A Fine Finish, Unicycles and All

Julie Mizraji, who is living with metastatic breast cancer, ran her half-marathon birthday race with a little help from her friends.

October 16, 2020 By Bob Barnett

I called Julie Mizraji to see how her race went. She wrote the essay "My Birthday Race" for the current issue of Cancer Health. It chronicled her decision, more than a year after being diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer, to run a half-marathon to celebrate her 30th birthday. Due to the quirks of magazine production, she wrote the essay before her race, and it was published after the race. So how did it go?

"It was everything I imagined and more," said Mizraji. The race was on a Saturday, and the day before, her actual birthday, she "got to celebrate and relax, eat a lot of pasta and have some cake." Socially distanced, of course, with friends in her backyard.

She was well prepared. Her cancer treatment includes a targeted therapy that she takes for three weeks at a time followed by one week off. By the time that recovery week happens, although she is often fatigued, she actually feels pretty good overall. "I was feeling completely normal, so I was able to push myself," she said. She ran up to 10 or 11 miles on some days to train for the 13.1-mile race.

Race day she had some jitters and showed up early, at 7:30, for the 8 a.m. race. "I was worrying, What if I get corona? What if I'm sick? What if it's raining? But it turned out to be a beautiful day, sunny and not too hot, in the low 60s. All the stars aligned."

About 25 friends and family were waiting for her at the end. Given the pandemic, it was a virtual timed event—she was the only person racing. Four partners accompanied her at different legs of the race. Three of them ran alongside her. Her brother, though, isn't big on running but loves to ride his unicycle, so he cycled along with her for miles two and three.

For more on this topic:

Getty Images

COVID-19: What People Living with Metastatic Breast Cancer Need to Know [SPONSORED]

Friends and family followed along from afar via a link provided by the app Runmeter that updated her location on the course every five minutes. “My dad couldn’t come out, but he was following the whole time—we even FaceTimed while my brother was unicycling.”

She planned to finish somewhere near the two-hour mark. The first hour went great. “I was high on adrenaline,” Mizraji told me. “Mentally knowing I still had four or five miles to go” made the next half-hour tougher.

With two miles to go, she got stomach cramps. “I walked for about 10 seconds, putting a hand on top of my head, catching my breath.” Her friend Kat ran alongside her and kept her spirits up. The

cramps passed. “I crossed the finish line and had a lot of pain, but it was amazing to see all my friends, including a lot of people I didn’t know were coming.” Her time was 2:07.

A friend, Andrew Allen, made a short video:

The next day, dog-tired, “I thought, No way I could do this again,” she said. But with the race already about three weeks in the rearview mirror, her mind was starting to entertain new challenges. “I need a break. The most I’ve run is about six miles. But I want to do a race again.”

You have to have a good reason to endure the early mornings and the pain of pushing yourself on the trail, she said. “This one was for my birthday.” The next one, she said, may be to raise money for cancer research for the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, where she gets treated. “I might want to do a full marathon,” she mused, “when they come back.”

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/blog/julie-mizraji-birthday-half-marathon