

# MCRRC Intervals



July 2026

Newsletter of the Montgomery County Road Runners Club

## On the Horizon

Please volunteer if you can!

**Saturday, July 4, 8:00 am**  
Red, White, and Blue 5K (\$)   
Potomac

**Friday, July 10, 7:00 pm**  
Midsummer Night's Mile (CS)   
Gaithersburg

**Sunday, July 26, 7:30 am**  
Riley's Rumble Half Marathon (CS)   
Boyd's

**Friday, July 31, 6:45 pm**  
Going Green Track Meet (CS)   
Gaithersburg

**Sunday, August 16, 8:00 am**  
Groovin' Woodstock Trail 7K (TS)   
Dickerson

**Saturday, August 29, 7:30 am**  
Eastern County 8K (CS)   
Silver Spring

Check our website for updates:  
[www.mcrrc.org](http://www.mcrrc.org)

## Board Meetings

Board meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month.

## Running Happy in the Heat



Photo: Dan Reichmann

Jimmy Schneidwind, co-director of MCRRC's Youth Running Series, relishes his job as rabbit for the Memorial Day 4-Miler kids' run.



Photo: Dan Reichmann

Aneesh Nadgouda (left) and George Ladue surge to the finish of Little Bennett 10K.



Photo: Leroy Kelley

Gernise Dixon approaches Run for Roses 5K with verve to spare.

# Taking a Break

by Amy Lin

As I write this, school has just ended, and summer solstice is just around the corner. For some, summer is the time for a break—from school, from work, and sometimes from running. For others, summer means *more* running, not less. (I'm in the second category, but I absolutely appreciate time off when I can swing it.)

This Intervals looks at breaks in training, whether voluntary or involuntary, and the role MCRRC plays in coming back to running after stepping away.

In From the Board, Brian Murphy writes about the ebb and flow of training and how getting a break makes for stronger motivation upon return, especially with Club friends waiting to tackle training runs together.

For those building mileage toward fall marathons, Riley's Rumble Half Marathon lurks about halfway through the summer, offering a break in distance but easily making

up for that with the three H's—heat, hills, and humidity. Dan DiFonzo uncovers some surprising stories as he digs into the history of MCRRC's best-worst race.

In this month's Coaches' Corner, Jyoti Bisbey gives an overview of perimenopause, the interruption it can cause to running, and ways women—and men—can adjust for it.

For Runner Profile, Lisa Levin interviews someone who doesn't seem to need a break! Our most recent Coach of the Year, Sheila Patel, finds the time and energy to coach in multiple programs and volunteer at countless races, and we're lucky to have her in the Club.

Lulu Muze, another beloved MCRRC program coach and race volunteer, provides her personal perspective on her break from running due to health issues and how her determination to run again led to a life-saving diagnosis and now, a comeback.

Happy summer break, MCRRC!



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### Have comments or questions? Or want to help?

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MCRRC is a non-profit, educational organization which promotes personal health and fitness through the sport of running. The club conducts regular running activities, including training sessions, races, seminars, and social events.



## Stay Informed!

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# Training and Not-Training

by Brian Murphy

**H**appy summer, y'all! As I typically do for the July issue of Intervals, I'm writing this just after race-directing Suds & Soles 5K. Suds is one of our events that really make you feel like you're part of a larger community. Of course, the 5K race is the main draw—this edition had our fastest year on record!—but after you finish and you get to spend time with your friends and fellow Club members, the event really shines.

I feel that way with Suds, the annual awards banquet, and our member appreciation happy hour. All give you a great chance to just hang. As a board, we're looking at creating space for more opportunities like that in the months to come. I hope you can find an MCRRC event where you feel a similar connection—maybe it's a training program or a weekly drop-in run.

The month leading up to Suds is usually the time of year I dial back the training just a bit. One, it gives my body and mind a chance to rest from months of harder training, and, two, it gives me a little more time in the day to focus on race-director duties. The break my mind gets from several months of training is invaluable. It's usually just enough that I'm able to feel the drive again and get excited about what's next.

