



## **Large Event Roundtable Session: 2025 Industry Conference – Louisville, KY, Feb. 3, 2025**

Summary: Roundtable Discussion on Challenges in Large Event Races

### **Key Challenges:**

**City-imposed Pace Maximums:** Cities often mandate pace limits, limiting race inclusivity for slower participants, especially walkers (Around the Crown: 13:45 pace limit).

**Participant Experience Beyond Cutoff:** Organizers face challenges keeping amenities and support for slower runners or walkers who fall behind cutoff times.

### **Innovative Solutions and Practices:**

**Early Start Groups:** NYCRUNS allows slower participants (14-minute pace or slower) to start before others, minimizing production impact and receiving positive media attention.

**Alternative Race Days:** Boilermaker hosts a separate "Walk in the Park" event to accommodate walkers, offering equal amenities.

**Sidewalk Finishes:** LA Marathon moves late runners to sidewalks with a separate finish line and volunteer-supported celebrations.

**Final Finisher Checkpoints:** Chicago Event Management implemented checkpoints at 15 and 20 miles, providing resources, guidance, and optional bus services. Despite accommodating 1500 behind the cutoff, no one used the bus.

### **Support Strategies Post-Cutoff:**

Medical teams remain on course until the last participant finishes (LA Marathon).

Legacy runners and run clubs volunteer for late-stage support.

Blue lines on the course (Chicago) help prevent navigation issues.

Bib enhancements with medical aid locations or full course maps (Houston Marathon).

### **Liability and Navigation Concerns:**

Volunteers and water stations are challenging to maintain after cutoff times.

Communication issues arise when participants are separated from gear with their phones inside (Capstone Event Services).

Chicago and other events provide interactive maps and communication resources to address navigation issues.

This conversation highlighted the balancing act between race logistics and participant inclusivity, with creative solutions emerging to improve the experience for all participants.

### **Innovation & Tech Impacting Race Management:**

- **Digital Mapping Tools:** Jeff Moyle (Canada Army Run) highlighted the use of Felt Map for real-time course mapping and security coordination.
- **GIS and Tracking Tech:** Boilermaker and other events implemented GPS trackers for first responder vehicles and GIS products like Mission to monitor police locations along routes.
- **Communication Platforms:** Sean (Run Local) discussed using text-based volunteer communication platforms filtered by duty groups.
- **Starlink for Connectivity:** Murphy (LA Marathon) and Steve Lastoe (NYCRUNS) emphasized the benefits of Starlink for overcoming network congestion at events, noting affordability and ease of deployment with multiple access points.
- **Flow Management Expertise:** Marcel Altenberg's contributions to event flow strategy for major races like Berlin and Chicago were acknowledged as a significant resource.

### **Tech's Financial Impact Over the Past Decade:**

- Greg Hipp (CEM) noted that technological advancements have generally increased costs, though they solved critical problems.
- Boilermaker found GPS trackers for first responders transformative, improving command center visibility and operations.

### **Effective Strategies in Race Management:**

- **Detailed Contingency Planning:** Greg Hipp advised planning events so that operations can continue seamlessly without key personnel on race day.
- **Staffing Philosophy:** Steve Lastoe (NYCRUNS) emphasized hiring talented and motivated individuals and empowering them to collaborate dynamically.
- **Self-Care Awareness:** Laura Torgerund (Quad Cities) highlighted the importance of maintaining personal well-being in a demanding industry.
- **Project Management Tools:** Joe (Bayshore Marathon) recommended using project management software to efficiently assign tasks and streamline operations for small teams and key volunteers.

These insights underscore the intersection of technological innovation, strategic planning, and operational excellence in managing large-scale race events.

### **FULL SESSION NOTES FOLLOW:**

**Moderator Q: What challenges are you facing in the large event space?**

**Brian Mister, Around the Crown:**

- We're newer to the larger space
- Around 7000 participants now
- Pace maximums being provided by the city– 13:45 from the city
- Makes it harder for walkers and people newer to running to get into the event

**Steve Lastoe, NYCRUNS:**

- One thing we did starting a couple years ago was we took people who were 14 minutes and slower and we started them before everyone else
- Used 15 min miles as a cutoff
- From a production perspective, it's a rounding error
- Very small percentage of the field
- Got some good press on it

**Jim Stasaitis, Boilermaker:**

- We discourage walking in the main Boilermaker event
- We have a walk in the park the day before and encourage the walkers to participate there and they get all the same amenities and are invited to the post race party

**Murphy Reinschriebler, LA Marathon/McCourt:**

- Move runners to the sidewalks so that the streets can reopen, have a separate finish line that goes up after the main one comes down
- Sidewalk on Avenue of the Stars where they finish

**Stacey Ferraro, LA Marthon/McCourt:**

- Announcers are no longer there but the community engagement manager gets volunteers to support those who are walking and still have a party atmosphere at the end

**Audience Q: Where does the liability end? Do you give them water?**

Stacey: We do have our course time limit, if you get behind that, we have some water stations that will stay out on the course – but on the sidewalk

- Late medical team on course to assist
- Legacy runners and run clubs will stay to volunteer
- Medical stays til everyone is back in
- Bike medical team stays out for support

**Audience Q: Do you do anything special so that they know how to get back?**

People ended up getting lost, says questioner, from Capstone Event Services. We had their gear check bag, but their phones were in it, no way to get into communication with them

**Carly Caulfield, Houston Marathon**

- Same problems for all of us
- Put medical aid station locations on people's bibs

Put a full course map on their bib?

