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MARATHONERS MAKE STRIDES FOR FREEDOM



BOROUGH HAUL: Runners in the New York City Marathon yesterday get an ovation as they arrive in Brooklyn (above) after a trot across the Verrazano Bridge — and one "stickered" racer let everyone know the appreciation was mutual (below). AP, Matthew McDermott(below)

By John Lehmann, Ikimuliso Sackwell-Mason and Roosevelt Joseph

Runners plastered "I Love New York" stickers on their arms and legs yesterday before defying terrorist threats to tackle the 32nd New York City Marathon.

With police helicopters patrolling the sky and thousands of cops lining streets, about 25,000 runners battled through the pain barrier as patriotic spectators sang "God Bless America" and waved placards denouncing terrorism.

"Everybody is running for New York," said Andrey Baranov, 35, who wasn't going to run this year because of a stress fracture in his leg.

"After Sept. 11, I just had to run — we all have to show that we will go on no matter what," he said.

But race officials said there were about 5,000 no-shows and suspected they were from the international field.



Race director Allan Steinfeld said it would take a few days to determine precisely who did not run, but word from a number of tour operators indicated that many runners from outside the United States had decided at the last minute to stay home.

Under the slogan "United We Run," the marathon was dedicated to the victims of the terror attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Before the race, competitors were given temporary tattoos of American flags and the "I love New York" logo, along with food and sweat bands.

"It was very moving — every time I went by a firehouse, I couldn't help but tip my hat," said 1984 Olympic champion Joan Benoit Samuelson, who finished ninth among U.S. women and 21st overall.

Heavy security blanketed the 26.2-mile race as it wove through New York's five boroughs.

Air space above the course was restricted, sharpshooters were stationed on rooftops and four of five bridges were closed to traffic.

Mayor Rudy Giuliani, who started the race after catching a red-eye flight from Phoenix, where he was watching the Yankees, declined to say how many police officers patrolled the marathon but organizers said there were nearly 3,000 cops and other security officers.

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