricity; the marathon coverage on one television station devoted most footage to a chance spectator who shouted, "Look at all these crazy people!"²³ Certainly the New York City Marathon directors were looking for some way to enhance the prestige of their event, and to associate marathon running with serious achievement.

The prestige came the next year, when two of the 1976 United States Olympic marathoners competed in the race. In 1976, with Bicentennial commemorations under way throughout the country, the New York Road Runners Club, in keeping with the Bicentennial spirit, proposed that the upcoming New York City Marathon be taken out of Central Park and run through all five boroughs on the streets of New York. Frank Shorter had won the silver medal in the marathon at the Montreal Games; Bill Rodgers, winner of the 1975 Boston Marathon, placed fortieth in the Olympics. Both attractive men in the late twenties and graduates of highly-regarded universities, they were fine examples of marathon runners for affluent earners in their twenties and thirties.²⁴

The five-borough marathon was endorsed by New York City Mayor Abraham Beame and by Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton, and the Rudin family, founders of a major New York City real-estate firm, offered \$25,000 to sponsor the race. Through Lebow's promotional efforts, the event picked up other sponsors, including Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company, *New Times* magazine, Finnair, and Bonne Bell cosmetics. The New York Academy of Sciences' "Conference on the Marathon" was scheduled October 25-28. Advertisements for the marathon included announcements for the conference that implied a connection between the marathon and medical approval. As the race drew near, colorful posters appeared all over the city. Entrants poured in, half of whom had never run a marathon before.²⁵

The success of the 1976 New York City Marathon was to a great extent due to Rodgers and Shorter. "Under-the-table money," the illicit payment of amateur athletes, underscored the vital role of top runners. According to Lebow, Rodgers was paid \$2,000 for this race, and Shorter was also "treated . . . fairly." The guaranteed appearances of famous, world-class runners attracted the attention of the media that publicized the race, and of sponsors who paid for

23. Joan Uillyot, *Women's Running* (Mountain View, California: World, 1976), 145-147.

24. Neil Amdur, "New York's First Citywide Marathon Draws Some of World's Top Runners," *New York Times*, 25 October 1976, p. 31.

25. Lebow with Woodley, *Big-Time Marathoning*, 64; Ted Brock, "All Around the Town," *Runner's World* 11 (December 1976): 22; *Runner's World* 11 (August 1976): 26; Amdur, "First Citywide Marathon," 31.

the banners, T-shirts, and other paraphernalia of festival. The acclaim and the spectacle were necessary to draw enough spectators to provide sufficient public relations value to the event’s sponsors.²⁶

The payment of athletes by the New York City Marathon is difficult to trace, partly due to the manner in which the payments were made. In 1976, Rodgers probably received a cash payment. In 1979, Jon Anderson ran in the New York City Marathon and finished ninth. He did not give lectures or appearances; in his own words, he “simply ran the race and finished ninth.” New York Road Runners Club treasurer Peter Roth arranged for Anderson to receive a \$1,500 check from New York City Marathon sponsor Great Waters of France (Perrier). Officially, there was nothing but Anderson’s word to connect the New York City Marathon with the payment of an athlete in violation of the amateur code.²⁷

Events in 1976 also marked a major change in the New York Road Runners Club from a democratic organization to one in which all authority was vested in Lebow.²⁸ According to Hardy, when a sport is not subsidized by the state or by a philanthropic agency, it is important that the sport have an entrepreneur willing to engage in profit-seeking and risk-taking and other innovative activity, such as introducing a new service or opening a new market. Lebow fit this description as he spearheaded the New York City Marathon, and did much of the negotiating himself directly with sponsors and city officials.²⁹

Although the more than two thousand entrants made the 1976 New York City Marathon the world’s largest, in many ways this race seemed to be aimed at runners who would enter the marathon in 1977 and after. The first five-borough marathon provided a general awareness of the event, especially to those with the leisure time to train for the next year’s race. The 1976 New York City Marathon attempted to target the upscale market of health-conscious joggers through the personal appearance of Shorter and Rodgers; inhabitants of the affluent Upper East Side saw two twenty-nine year old Olympians racing, followed by ordinary, thirtyish men and women much like themselves.

