**THE RUNNING RECESSION**

A few years ago, I sensed that the rapid growth in the number of runners participating in races around the state was finally coming to an end. Some races--GO! St. Louis, in particular—were actually starting to see declines in participation for the very first time.

To see whether this was really happening, I started collecting data for the number of half and full marathon finishers at nearly every Missouri race offering those distances. That seemed to be the easiest, most reliable way to measure interest in running since those who run half or full marathons are the most serious about the sport, and big races everywhere live or die by their participation.

I now have almost four years of data, and the data leads to one conclusion: We’re in a running recession.

You can see the data for yourself in the spreadsheet [linked here](http://www.gojim.tv/Miscellaneous/Marathon_and_Half_Marathon_Finishers_Totals_2015.pdf), but let me summarize the salient points:

1. The total number of solo half and full marathon finishers at Missouri races declined from 54,552 in 2014 to 49,473 in 2015, a drop of 9%.
2. The totals increased from 2012 to 2013, and then again in 2014, but those increases were no doubt helped by the substantial increase in the number of half and full marathons held in those years. If not for those new events, the 2013 and 2014 totals would likely have shown declines.
3. Of the 42 events that were around in both 2014 and 2015, 28 had declines in participation—exactly twice the number of those that experienced increases.

We’ve seen some loss of interest in running the Lake area in recent years, with many of our local races experiencing smaller turnouts than in years past. (Search through this website’s archives from years ago, and you’ll see many, many names we haven’t seen since.)

The decline in running is now being noticed nationwide. Each year, RunningUSA.org publishes a statistical summary of running races throughout the country. The most recent [report](http://www.runningusa.org/2015-state-of-sport-us-trends?returnTo=annual-reports), published earlier in 2015, contains data through 2014. The data shows that the number of race finishers declined in 2014, marking the first decline in many years (except for a slight dip in 2006).

It’s not just running that’s in recession, either. Triathlon is down, too.

So, what caused the decline in running? It’s probably a combination of many factors, but the biggest reason may be that runners who jumped on the bandwagon when running was growing in popularity got hurt, or burned out, or turned to other sporting events (e.g. mud runs). There were probably some who, after checking “running a half or full marathon” off their bucket list, moved on to other bucket-list items. Changing demographics may explain some of the decline as well.

What does the running recession mean? Not much, really, unless the decline continues for a few more years. In the short-term, you may find a few marginal events being cancelled, some distances no longer being offered, or events cutting expenses in small but visible ways (swag, expos, etc.).