



A Race Like No Other: 26.2 Miles Through the Streets of New York

Liz Robbins

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"A Race Like No Other" is a narrative based on the November 4, 2007 race, but it is timeless in its themes. Acclaimed "New York Times" sportswriter Liz Robbins captures the enormity of the New York City Marathon through the prism of five representative athletes and the experiences that brought them to the starting line: one male and one female professional runner from overseas, both of whom have won this race previously; a recovering alcoholic and mother of three who was in jail last Marathon Sunday; a cancer survivor running for charity to follow a growing trend; and, a first-timer who wants to check a marathon off the list of life goals. Woven into the narrative will be supporting characters: fixtures like 65-year-old Tucker Andersen, who has run the five-borough race every year since 1976, and John Codiglia, police chief of the 10th precinct, who entertains runners with his bullhorn as he stands on Central Park South near the finish. Flashes of history will amplify the present and provide insight into the neighborhoods and the people who have made the race into the phenomenon it is today: the race's charismatic founder, Fred Lebow; Grete Waitz, the Norwegian-born runner who won it a record nine times; Vic Navarra, a retired firefighter who has directed the start in Staten Island for three decades and is dying of cancer; and, Mary Wittenberg, the chief executive of the New York Road Runners Association, who has vaulted the organisation to international prominence.

A Race Like No Other: 26.2 Miles Through the Streets of New York Details

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Bryan Hall says

As good a book as you could write about the New York City Marathon. Robbins covers the course mile-by-mile, tracking a variety of runners along the way. She goes into detail about the histories and personalities of the male and female elite runners, profiles several amateurs with inspirational stories, and even goes into the crowds to get a behind-the-scenes look at some of the spectators, musicians, and volunteers that line the course. The history of the race is also covered extensively, but in a sort of meandering way that I think makes it more interesting than a simple, straightforward, 30-page block of text would be.

I think this is a must-read for anyone who has run NYC or plans to. Whether you read it first to get an idea of what to expect and to psych yourself up for the race, or read it after finishing to reminisce about your run, I feel this is a valuable addition to the experience. And even if you never want to run a marathon, this is a great New York story.

Deanna says

I have a very large collection of books about running. I love books about running. This is the least compelling specimen of the genre that I've come across in a while, though maybe less boring to someone who doesn't follow running as closely.

Susan says

I really enjoyed this book for several reasons. The biggest is that if I ever decided I wanted to run a marathon, New York is probably the one I would want to run. (Except I am totally turned off by that 5 hour wait to start.) Also, based on the 2007 race, it was well before my interest in running so I wasn't familiar with most of the elites featured in the book. And obviously all the amateurs were unknown to me. Ms. Robbins did a terrific job of combining the flow of the race with everyone's personal stories. Truly an inspiring look at running and the New York marathon. But, oh, that wait!

Jason Sherman says

Wow.

This book has always been on my bucket list (semi-alongside actually running the marathon) and I picked this up just about a month before this year's marathon - my first. I had wanted to finish it before race day but in the end, I took too long and finished about 3 weeks after.

I'm glad I finished after I ran the race, actually, because it allowed me to appreciate the stories in a different way. I was able to flash back to certain moments, especially during the last stretch of the race, and

remember exactly how I felt as I read the words describing this part of the course.

The style of writing isn't what I'm typically drawn to and is what took me longer to plow through but it's undeniable how impactful and moving the individual runners are, and it's all the more intensified when juxtaposed with the elite athlete competitions recounted here as well. I found myself becoming emotional at certain points, especially before race day, as I related to many of the feelings these runners felt. I also enjoyed using this book as a course preview, though sadly I wasn't great at remembering details while I was on the course myself.

Ultimately this was an amazing companion as race day approached, an immensely meaningful moment for me. It was incredible to see that I wasn't close to being alone in that feeling, as hundreds of runners felt the same way. This race is bigger than me, bigger than the elites, and bigger than any single individual. And it's that enormity that helps make it so incredibly special to so many people. This book helped capture that feeling and elevated my already heightened emotions surrounding this special day.

Even though non-(Marathon) runners may not feel as strongly as I did or relate to this book in the same way, I would still recommend this to anyone who is an athlete, has overcome large obstacles in their life, or who simply needs a reminder of the will of humans. It WILL move you.

Amy says

A friend book this for a group of us running the 2017 NYC Marathon, some of us, like myself, for our first marathon distance. I loved how the chapters were broken into miles to give you an idea of what to expect as you run the course. After reading this book I found myself equal parts terrified and excited to run 26.2 miles through the streets of NYC. Highly recommended for anyone running the NYC marathon!