**Greg Hipp, Chicago Event Management (CEM)**

- We instituted final finisher checkpoints
- Had two locations on course that opened up immediately when the finisher cutoff had passed
- There we had a team that would notify people they were behind the cutoff
- 15 and 20 miles
- Resource depot for gels/water
- Resources with how to get gear back
- Also an option to get on a bus
- 1500 people behind the cutoff – no one got on the bus
- Blue line on the ground helps with people not getting lost (in Chicago)

- Now we are questioning whether or not have a bus there

**(Unknown speaker)**

- Interactive map with a link
- Try to leave out table with water, but volunteers won't stay past a certain point
- Shifts for course marshals

**Moderator Q: What innovation or tech have you seen recently that will impact your/our field of work?**

**Jeff Moyle, Canada Army Run**

- Digital mapping tool called Felt map
- Technical ops team and city rep have access
- Real time edits, everyone who is on it can easily see what other editors are doing
- Free and easy to share, has been helpful to him
- One for security detail, pay duty, separate maps for who needs to know what

**Moderator Q: Where were you ten years ago and how has tech made your experience better or saved you some money?**

**Greg Hipp, CEM**

- I think most of it has cost us more money. Some of it has solved problems, but it's expensive.
- 9000 people an hour through a gate, quick way to move people into a safe perimeter
- A matter of show timeline of when can you implement what based on budgets

**Jim Stasaitis/Boilermaker**

- No issue with start line flow of people on a two lane highway
- Getting people to lineup correctly by bib type is an issue
- But one thing we've gotten into with tech – sponsor – GPS trackers for first responder vehicle, so command can see where every vehicle is at all times
- A game changer for us

**Unknown speaker**

- We use GIS product called Mission. I can track every police officer, know where everybody is on the whole route of the marathon and half – use of smart phones. Phone assigned from the city. Can't complain about using their own tech
- If you want to be part of the event, you have to download the app and be tracked
- Knows where the lead and tail officer are at all times.

- Can communicate with the officers via this app

### **Sean, Run Local/Oakland Marathon**

- Anyone using communication platform for both before and during the event?
- Volunteers – sign up for texting and filtered into groups based on duties

### **Murphy, LA – We experience network congestion at events. Experience with Starlink?**

#### **Unknown**

- We do that specifically for that reason, setups with multiple dishes and its great
- Internet with convention centers is ridiculously expensive
- Starlink hot spots around convention center – been a game changer

### **Steve Lastoe, NYCRUNS**

- Whether you have 25000 or 2500 people, internet becomes an issue
- Used Starlink, that solved the problem right away
- 5 different access points with antennas
- Not meshing them
- Meant to be in the street area
- Finish in Brooklyn – one at finish line, and several other locations
- For any of our key areas, access to a point
- May add one for the general public

**Unknown** – Travels with a mini one, no plug in, will run for 4.5 hours

#### **Steve Lastoe:**

- You don't have to pay for them year round.
- Not stuck paying 5 cable bills a month.
- Cost: Dishes are \$450, tiered data usage model
- Starlink is affordable and pretty damn amazing

**Unknown:** Marcel Altenberg, puts doctorate level ability into being able to solve flow issues

- Benefit of experience through all the big events, Berlin, Chicago, etc.
- Start, finish, flow for all events that are seeing increasing event numbers

### **Moderator Q: What strategies have been the most effective in your line of work?**

#### **Greg Hipp, CEM:**

Plan in a way that if you didn't make it there on race day, everyone else could still do their job. Plan as if I died on the way to the race, everyone could still put on the event.

### **Steve Lastoe, NYCRUNS**

- Staffing, hire the best, brightest and hungriest, and let them fight it out
- Surround yourself with people who are hungry.

### **Laura Torgerund, Quad Cities**

Taking care of yourself above all. Easy to try to be everything to everybody, but it's not possible. Know that you're human and take care of yourself.

### **Steve Lastoe, NYCRUNS**

- We tend to work 24/7 and we keep grinding away at the task
- People in the events business tend to be that way

### **Joe, Bayshore Marathon:**

- Utilize a good project management software. If you don't have a large team, or have key volunteers, make it so you don't have to focus on all the balls in the air at the same time, everyone can focus on their specific areas.
- Making sure you're being very stern about capturing the plan

### **Q: Others beside Basecamp?**

#### **Alex, Ogden Marathon:** Uses Asana

Intuitive program, functions well.

