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## Inspiring Stories from the 2025 Bank of America Chicago Marathon

*53,000+ Participants to Take Part in the 47th Running on Sunday, October 12, 2025*

CHICAGO, IL – The Bank of America Chicago Marathon returns on Sunday, October 12, for the 47th running of one of the world's most iconic road races.

For more than four decades, runners have descended upon Chicago to chase dreams, to set personal bests, to raise money for charity and to do something they weren't sure was possible. This fall, the Bank of America Chicago Marathon will welcome more than 53,000 runners, including an exciting [professional athlete field](#), from around the world ready to inspire, motivate, break barriers and set records. Here's a look at some of the extraordinary stories that are motivating runners this year:

### Notable Participants

- **Bryan Arenales:** Bryan is the winner of season seven of Love Island USA and included his love for running in his show introduction. Bryan is signed up to run the Bank of America Chicago Marathon, his first Abbott World Marathon Major, with the Mercy Home Heroes.
- **Justin Britt:** Justin is a retired NFL center who played for the Seattle Seahawks (2014-2019) and Houston Texans (2021-2022). After he retired, he started running to help overcome depression but soon realized how addictive and welcoming the run community is. This will be his first marathon.
- **Otis Hudson:** Otis is a retired NFL guard who played for the Cincinnati Bengals (2010-2013) and Kansas City Chiefs (2014). Following his retirement, Otis moved back to the Chicago area and discovered running as a way to stay healthy.
- **Ben Lustbader and Sarah Mispagel:** Chicago chefs and owners of popular Avondale bakery Loaf Lounge are running on behalf of the Alzheimer's Association. Loaf Lounge was made famous when their baked goods, most notably the chocolate cake, were featured in popular Chicago-based TV show, 'The Bear.' The Alzheimer's Association is a special cause to the married couple as Sarah lost her mom to early-onset Alzheimer's when she was 25. Her mom was always an avid runner, and Sarah feels the best way she can honor her is through running. This will be the first marathon they've run since opening Loaf Lounge three years ago.
- **Heather O'Reilly:** Heather is a former professional soccer player who played for the United States Women's National Soccer Team as a midfielder. Heather has run three marathons, including the 2022 Boston Marathon presented by Bank of America, the 2023 New York Marathon and the 2024 Berlin Marathon. Her goal is to break four hours in Chicago this fall.

## Stories from the Field

- **Alumni Runners, Randy Burt, Henry Kozlowski and George Mueller:** From the first Chicago Marathon on September 25, 1977, to the upcoming 47th, three runners have been on every start line and every finish line. Randy, 76 from Antioch, IL; Henry, 74 from Wilmette, IL; and George, 76 from Bloomingdale, IL have completed every Chicago Marathon. While they take it one year at a time, they are eyeing the 50th as their biggest milestone.
- **Bank of America Chicago Distance Series ambassadors:** The third edition of the Bank of America Chicago Distance Series culminates at the Bank of America Chicago Marathon. Local Distance Series participants and ambassadors [Ariel Greenstein](#), [Grezelro Gonzales](#), [Shania Kranz](#), [Henry D Norris](#) and [Nimbe Juarez](#), will be celebrating the achievement on race day along with more than 4,000 runners.
- **Sierra Brooks, Chicago, IL:** Former University of Michigan Gymnast Sierra Brooks is running in memory of her friend and past gymnastics partner, Kara Welsh, who passed last year due to an act of domestic violence. Sierra and Kara grew up learning gymnastics together, and in her honor, Sierra is fundraising with The Network, a non-profit dedicated to supporting survivors and ending domestic violence.
- **Melissa Broyles, Chicago, IL:** Starting her running journey after having two children was Melissa's way to get back into shape. The 2011 Bank of America Chicago Marathon was her first marathon, where she qualified for Boston and went on to run in 2013, the year of the Boston Marathon bombings. Being part of that field changed her life and inspired her to run strong for as long as she can. Sixteen marathons later, Melissa is hooked. The 2025 Chicago Marathon will be her first since 2023 and she is looking forward to making a strong comeback.
- **Mary Ellen Clifford, Chicago, IL:** Mary Ellen is running the 2025 Bank of America Chicago Marathon alongside all four of her daughters. A longtime high school cross country coach, Mary Ellen has spent 17 years inspiring young athletes, including her own children, to discover the joy of running. She's run a marathon with each of her daughters individually, but this year marks the first time the entire family will run together for her 10<sup>th</sup> Chicago Marathon.
- **Minakshi Dhanvada, Centennial, CO:** Minakshi is taking on her first marathon at the 2025 Bank of America Chicago Marathon, turning a personal postpartum journey into a mission to empower women, especially South Asian immigrant women like herself. Originally a high school sprinter in India, Minakshi rediscovered running after the birth of her daughter in 2022, using it as a powerful tool to redefine postpartum strength. Now a fitness and nutrition coach, she supports other immigrant women in prioritizing their health. After Chicago, Minakshi wants to run all seven Abbott World Marathon Majors and put Indian women on the global marathon map.
- **Gretchen Evans, Northlake, TX:** Gretchen is a deaf adaptive runner, U.S. Army veteran and the founder of *Team UNBROKEN*, a group of adaptive athletes who refuse to let injury or trauma define their limits. A recipient of the Purple Heart, Bronze Star and the 2022 ESPY Pat Tillman Award for Service, Gretchen served 27 years in the military before a rocket attack in Afghanistan left her with life-altering injuries. Alongside her teammates, all of whom have faced devastating injuries or illnesses, Gretchen is running the 2025 Bank of America Chicago Marathon to inspire others to pursue their dreams, no matter the barriers.
- **Matthew Gorski, Chicago, IL:** Since October 2023, the Bank of America Chicago Distance Series has supported the Runner 321 Movement by reserving bib #321 at each event for a neurodivergent athlete. For the first time in 2025, one participant will

