

A terminology statement of Ultra-running is presented below.

WHAT IS ULTRA-RUNNING

For a number of years a misunderstanding has been expressed –leading to a confusion and, sometimes, to a wrong interpretation- about what *Ultra-running* really is.

Below, you will find the categories that meet –followed by some that do not meet- the criteria of the complete sense of Ultra-running and, their justification.

(Real) Ultra-running. in its precise description, is a competitive, but continuous (while the race clock does not stop during the same and entire race) running sport, officially contacted under internationally set regulations where judges control the entire event and its scoring development, and takes place on the track or on the road –touching the ground and not an apparatus, like a treadmill, which is moving mechanically or electronically. Additionally, runners are not allowed to use any other artificial means, illegal substances, unauthorized shoes or inner-soles, metabolism information given by electronic devices or any other unfair means that are against the rules that govern the sport. Real Ultras are considered, the events which are taking place for a period of time beyond 24 hours –as a runner has to face the whole spectrum of the daytime and nighttime and be able to continue. Doing so, runners have to prove that they can run beyond the effectiveness of genetic gifts and fitness level, as these elements will have gone from the duration of time and the muscular exhaustion.

However, because an Ultra-runner –in the true sense of Ultra-running- should be a unique person with mental endurance, going beyond common expectation and achieving high performances, the result of the spiritual abilities should be effectively proven: eg: If a runner stays back in order to avoid surpassing their limits with many stops and rests, which leads to a low performance, this also means that the runner lacks the characteristics and the attitude of the true sense of Ultra-runner. Therefore, a limited distance and/or performance of 5/6, or at least 80% of the world mark of the 24h, 48h, 6days e.t.c. (different for male, female and age group runners), should be covered only in official events, something which will be the evidence for entering the level of the ones who really belong to this sport and, therefore, will bring the runner to the status of going beyond.

Thus, some examples of time based events are the following: 24h, 48h, 72h, 6-day, 10-day races etc, –of course the ones beyond 48h could be called multi-day races. In terms of races specified by the distance we can mention 200 miles, 300m, 500m, 1000m etc, or similar distances in km (like 400km, 500km, 1000km etc), but under the condition that it's continuously timed (not in stages) and, on the other hand, the runner tries to keep a reasonable pace in order to cover the specific distance.

In all the above categories the records are registered –once examined that all rules are kept-, receiving international recognition and can be considered as National, Continental (i.e. European, Australian, African, Asian, Australian, Latin American or North American) and World records as well (same for age group records), according to where the runner belongs and what they have achieved.

Epigrammatically speaking, what makes an Ultra-runner? His/her mental idiosyncrasy with a philosophy of going beyond attitude, to surpass the physical

limitations of the body and achieve specific distances and performances with a reasonable speed, which is required to meet the criteria, according to the duration of the event.

Other long distance running activities –but NOT real Ultras

a) 50km/mile to 100km/mile and 6h to 12h events.

These events are of course longer than a marathon but, due to the fact that in this field we also see runners who can be distinguished by great performances (and we should acknowledge that) through their genes and training fitness, their approach is similar to the marathon, plus their physical abilities could be measured with ergo-physiological methods, as they belong to and obey to physical laws. Therefore, the metaphysical characteristics of these runners cannot be proven here (but it can be hidden or, a runner could be a “potential Ultra-runner” as I call it), because the period of the time is not long enough for their genes and training form to eliminate and disappear. Thus, the state of the mind and the metaphysical abilities could not take over and continue. An exception should be considered the case when a 50-100km/mile runner does well in races beyond 24 hours and in multi-day races.

Consequently, the above category of races is meant for specialists, so that kind of events have special terms as 50km, 50m, 100km, 100m and 6-hour and 12-hour race on the track or road, but since the duration is not enough, they do not meet the criteria of the true sense of Ultra-running.

b) Stages or etape running category.

Here we have competitive races of a given distance per day and for a number of days (like the tour of France for bicycle races), but such running races are also races with special terms (eg. 10 stages or 10 etapes of 100km, or the stages could vary in distance –1st day= 120km, 2nd=100, 3rd =80 etc or, let’s say 30 stages, running 30 miles per day with other competitors -but not solo, as solo running can’t be recognized at all as official performance). Here the winner is the runner whose total time is the fastest, taking in consideration performances of all stages, and its not necessary to win all stages.

