

Course Selection

Find the best race for your personality BY JUDI KETTELER

MOST RUNNERS take a Goldilocks approach to choosing races by trying them on for size. 5-K? Too short. Marathon? Too long. Half-marathon? Just right. How you come to these decisions isn't only based on how you *physically* feel. Your brain has just as much say, if not more, over which race distance fits you best. If you get bored easily or like to focus on short-term projects, you may struggle through a 16-week marathon-training plan. Switching to a race that matches your mind-set better, such as a 5-K (instant gratification) or a triathlon (variety), could improve your outlook on running. "Picking a race based on what suits your personality can lead to more personal satisfaction and joyfulness with your running," says Kay Porter, Ph.D., a sports psychologist in Eugene, Oregon. So whether you're new to the racing scene or a seasoned runner wondering if your current regimen is right for you, here's a quiz to help you find your perfect distance.

» WHEN IT COMES TO WORK AND GOAL-SETTING, I:

- A) Start a lot of projects without finishing them.
- B) Gravitate toward goals I can accomplish with moderate focus.
- C) Seek out long-term projects that can become all-consuming.
- D) Multitask so I don't get bored with one project.

» I CONSIDER MY ATTENTION SPAN TO BE:

- A) Short but intense; I like instant gratification.
- B) Steady, but I still get restless sometimes.
- C) Constant; it's easy for me to stay focused for long periods of time.
- D) Sporadic; I get bored easily.

» MY FAVORITE PART ABOUT RUNNING IS:

- A) It's efficient: I can get a great workout in quickly.
- B) It's adaptable: I can train a lot, or a little, depending on my schedule.
- C) It's me-time: Long runs help me clear my mind.
- D) It's social: I love being part of a team and/or trying new things.

» REGARDING DISTANCE, I USUALLY:

- A) Keep my runs short, but enjoy speedwork.
- B) Maintain a steady base, but like occasional distance runs.
- C) Enjoy weekly long runs and can handle some 40-plus mile weeks.
- D) Like to do a lot of cross-training in addition to running.

Tally It Up

» **Mostly As:** You like quick results, so 5-Ks and 10-Ks might be best for you. These distances are ideal for energetic "project-starter" types, says running coach Greg McMillan, who operates mcmillanrunning.com. "Shorter races are ideal for people who have a lot of motivation but have trouble maintaining their focus for a long time."

» **Mostly Bs:** You strive to attain balance in your life, so half-marathons would suit you well. "The half is the perfect distance for most runners," McMillan says. "It requires a training program, which provides structure most runners like, without the commitment of a marathon."

» **Mostly Cs:** You tend to organize your life around long-term goals, so you'd likely do well as a marathoner. "Distance runners are stick-to-it people, who can focus well on future goals," McMillan says. If you've done marathons and are craving more, consider an ultramarathon.

» **Mostly Ds:** You're a multitasker, and events like triathlons, duathlons, and relay races can provide the diversity you need. "Triathlons are perfect for variety seekers," McMillan says. Plus, events like relays tend to have more of a social, team-oriented component—ideal for runners who seek camaraderie and fun.



HOW THE PROS PICK THEIR RACES

THE SPEEDSTER Shayne Culpepper (2004 Olympic Trials 5-K Champion)

"I'm impatient by nature," says Culpepper (above). "I would prefer to be done with a race in two minutes versus 15. Moving up to the 5-K [from 800 meters] was more of a mental challenge than a physical one for me."

THE IRONWOMAN Heather Fuhr (five-time Ironman Lake Placid Champion)

"I started doing triathlons because the training is so varied," Fuhr says. "With three sports, there is always something different to do and think about, so there isn't much chance of getting bored."

THE EXTREMIST Scott Jurek (seven-time winner of the Western States 100-Mile Endurance Run)

Jurek, who takes a holistic approach to life and training, says he was drawn to the meditative aspect of long solo runs and craved a thrill beyond 26.2 miles. Being in tune with his body has helped him find success. "To go the extra distance, you have to respect your body."

THE JACK OF ALL TRADES Rod Dixon (1972 Olympic bronze medalist in the 1500 meters; winner of the 1983 New York City Marathon)

Dixon is proof that not every runner fits a specific niche. Early on, Dixon focused on the mile, then excelled in the 3-K, 5-K, half-marathon, and marathon. "I needed to keep switching gears. I've always been drawn to new challenges." —J.K.