#### **Jake, DMSE Sports:**

- We use Lasso – took the idea from a different industry
- Crewing, project management, and because we own a huge amount of inventory, it helps us manage it. Being able to track where everything is and how it will be used. Doing to drive how we pack the truck.
- Inventory management drove us to this.
- Set timelines for each individual event, build off of that
- Supporting Documentation also in there
- You can grow and shrink it

#### **David, Run Monumental:**

- We use SmartSheet – needs to be your North Star and you're always going back to it.

- Don't want it to be so onerous that it becomes another part of your job that you hate to engage with

**Moderator Q: What lessons have we learned in the last year, an extraordinary year?**

**Jim, NYCRUNS:**

- Show up rates – people are not flaking out. 20/30 percent no shows are a thing of the past
- When you have way more people showing up, it's a different event.

**Steve Lastoe, NYCRUNS:**

- Loyalty program has a churn affect
- Brooklyn event – a good chunk of runners are going to defer (several thousand)

**Greg Hipp, CEM:**

- We had higher show up rate this year for us, a lot of events did, berlin especially
- We haven't come to the bottom of it
- Checking on which demographics show more up than others
- International people don't flake out
- Need to dive deeper into the data
- Charity runners are going to show up
- For us it's looking at how our demographics changed and see what triggered it
- Looking at each demographic in your race and not just the whole number
- And doing more anticipatory analysis of what to expect

**Moderator Q: What are the biggest opportunities you see in the growth in the industry that you see. – 15-20 percent growth – what opportunities does that create?**

**Brian/Around the Grown:**

Sponsorship, with the growth of our event, what are the new options for our deck, and what other things can we put out for sponsorship (kids run, etc).

**Steve Lastoe/NYCRUNS:**

Recent Oatly sponsorship for us was a big one. When brands really want to be in the endurance space in the market, it may not matter how many finishers you have.

**Jeff Moyle, Canada Army Run:**



Finding the sponsors and partners that will appeal to the younger generation coming up. BMW may not be it. If you build it, they'll come. Data/getting those sponsors – to appeal to a younger demo

**Megan Faulkner, Falmouth:**

Depends on who you talk to if they will be excited about running. Have gotten some good local brands that are relevant to Falmouth.

**Carly, Houston:** For Houston it can be more about media value for the bigger brands

**Nick:** Run Club Rally specific code to invite groups out to races – invites for an organic block party that has been very successful

Kicks off the marathon training season

Unknown: Branding, for apparel, non dated gear – brand focused not year focused

**Moderator Q: Other revenue centers- merchandise, sponsorship?**

**Murphy, LA:**

- increase in demand allows us to raise our registration fees
- Cap races, demand in the marketplace, prices can rise
- It's a market by market question. Costs in LA are astronomical.
- Consumers compare what we are charging vs in a small metro, why do we have to pay so much to do your race? That's been a hard balance, but with this influx in new/added participants we feel like we have a lot more flexibility on our pricing going forward.

**Steve Lastoe, NYCRUNS:**

Bib shipping for Brooklyn. Runners pay for the bibs to be sent to them. Moves the needle due to the point that you question .. \$200K + more revenue. A no brainer.

**MCM:**

- Staggered price increases, 100 percent market dependent. Resilient to any type of price increase. Dynamic bib assignment at the expo. Has lowered no show rate.
- Insurance that the runner pays on their registration fee, between the time they buy and time they run is much longer. The insurance gives them a sense of security.
- To help w higher cost, split payments. Now buying over ten months instead of two months. Can pay that in increments. ROI on rebate program. Really powers the rebate.

**Audience Q:** We're seeing a lot more runners (at the Detroit Free Press Marathon) stopping for selfies, getting complaints about that. What policies can we put in place to stop this, to help move runners along without impeding others. (Ambassador Bridge).

**Jeff/Canada** – lean into it. But up a sign that draws them off to the side.

**Unknown:** Pick out that spot, activate it, get a sponsor for it, promote it, move it off to the side so that people can still get past those who want to take pics.

**KDF Marathon** (Churchill Downs as an attraction) – Try to manage/control vs trying to deter it.

**Unknown** - "Influencers" on social media – in the way – I notice it's not just the middle and the back of the pack, some in the front are even doing it.

**NYRR** – Matt Choi situation. Had a policy and we enforce the policy. Make sure you have a policy and you have a plan and make sure that your participants know that you will enforce the policy. Applicable to all races. If people know they can't do that, it will trigger the policy.

**Glenn Amos/500 Fest** – On the Indy Speedway, yard of bricks on the track – all of our participants, well a good number, the tradition is the winning driver stop and kiss the yard of bricks. So almost all the runners want to stop and kiss the bricks. Get down on a knee. A huge issue for us for a long time. Didn't promote or encourage for a long time because it became dangerous for it. Put in some simple signage to push those that want to kiss the bricks to the outside and those that want to keep running to the inside.

So much of our race is traditional pieces that are connected to the Indy 500.