Two days after the marathon, an article appeared in the *New York Times* entitled “Want to Run Marathon? Take It Easy, Doctor Warns Hopeful Novices.” The piece contained extensive advice on training and referred to the Academy of Sciences conference. The author concluded with a statement from Fred Lebow that the city would like “to make the five-borough marathon an annual event.” According to Lebow, “The New York Road Runners Club raised \$40,000 from various corporate sponsors, but still will wind up with a \$20,000

26. Montieth M. Illingworth, “Run for the Money,” *Manhattan*, Inc. 2 (October 1985): 129.

27. Lebow with Woodley, *Big-Time Marathoning*, 15; Jon P. Anderson, “Lebow,” letter to the editor, *The Runner* 4 (January 1982): 6.

28. Milvy, “Milvy to Lebow,” 6. The following is an excerpt from this letter of March 1977:

Just look at where we stand today: we have a President and an Executive, neither of which was ever elected by the membership. And as undemocratic as this may be, from a purely practical point of view, it doesn’t matter at all: the Exec. never even convenes! From time to time, authority to work independently is given to various individuals with one hand, too often taken away with the other. Their decisions may well be made after careful thought, yet all too likely they are countermanded by the President’s personal whim.

29. Hardy, “Entrepreneurs,” 20; Lebow with Woodley, *Big-Time Marathoning*, 63-69.

deficit for the race.” This article summed up the situation nicely: Lebow was calling out to next year’s runners and next year’s sponsors.³⁰

The 4 June 1977 ten-kilometer Women’s Mini-Marathon, which increased to two thousand entrants from 408 in 1976, indicated the direction the marathon would be taking. First, finish line timing and scoring procedures were computerized to enable the staff to accurately score four or five finishers per second. This ten-kilometer women’s race became a test run for the technology that would permit a greatly increased field at the upcoming marathon. The modification had marked commercial value; larger fields were important to sponsors, since they meant that many more people would be exposed to advertising for sponsors’ products. Second, the directors of the Mini-Marathon improved public and press relations. According to the *Runner’s World* coverage of the event, the 1977 Mini-Marathon’s success could be attributed “to a bit of marketing genius.” *The Runner’s World* article gave an account of fun runs and clinics for members of the press, mass mailings of schedules and flyers, and advertisements of the race in upscale magazines such as *Vogue* and *Harper’s*, as well as in magazines geared to young adults with significant disposable incomes, such as *Seventeen* and *Glamour*. The April 1977 edition of *Vogue* and the May 1977 edition of *Mademoiselle* carried articles by medical doctors explaining the benefits of jogging.”

By August, five thousand entrants had been accepted for the upcoming 1977 New York City Marathon. The marathon course had been changed slightly, so that now the runners would travel up First Avenue, past the trendy singles bars. Perrier became a marathon sponsor, and on 23 October 1977, the young, upwardly-mobile professionals of the late 1970s became the objects of Perrier’s American advertising campaign as they watched Bill Rodgers and Garry Bjorklund in an impressive duel up First Avenue.³²

Bill Rodgers, the winner of the 1977 and 1978 New York City Marathons, appeared on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* on 30 October 1978 during a New York City newspaper strike. His racing number, along with the printed name of sponsor Manufacturers Hanover, was clearly visible. *Forbes* magazine quoted Manufacturers Hanover Vice President Charles McCabe as saying, “You can’t buy advertising like that.” But even without *Sports Illustrated* and the newspaper strike, sponsors such as Perrier were reaching a suitable consumer audience through the New York City Marathon. The commemorative T-shirts given to the entrants were ideal for corporate trademarks and other advertising.³³

The race T-shirts had many functions. They were a motivation for participation in road events where enormous fields meant few runners could win a

30. Neil Amdur, “Want to Run Marathon? Take It Easy, Doctor Warns Hopeful Novices,” *New York Times*, 26 October 1976, p. 33.

31. Milvy, “How the Mini Kept Score,” 51-3; Derderian, “Women’s Day in Central Park,” 49; George Sheehan, “Fitness Rx,” *Vogue* 167 (April 1977): 136-7; Arthur Frank, and Stuart Frank, “Jogging,” *Mademoiselle* 83 (May 1977): 92-95.