take on the full series. Matthew Gorski, an avid runner, has worn bib #321 at both the Shamrock Shuffle and Chicago 13.1, and will again at the Chicago Marathon to culminate the series and represent people with disabilities.

- **Susan Harrold, Oak Park, IL:** Susan is returning to the Bank of America Chicago Marathon in 2025 to celebrate her 65th birthday and nearly five decades of running. A legacy participant, Susan ran her first Chicago Marathon in 1978 at the age of 18, paying a \$10 entry fee after sewing curtains for her uncle to fund her race. Since then, she's run more than 20 Chicago Marathons, watching the event evolve from a grassroots race into a world-class marathon.
- **Leah Howell, Chicago, IL:** Leah is running the 2025 Bank of America Chicago Marathon to honor the life-saving gift she's received not once, but twice. A two-time kidney transplant recipient and Kidney Connections Ambassador for the National Kidney Foundation, Leah is running with Team Illinois to give back to the community that supported her through dialysis, dozens of surgeries and over two decades of post-transplant life. This race marks 21 years with her second transplant, affectionately nicknamed "Joey."
- **Candace James-Roberts, Chicago, IL:** As part of her Masters in Public Health program at Northwestern University, Candace developed a community-centered wellness initiative focused on the Bronzeville neighborhood, combining her passions for public health, community empowerment and running to address chronic disease disparities through movement, education and connection. Candace organizes community runs, partners with local health organizations for screenings and resources and uses storytelling to highlight the lived experiences of residents in Bronzeville.
- **Alex Judge, Keene, NH:** Alex is running the 2025 Bank of America Chicago Marathon as a bold and personal statement: Parkinson's doesn't define him, it drives him. Diagnosed with Young Onset Parkinson's Disease at just 33 years old in 2024, Alex signed up to run for the Michael J. Fox Foundation the same day he received his diagnosis. Inspired by fellow Parkinson's advocate and athlete Jimmy Choi, Alex believes a life-changing diagnosis calls for a life-changing mindset.
- **Bryan Lip, Perth, Australia:** Bryan is on an ambitious mission to run 100 marathons in five years, including on every continent, as part of a global effort to increase LGBTQ+ visibility and participation in sport. A member of Frontrunners New York and a committee representative for the Asia Pacific region of International Frontrunners, the world's largest LGBTQ+ sporting group, Bryan uses running as a platform for social activism, community building and inclusion. Bryan has completed numerous marathons, significantly improved his health and now works to empower others to find confidence and connection through running.
- **Elizabeth Pehota, Boston, MA:** Elizabeth is on a mission to shatter barriers by setting a Guinness World Record for the Fastest Female Marathon Completed with Multiple Sclerosis, targeting an ambitious 3:15 finish. A seasoned runner with 13 marathons under her belt, including all six Abbott World Marathon Majors, and soon earning her seventh star at the Sydney Marathon this August, the broadcast journalist and entrepreneur is determined to break the existing record by an astounding 48 minutes, proving that her MS diagnosis will never define her limits.
- **Christopher Russo, Calumet City, IL:** Christopher Russo is a 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher at Thornton Fractional North High School. In 2019, deeply motivated by his father who completed the Bank of America Chicago Marathon four times, Christopher began running. Though his father was battling dementia and unaware of this new chapter, Christopher honored his memory by completing multiple ultramarathons.

