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A Sunday Run Like Few Others

Several San Fernando High students will participate in this weekend's LA Marathon

By Mike Terry, Sun Contributing Writer Mar 20, 2019



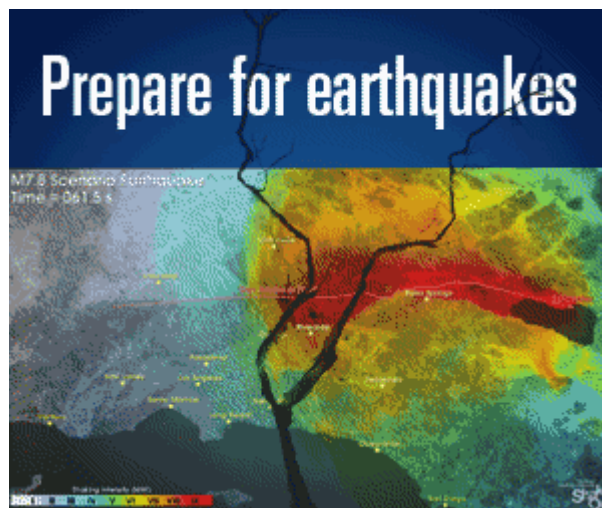
M. Terry / SFVS

David Montes (top), along with Natalie Vargas, Jasmine Harr, Estefani Navarro and Elideth Presuel, are among the San Fernando High students running in the LA Marathon.

On Sunday, March 24, San Fernando High School junior Jasmine Harr will rise early, assuming she was able to sleep at all. Harr expects to be a jangled mixture of anxiety and excitement as she gets prepared for a morning run.

And not just any morning run. Shortly after 7 a.m., Harr and thousands of others will take part in the 2019 Skechers Performance Los Angeles Marathon.

Also expected to run is Sylmar resident Jim Davis, who has participated in every LA Marathon since the event began in 1986.



Marathon officials are anticipating more than 20,000 entrants from all 50 states and 63 countries on Sunday, ranging from novices and first-timers to professional elite athletes. You can be as young as age 12 (students only) or more than 80. You can run, walk, or use a wheelchair. The top three finishers in each age division receive a commemorative award. All finishers will receive a commemorative medal.

The 26.2 mile course begins at Dodger Stadium and ends in Sant Monica. In between, participants go through parts of downtown LA, Silver Lake, West Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Century City, Brentwood and Pacific Palisades — hopefully before cheering friends, family and spectators — before reaching the finish line.

According to the race website, participants wishing to receive an official time must successfully complete the course in 6.5 hours. To date there have been 542,960 official finishers. Los Angeles is considered a popular venue for novice marathoners, and, the website stated, an average of 53 percent of the runners who make up the field are attempting a marathon for the first time.

Harr, 16, will be one of those first-timers. She is one of 16 San Fernando High students that have been training for the marathon since September.

"This year I decided to take that leap of faith," she said. "I knew how many miles, how many hours I was going to have to put in training for it. The biggest surprise for me has been the fact that I now like running long distances. I didn't think I was going to enjoy it as much as I do."

Elideth Presuel, 18, a senior, is also entering her first marathon. She is a member of the Tigers track team, running the mile and two-mile. This will be the longest race she has ever attempted.

“When I used to play basketball, I enjoyed the running but I didn’t enjoy playing basketball,” Presuel said. “I liked running.”

During the training, Presuel said she sometimes fought the urge to give up.

“There were a lot of hills. You’re tired, you see another hill, and it’s like “uuhhh.’ But you can’t up, you have to keep going. Running is all mental, I think.”

She’s also resisted going on the race website and getting a look at the course.

“I want it to be a surprise,” Presuel said.

Then are the veterans.

Estefani Navarro, 16, a sophomore is entering her third marathon. “I began in eighth grade and fell in love with it,” she said. “I didn’t like running before I began this and I really enjoyed the experience. So I continue to run.”

The best thing about having gone through the marathon experience is “it really helped me get stronger mentally and physically,” said Navarro, who is on the Tigers’ track and cross-country teams. “I became a better person because of it.”

Natalie Vargas, 18, a senior, also did her first marathon as an eighth-grader. Sunday will be her fourth.

“I thought I was gonna quit after the first week of running because I really wasn’t doing anything,” Vargas said. “But the coaches at my middle school kept pushing me. And it was a different feeling. Before I didn’t have that much confidence. But I started gaining enough confidence. And I kept on running.”

David Montes is entering the race for the second time. The 14-year-old freshman said running provides him a sense of relief and calm, especially after a hard day of school.

“[Running] clears your head,” Montes said. “All your stress just leaves. You just feel free running, and enjoying it with people you like.”

The girls are aiming for the 6.5 hour requirement that would get them a medal to bring back to school on Monday. Montes is more interested in a faster time — “probably like four hours.”

The students are part of the Student Run LA program, which was developed by high school teacher Harry Shabazian after he finished the 1986 LA Marathon, and felt so transformed by the experience that he challenged some of his students to consider training and entering next year’s race. The program has grown into more than 500 leaders and 3,200 students from 175 schools and community programs throughout the greater Los Angeles area.

The San Fernando High students are trained and mentored by Deo Jaravata who, by his count, has participated in more than 400 marathons primarily as a race walker. He has entered every LA Marathon since 1997 except for the 2006 race when he was in Antartica.

Jaravata has been training students at San Fernando since becoming a teacher here in 1999. He said one way he annually attracts students to running in the marathon is how it can help their mental health as well as boost their confidence.

“Once you reach Mile 10 you won’t feel any pain. You’re just like floating out there,” Jaravata said. “And once they finish the marathon, no one can take that away from them. They can keep that with them the rest of their lives. When they finish they are tired, but you can see them smiling. And almost all of them want to do it again.”

Once the marathon is finished, the next race will be to get something to eat. The In-And-Out hamburger chain was a popular post-marathon destination. But Montes has a different plan.

“I’m going for pizza,” he said.