32. Lebow with Woodley, *Big-Time Marathoning*, 82-83.

33. O’Donnell with St. Goar, “Marathon Money,” 37.

trophy. According to sociologist Jeffrey Nash of Macalester College, "The common practice of awarding T-shirts to all finishers symbolizes the individual conquest of failure."³⁴ Running togs became a fashion statement as well, and the commemorative T-shirt implied the wearer was a clean-living individual. On 1 April 1978, Perrier co-sponsored a ten-kilometer race with Bloomingdale's. Race tank tops and T-shirts were distributed at a check-in held in Bloomingdale's new running wear department. "Can't we get these people to move any faster?" a Road Runners official reportedly asked a Bloomingdale's sales clerk as runners wavered in their choice between the tank tops and the T-shirts. "How can you possibly give the Bloomingdale's customer a fashion decision to make and expect them to make it quickly?" the clerk replied.³⁵

While runners and non-runners alike recognized the social and psychological advantages of wearing a marathon T-shirt, marketing vice-presidents acknowledged the race T-shirt's value as "unsolicited" advertising. "The sight of a smiling corporate vp is not unfamiliar these days at running races . . ." said a 1979 *Advertising Age* article that began with a few paragraphs on the potential of race T-shirts imprinted with a company's name and logo: "All those runners undoubtedly would take those T-shirts home and wear them another day."³⁶

A 1978 *Runner's World* survey conducted by market research firm Yankelovich, Skelly, and White indicated that runners were mostly white-collar people with yearly incomes much higher than the national average. Journalist Neil Amdur, in *The Runner*, made a connection between the new marathoners and the possibilities for corporate sponsorship. Amdur noted the significance of the New York City Marathon in "changing the image of long-distance running from one of personal struggle to a joyous one shared by an entire city," and, especially, in creating an "expanded constituency" for what was formerly an event of limited participation. "Corporations . . . saw the upbeat, middle-income college-educated market moving onto the roads. What better way to sell an image than by identifying with a healthy amateur sport?"³⁷ A large part of the sponsoring corporation's image would be determined by the presentation of the New York City Marathon; by the overall organization, the facility of procedures, the services offered, and the care of individual runners.³⁸

The New York Road Runners Club was originally concerned with the politics of road racing; developing opportunities for competition, sanctioning races, and representing long-distance runners' interests in a track-dominated athletics culture. Administrative and other tasks were carried out through the cooperative efforts of runners and non-competing members, generally in a private home or temporarily donated office space. When the NYRRC finally obtained its first

34. Jeffrey E. Nash, "Weekend Racing as an Eventful Experience: Understanding the Accomplishment of Well-Being," *Urban Life* 8, 1 (1979): 212.

35. Neil Amdur, "Running Boom: Too Much Too Soon?" *New York Times*, 17 April 1978, pp. C1, C8.

36. Carol Galginaitis, "To Corporations, Name's the Game," *Advertising Age* SO (27 August 1979): S-2; Ullyot, *Women's Running*, 70.

37. "Who is the American Runner?" *Runner's World* 15 (December 1980): 37; Neil Amdur, "What Makes the Seventies Run," *The Runner* 1 (October 1978): 14.

38. Texas, "Take the Money," 19; Santry, "The Business of Running," 12-13.

permanent office in the West Side YMCA, it was intended to be run on a "family basis," with members expected to "drop in to help out" as the need arose. But the staging of the first five-borough marathon necessitated the establishment of formal committees, over a dozen of them, each little more than a chairperson dependent on sporadic volunteer help, all under the direct control of Fred Lebow. The system was barely workable and often chaotic.³⁹

The five-borough marathon also required the use of city services, such as police, coordinated by Lebow but clearly under their own direction. This set an important precedent as race production became the NYRRC's main product and the various committees achieved increasing autonomy. For example, the Medical Committee, chaired by a NYRRC-member physician, but staffed by volunteer residents, interns, and medical students, was self-contained due to the professional nature of its work. The Medical Committee also filled an important public relations role, as noted in the minutes of the 25 July 1977 meeting of the Marathon Committee: "If two or three people drop dead then we will be placed in a position of answering a lot of questions. We will have to be able to say that we acted like responsible citizens in allowing people to run twenty-six miles."⁴⁰

The Technical Committee, responsible for the finish line structure and timing and recording devices, was another unit which quickly achieved autonomy, again in Chandlerian fashion, as a reflection of their highly specialized knowledge and function. As time and road racing progressed, the Technical Committee fulfilled its Chandlerian destiny, essentially becoming "separated from its ownership," the members of the NYRRC. By 1980, the NYRRC was renting out its equipment and personnel as consultants to other races, some far from the area served by the NYRRC. Rather than merely sponsoring an NYRRC race, other organizations could produce their own events, using NYRRC technology and expertise.⁴¹

Within a few years of the first five-borough marathon, responsibility for the race was shared among established committees. The committees were headed by coordinators, salaried managers who developed their own systems of handling different aspects of marathon production and staging. These autonomous units called upon a pool of thousands of NYRRC volunteers for labor. As the systems evolved their own rule-bound procedures, the volunteers required formal training for their tasks. In October 1983, *Successful Meetings*, a management periodical, described the bureaucratic experience of volunteering for the New York City Marathon: filling out application blanks, attending classes,