and created two scholarships for students who've overcome hardships and pursuing careers in teaching or law enforcement—the same paths his father followed. This year's Bank of America Chicago Marathon will be Christopher's first road marathon.

- **Derrick Song, San Clemente, CA:** Derrick is running the Bank of America Chicago Marathon for Special Children's Charities in honor of his niece, who is nonverbal and on the autism spectrum. A member of the Venice Run Club, Derrick has completed eight marathons so far and Chicago will mark his fourth Abbott World Marathon Major as part of a personal mission to run a marathon on all seven continents.
- **Brittany Simque, Gillette, WY:** Brittany is preparing for her first-ever marathon after an incredible journey of losing 203 pounds. Once nearly immobile and taking her body's movement for granted, Brittany began walking on a treadmill as she lost weight and eventually realized she could run, completing a half marathon three years ago. Now running with Team Best Buddies, a charity focused on supporting people with disabilities, Brittany draws inspiration from her 14-year-old nephew, who faces obesity and disabilities.
- **Kyle Tellez, Grayslake, IL:** Kyle, an Inventory Control Coordinator Senior at Pleasant Prairie Surgery Center, is preparing to run the Bank of America Chicago Marathon with Team Advocate to fundraise for Condell's Heart and Vascular Center. This cause is close to him, as it reflects his passion for his work and love for the hospital. After struggling with unhealthy habits, running became his way to regain focus and purpose, transforming his health and life. Now, he pours that strength into supporting a cause he deeply cares about.
- **Scott Wilson, Queensland, Australia:** After undergoing weight loss surgery in 2020, Scott Wilson began running as part of his personal transformation journey. In 2024, Scott ran his first marathon at the Bank of America Chicago Marathon, where he joined the Culligan International employee team, a global company based in Chicago that debuted as a proud event partner in the same year. In 2025, Scott will take on the Sydney Marathon in August, followed by a return to Chicago.
- **Jeremy Woodward, Concord, NH:** Like many, Jeremy was born with a congenital heart defect. He was told that it wouldn't cause any issues. But at age 22, Jeremy developed endocarditis, which is inflammation of the heart's inner lining, and it was determined he needed a replacement heart valve. He received a valve from an organ donor but seven years later, Jeremy went into heart failure and he was given 24-48 hours to live. This time, he received a new artificial heart valve created by Abbott. While his journey to health was not easy, he has committed to pushing himself to prove he can live a normal life. Jeremy will run his 15th marathon this fall, and his first Bank of America Chicago Marathon. He will run for charity with Tedy's Team and as part of Team Abbott, a community of runners who have been impacted by health challenges but refused to let those challenges define them.

For more information on this year's race, visit [chicagomarathon.com](https://chicagomarathon.com).

### About the Bank of America Chicago Marathon

In its 47th year on Sunday, October 12, 2025, the Bank of America Chicago Marathon will welcome thousands of participants from more than 100 countries and all 50 states, including a world-class professional athlete field, top regional and Masters runners, race veterans, debut marathoners and charity participants. The race's iconic course takes participants through 29

vibrant neighborhoods on an architectural and cultural tour of Chicago. Annually, more than a million spectators line the streets cheering on tens of thousands of participants from the start line to the final stretch down Columbus Drive. As a result of the race's national and international draw, the Chicago Marathon assists in raising millions of dollars for a variety of charitable causes while generating over \$683 million in annual economic impact to its host city. The 2025 Bank of America Chicago Marathon, a member of the Abbott World Marathon Majors, will start and finish in Grant Park beginning at 7:30 a.m. on Sunday, October 12. In advance of the race, a three-day Abbott Health & Fitness Expo will be held at McCormick Place Convention Center on Thursday, October 9, Friday, October 10, and Saturday, October 11. For more information about the event and how to get involved, go to [chicagomarathon.com](https://chicagomarathon.com).

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