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Making strides for runners of color at LA Marathon

For some, Sunday's 2023 Los Angeles Marathon was more than an opportunity to run — it was a chance to create opportunities for other runners.



Analiah Herrera, left, and Brised Nolasco represented Students Run LA in the LA Marathon on Sunday, March 19. Photo: Kristy Hutchings, SCNG



For some, Sunday's 2023 Los Angeles Marathon was more than an opportunity to run — it was a chance to create opportunities for other runners. For such groups, victory meant much more than getting across the finish line in Universal City.

Quite visible on the course — a sea of neon in their telltale yellow jerseys — were more than 3,100 runners from Students Run L.A., an after-school mentoring and physical fitness program offered at more than 185 public schools in the Greater Los Angeles Area. The program engages underserved communities from the San Fernando and San Gabriel valleys to Whittier, San Pedro, Eagle Rock — and everywhere between.

“The program is about developing them as leaders, developing them to become positive role models,” said Kristi Dorf, a SRLA leader and teacher at Twin Lakes Intermediate School in El Monte.

The year-long program — which concludes each year with the L.A. Marathon run — is just as much about character, leadership and achievement as it is about fitness.

“It's just derived from passion,” said Analiah Herrera, an eighth grader waiting for her turn to take off Sunday onto the 26.2-mile course that included some of L.A.s most familiar landmarks.

“I do a lot of other sports,” she added, “(like) softball and soccer.”

Analiah hadn't run a full marathon yet, but she'd been prepping along with her classmates — and hit an 18-mile course before Sunday's big finale.

“(I'm) excited,” Analiah said, noting that her only plans after crossing the finish line are to “eat and sleep pretty much.”



Runners take on water in front of the Dorothy Chandler Pavillon during the 38th LA Marathon Sunday, March 19, 2023. The race began at Dodger Stadium and wound through downtown Los Angeles, Hollywood, and Beverly Hills before finishing in Century City. (Photo by David Crane, Los Angeles Daily News/SCNG)

Analiah and other students have been preparing for the event since September, along with their teachers and administrators who volunteered their time to train with them.

The group's goals: Boost students' self-confidence, build camaraderie and offer up completing the marathon as a achievement — the result of a season of sweat, focus and dedication.

Brised Nolasco, a seventh grader also running her first marathon, added one more achievement — experiencing one heck of a day in L.A.

“It’s just for fun,” she smiled.

Black Girls Run, a nationwide organization with a local chapter in L.A., also sent a contingent to the marathon.

“It’s important because in our community, this is something that’s not taught until we actually have a diagnosis maybe for diabetes or high blood pressure,” said BGR LA ambassador Sherri Harris. “Usually in the Black community, this is not something that’s addressed on a proactive basis— its more of a reactive basis.”

Communities of color in LA have also historically had less access to parks, green space, and sidewalks. Many neighborhoods, including South LA, are classified as food deserts, meaning there are few with fewer stores offering healthy food options in the area — further preventing people living in those neighborhoods from maintaining active and healthy lifestyles.

Black Girls Run was established in 2009 with the goal of helping Black women overcome those barriers.



Black Girls Run Los Angeles Chapter members at the 2023 LA Marathon on Sunday, March 19. (Photo courtesy of BGR LA).

“We don’t have membership dues, but we teach some of the same strategies that other running groups teach for a fee,” Harris said. “The ladies that run with us are here on a voluntary basis and they get training for 5ks, 10ks, half marathons and full marathons.”

About 12 members of the BGR LA chapter ran in Sunday’s marathon, Harris said — but the group has more than 6,000 members in total.

“A lot of women come for that supporting one another (and) having a space of bit having a space to air your concerns,” Harris said. “It’s not just physical, it’s also mental — the accountability, the camaraderie. BGR runs more a foundation and a

“Any woman that wants to run and move with a purpose to be healthy, and to have an active and healthy lifestyle — we support that,” Harris said, “no matter what your race, religion color or creed.”

Empowering Leadership in Latina Athletes also participated at Sunday’s big run, aiming to raise funds to help pay for sports equipment for local schools.

The group, established in 2019, seeks to level the playing field for Latina athletes — who aren’t always equally represented in collegiate athletics, according to ELLA co-founder Patty Godoy.



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Empowering Leadership in Latina Athletes was at the L.A. Marathon to fundraise for sports equipment for local schools. The group, established in 2019, seeks to level the playing field for Latina athletes — who aren't equally represented in collegiate athletics, according to ELLA co-founder Patty Godoy. Photo: Kristy Hutchings, SCNG “We know that as girls continue in their journey, when they want to get serious about playing in college,” Godoy said, “there are fewer girls of color represented.”

Godoy added: “ELLA, meanwhile, works to ensure that young Latina women and girls are encouraged to participate in sports early — and stick with them later in life.”

The group also encourages collegiate athletes to pursue education and leadership skills, Godoy said, so they can have a career post-university.

“We want to make sure they have leadership skills that enable them to be successful,” Godoy said.

ELLA also does community outreach — including staffing a table at the marathon on Sunday — to boost underserved schools.

To help raise money, Godoy and a group of about 40 participated in the half marathon Sunday.

“We're very thankful for everybody that is here fundraising,” Godoy said, “And we hope that they continue to help us because there are a lot of inequalities that are out there in sports community that we want to level.”

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Kristy Hutchings covers all things Long Beach — including local government, politics, and the environment. Prior to joining the Press-Telegram, she served as the Daily Breeze's lead city hall reporter. Hutchings holds a B.A. in communication and M.S. in journalism from the University of Southern California.

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