39. *Road Runners Club New York Association Newsletter* no. 1 (?1959): 1; *Road Runners Club New York Association Newsletter* no. 67 (Spring 1976): 8; Paul Milvy, "The Definitive Short History of the New York City Five-Borough Marathon," *New York City Five-Borough Marathon* (?1976): n.p. This undated, unpaginated publication was the program for the 1976 New York City Marathon. See also Lebow with Woodley, *Big-Time Marathoning*, 70, 72, 80.

40. Milvy, "Short History"; Lebow with Woodley, *Big-Time Marathoning*, 64, 71; Kathleen Macomber, *Minutes, 25 July 1977 Meeting, Marathon Committee*, New York City Marathon for the Samuel Rudin Trophy, 3.

41. Chandler, *The Visible Hand*, 6-10. See also Art Jahnke, "The Boss," *Running* 8 (September/October 1982): 34-40; Milvy, "How the Mini Kept Score," 51-53; Texas, "Take the Money," 16.

putting in time to gain seniority, and learning new skills required for a promotion. At a meeting about two weeks before race day, “volunteers meet their supervisors, get to know each other, learn the necessary procedures, and receive their race credentials. An additional two-hour training session in peace-keeping and crowd control is required for those volunteers whose jobs demand it,” according to *Successful Meetings’s* interview with Jolene Roberts, the coordinator of volunteers.⁴²

In the early days of the NYRRC, race course and finish line tasks were performed by member runners who expected reciprocity when it was their turn to compete. But many of the new volunteers never ran competitively or even assisted in any other NYRRC event. Volunteering became their way of participating in the marathon, a position the NYRRC validated by stressing the “basic, life supportive things” volunteers do for the runners. “How many times do you give someone a drink of water who may get sick or even die without it?” Roberts asked. The NYRRC also recognized the volunteers’ contributions with awards and small gifts, the most prized of which were the specially designed “Marathon Volunteer” T-shirts.⁴³

As the number of paid employees of the New York Road Runners Club grew, the administration of the New York City Marathon became a separate entity that was capable of functioning independently of other NYRRC activities. The New York Road Runners Club now had all the characteristics of a modern business enterprise. Its state-of-the-art product, the New York City Marathon, could most efficiently be produced by the cooperative effort of a series of autonomous systems run by a professionalized managerial hierarchy, using the labor of a controlled work force. Major decisions of the NYRRC, such as the purchase of a building in 1981, promoted the long-term goals of the organization and provided for its stability, often before they answered the needs of its competing members.⁴⁴ In 1982, The Athletics Congress permitted cash prizes for top finishers, and another managerial role of the New York City Marathon, allocating the funds of its wealthy corporate sponsors to the world’s greatest runners, was now openly acknowledged.⁴⁵

The directors of the New York City Marathon used personal appearances and popular concern with fitness to present their event in a manner that appealed to young, upper-status individuals. Through a change of venue, they modified the game form to make the marathon more accessible. They created auxiliary

42. Michael Adams, “The New York City Marathon: How It’s Run,” *Successful Meetings* 32 (October 1983): 29-30. For the bureaucratization of labor, see Sanford M. Jacoby, *Employing Bureaucracy: Managers, Unions, and the Transformation of Work in American Industry, 1900-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 2. For the significance of standardized procedures and job descriptions, see Daniel Nelson, *Managers and Workers: Origins of the New Factory System in the United States, 1880-1920* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1975), 151-55. See also Chandler, *The Visible Hand*, 124.

43. Adams, “How It’s Run,” 30, 32.

44. Chandler, *The Visible Hand*, 1-10, 107. That the newsletter *Road Race Management* began publication in 1982 was a clear statement of the professionalization of race directors. *Road Race Management* gave advice on race organization and sponsorship, legal and medical issues, etc.

45. Illingworth, “Run for the Money,” 124.

organizations, sport services, to attract specific groups. They provided sport apparatus such as the computerized finish line, which could accommodate the increasing numbers of participants the marathon attracted. Just as importantly, the New York Road Runners Club produced commemorative T-shirts-race T-shirts, volunteer T-shirts, T-shirts for the medical corps, and T-shirts in which to train for next year's race-tangible and lasting reminders that managerial capitalism, the "visible hand," has united athletic achievement and economic production.