Selina Young says

More like 3.5 stars. I really appreciated hearing about the race as I'm about to run it. Great set up - each chapter is a mile. While I liked reading about the elite runners I felt there was too much. I liked the stories of the amateur 'regular' runners much more compelling.

Carianne Carleo-Evangelist says

I really really loved this book. I've read it before but don't appear to have reviewed it anywhere. Fun to run into my pre existing highlights on the library kindle copy. When I first read this I wasn't a runner, and now the elites this book focused on are retired. Something special about reading this on a flight to England though with so much about Paula Radcliffe.

I liked that it focused on the city and the non elite athletes and volunteers as much as telling the stories of how the elites came to be running this marathon Sunday.

Colin says

Excellent way to learn about the NYC Marathon course and some neat stories of runners and people along the course. I read it right before running the marathon in 2018 and it was a great way to get ready to run!

Jenny says

I actually listened to this one on audio twice. The first time, it ended and I realized it had gone so fast I must have been distracted and missed some. But in listening again I realized I didn't really miss anything, and, yet, it entertained me all the same. I have always wanted to run this race (long before ever becoming a runner!) I had applied for the lottery this year (didn't get in, unfortunately) and had been reading this to psyche myself up even more. The author breaks each chapter into the number mile of the race. Some chapters focus on the history of the marathon, some on that specific location, some on the volunteers and spectators on the course, some on the lives of the amateur runners, and some on the lives of the professionals. Everyone has a different but awe inspiring experience in running this marathon. I thought it was put together smartly. Some of the personal stories did get a little long whereas most of the people reading this would be more interested in the running aspect of it. However, that might also make this book more relatable and interesting for in-runners. Overall a very enjoyable read (listen).

Jelena says

This book is a complete disappointment and reading it was an agonizing experience. It comprises of an endless row of anecdotes and yawn full stories with no clear narrative line or message. I bought the book while training for NYC marathon hoping to learn about this epic race and the five boroughs, instead the book offered a pig-pile of dull anecdotes that have no value in the NYC marathon context. I give the book zero stars.

Kimberly Prytherch says

Loved every minute of it, it makes me want to run the race even more!

Yvette Goldberg says

I thought it was a great book for anyone that appreciates the effort to being the best you can be at any sport. As someone about to run the marathon I loved the breakdown of miles for each chapter. It was nice to read and the elites, though I too that went on a bit long. Loved the back stories of the different regular runners trying to accomplish something big for themselves or some else, and also the back stories of some of the volunteers. Very original.

Kate says

Really cool. Lots of info about nyc/nyc marathon. Liked the setup - follow stories of multiple runners.

Kimberly says

I started reading this book while training for the 2017 TCS NYC Marathon to help me get in the mindset, build excitement, and mentally prepare for the grueling NYC course. The book follows several runners (some elite professionals and others who are like me - average people looking to finish for one reason or another) as they make their way through the 26.2 mile course. Each chapter covers a mile and tells a bit of the story of each runner. It's an interesting way to detail the marathon, though some of the backstories, especially on the elite runners, went a little long. I would rather have had more stories of the people who are part of the marathon--the regulars who stand on street corners, hold up signs, have run several consecutive NYC marathons, or who were first-timers.

I also was really annoyed by a couple of falsehoods early on in the book. The author perpetuates the urban marathon myth that runners on the lower level of the Verrazano Bridge risk getting sprayed with urine when those on the upper level pee off the top. I've run the top, and I've run the bottom, and I've seen neither pee-ers nor been sprayed. In fact, you risk an early DQ (disqualification) if you're caught peeing on the bridge. Can we please put that one to rest already?!?

I really don't think this book would hold any appeal to anyone who has not/isn't planning to run NYC. I don't even know that it would appeal all that much to the regular runner--it's very NYC focused. But if you are going to tackle the marathon, this is definitely a worthwhile read to help understand the course (even if some of the references are a bit dated) and get yourself mentally ready to conquer it.

Katie says

Great book about the New York City Marathon. Unlike "Born to Run," I'm not sure how much this book would appeal to non-runners, but as a runner I couldn't put it down. It was one of those nonfiction books that is the perfect blend of personal anecdotes and history of the race, which really kept me engaged.

The author follows personal stories everywhere from the top elite athletes to people who finished in over 6 hours, and everybody in between. I liked how it was structured, how there was essentially a chapter for each mile, and each mile described both the actual geography at that location plus things that happened to the various runners at that location (such as the street entertainers that were at certain points, elite runners strategically passing each other, or how the crowds were at that point, etc.). Thoroughly entertaining read.