However, due to the fact that the runners stop every night or another time of the day in order to rest, beginning the next stage afresh (even under the pressure of the previous stage/s), so the physical form is a must here too, but they are not running continuously to meet the criteria and prove that they can go beyond – like in longer than 24h races, where the sleep deprivation is including, on top of the lack of rest. Stage/etape runners are based mainly on fitness and thus the traits of real ultra runners, who can find energy after the physical “fuel” –the fitness level- is gone, cannot be proven. (And here apply the exceptions of those runners who, by doing well both in races under and beyond 24 hours and in multi-day races as well, then they have proven that they are real Ultra-runners). Performances can be kept only as stage-course records (if distance and quality of surface does not change) and personal times, covering each stage and/or the entire race, but could not be recognized as National, World etc. Ultra records.

c) Trails.

Trail events fail to meet the criteria and get the recognition of the true sense of Ultras because:

1. Cannot be measured accurately.
2. They cannot be compared to other trails –neither to the road races- with the same distance (km or miles), as the surface and elevation details varies from one to another.

Of course, data could be kept for course records only, with a «question mark» when they have to be compared with course records of the same race of earlier years, as some courses are subjected to natural or artificial changes, because the surface can be improved and/or modified.

d) Solo runs/Running on our own.

Running not in competition does not meet the criteria for recognition at all.

These are for sure unofficial running activities, plus the most obvious ones, which could NOT meet the basic criteria of Ultras. Athletic bodies should not consider such runs even as races as they cannot gain any recognition. This is because of the:

1. Lack of other competitors
2. Lack of judges and officials
3. Lack of evidence that the distance has been completed (declarations of family/friends/crew members can't be accepted)
4. Lack of official course measurements, official timekeepers (even if times are taken, they cannot be considered seriously)
5. Most personal exploits/solo runs are not continuous, but divided into smaller parts (similar to stages).
6. It's an unofficial and personal test, not a race.

Usually, the aim of solo runs is for personal purposes such as, training, traveling from one place to another, personal dream, vow or satisfaction, charity etc, but no way to be accepted as races.

e) Fun-running

Another kind of not only most obvious activity that lacks the true sense of Ultras but, sometimes, the so-called "fun-running" lacks the true sense even of marathon-running. But, this kind of running is the safest running activity (if there is self knowledge and not illusion of where they belong) when these runners are not aiming to become champions or to achieve great performances. When this applies, they do not come to the point to get stressed and push themselves to their limits. Taking into consideration that they don't run competitively, it's fine and mostly recommended by doctors and physicians for people's health condition. But sometimes –and this is the entrance for mental or physical illness-, these fun-runners, incorrectly motivated by other athletes, do not follow the above guidelines and become competitive. This leads to the other side and then it becomes an unhealthy and dangerous activity for the mind/shoul and body.

All other running activities, where someone can go to enjoy running and run as doing or playing another sport (eg. team sport, cross training or relay) do not meet the above criteria of Ultras, irrespectively of doing that for fun or seriously, for short or long period.

f) Collecting races and/or training mileage.

(Thanks to a world class female Ultra-runner, who reminded me of this category).

This kind of running collection does not meet the criteria for many reasons stated above, plus it's not an entire and continuous event. Those who collect 100 marathons, or fun-runs or any number of races of any distance, this is not a sport at all, and therefore it can't be considering as ultra either. Also, people who run eg 25km in the morning and 25km in the evening should not claim they have done even one Ultra-run –nor an event- longer than a marathon, when the overall load of distances is completed by smaller parts. In other words, a marathon runner who collects more than 200km in their weekly training does not have such mentality, neither expects to be considered as ultra-runner.

g) Relays.

The same (sense of NOT ultra-running) applies to those who cover a much longer distance than a marathon as a group of runners in relay (like in a 24-h race), where each runner runs a specific distance, or for some duration of time, and their total distance is, lets say, 300km.

A general apothegm:

There are thousands of runners who could be considered “potential Ultra-runners” but up to the moment they haven't found the chance to prove it, it remains to be proven.

Final note: With the aim to reinforce the above terminology, some quotes of Yiannis Kouros' statements, interviews and his dvd documentary titled “*Forever Running*” could help.

Examples:

In running for 24 or 48 hours or 6 days no one completes the race via his body but via his mind.

The verb “endure” is not a physical verb, it's a spiritual one. Endure means to withstand.

Without patience, you will never conquer endurance.

Yiannis Kouros, 2024