

Running on Empty: A Comparison of Marathon and Ultramarathon Race Preparation

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In the sport of endurance running, marathon and ultramarathon comparisons are inevitable but often debated. Comparing the two events creates many challenges including course terrain, altitude, and ambient temperatures. Thus, hosting both events on the same day over the same terrain may be valuable for comparison purposes. **PURPOSE:** The purpose of this investigation was to compare pre-race preparation, pace and nutritional strategies, and sweat rate awareness of marathon and ultramarathon participants competing on the same course under the same environmental conditions. **METHODS:** A prerace survey was completed by runners registered for either the Call of the Wild trail marathon (MA; n=23) or Eastern States 100 ultramarathon (UMA; n=32). Participants estimated completion time and answered various questions regarding training preparation, pacing and nutritional strategies. Participants were also asked if they had planned their hydration strategy based on knowledge of their sweat rate. Pearson's Correlation was used to determine relationships between pre-race questions and post-race results. A t-test was used to determine differences between estimated and actual finish times. **RESULTS:** A moderate relationship existed between estimated and actual completion time for MA (n=17; $r = .52$) and a strong relationship for UMA (n=11; $r = .82$). Significant differences were observed between estimated and actual completion times for both MA (6.2 ± 1.1 hr and 7.9 ± 1.3 hr, respectively; $p < 0.05$) and UMA (28.7 ± 2.9 hr and 31.7 ± 3.2 hr, respectively; $p < 0.05$). Only 4% of MA and 6% of UMA runners were aware of their sweat rate and planned to use it during the event. **CONCLUSION:** The current investigation provides an insight to the pre-race preparation and race adherence for marathon and ultramarathon participants.