No better time than now. I'm signed up for the New York City Marathon this fall. I don't *love* running marathons. However, one takeaway from running my last one after a bit of a drought was that I need a reminder of what that discomfort in the middle of a marathon feels like. There is nothing

in a training schedule that gets you ready for that feeling more than actually having done one, and the memory of that pain can leave you pretty quickly. I figured that two and a half years between my marathons should have been sufficient, but as soon as I hit that stretch where things get hard, it was difficult to push aside that little voice telling me to slow down.

I am looking forward to the training cycle. You've heard me talk about this before, but I absolutely love training, especially with friends and teammates. I can usually fill four or five out of the seven days of the week with people to run with. Especially for those harder workout days—it really does keep it fun. The Club is an excellent source for that. I see it from so many of you I follow on Strava, whether you're meeting for a program run, joining a Wednesday track night, the Thursday morning Fallsgrove crew, a low-key race to get that tempo or speed work in, or an impromptu meetup with similarly paced buddies.

It's not all work, though. I've got a few fun running adventures planned with some of these friends. Again, this is where MCRRC shines—I know I'm not alone in saying I've made several lifelong friends through the Club. It's what will keep me coming back as an MCRRC member year after year.

*—Brian Murphy is the President of MCRRC and a member of the Competitive Racing Team. He can be reached at [president@mcrrc.org](mailto:president@mcrrc.org).*

## Riley's Rumble

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low-key, volunteer-driven, and fueled by runners simply excited to build something together.

Jordan describes the early MCRRC culture as energetic and spontaneous. "It was a bunch of wide-eyed people who were just excited out of their gourds," he says. "It really was like those old Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland movies—'Hey, I've got an idea, let's do this!'" That enthusiasm helped create not just Riley's Rumble, but many of the Club's signature races.

Sissala modestly admits he was involved with "almost all of the races" during the MCRRC's formative years in the 1980s and 1990s, helping establish traditions that continue today.

Unfortunately, most of that history has been lost. Both men lament that early MCRRC records, newsletters, and archives disappeared years ago after being stored by a former Club historian who may have been a little overzealous with a house-cleaning project.

"We just don't have a record of all that," Sissala says regretfully.

But perhaps Riley's Rumble survives best through stories anyway.

Stories of runners covered in mud.

Stories of July and August heat that empties the tank.

Stories of hunters mistaking runners for protesters.

Stories of hills, humidity, deer collisions, and marathon dreams.

More than forty years after its beginnings, Riley's Rumble remains one of MCRRC's defining races—not because it is easy, but precisely because it isn't.

*—Dan DiFonzo has been a member of MCRRC for more than twenty-five years and has suffered through multiple versions of Riley's Rumble. He is a former Experienced Marathon Program (XMP) coach and can often be heard behind the mic, announcing at Club races.*

# Riley's Rumble: Mud, Mayhem, and the Making of an MCRRC Classic

by Dan DiFonzo

For decades, MCRRC members have known Riley's Rumble as one of the Club's toughest races—a brutally hot and hilly half marathon that arrives every summer just when marathon training starts getting serious.

But long before the race became synonymous with heat, humidity, and suffering, it began with mud.

A lot of mud.

According to longtime MCRRC member Lyman Jordan, Riley's Rumble likely dates back to 1983. The race was named for Riley's Lock on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal towpath, the location of the original course. "The first year," Jordan recalls, "it started at Riley's Lock and ran south toward Great Falls and turned around."

Riley's Rumble quickly established itself as a race runners would never forget.

"There had been massive rains in the week and a half before the event," Jordan says. "The towpath—I don't remember ever being that muddy before or since."

The result became instant MCRRC lore.

"People came back to the finish line coated in mud," says Jordan. "Particularly the high kickers—their backs were covered all the way up to their necks. Legs completely covered. Shoes covered. It was almost comical." He still laughs remembering the sight.

The inaugural conditions were so memorable that the course was immediately reconsidered. "The next year, John Sissala decided, 'Let's move it out to the road,'" Jordan says. That decision helped launch the race into its next era.

Sissala, one of the MCRRC's founding members and most influential early race directors and organizers, was the genius behind Riley's Rumble. He said the original concept was to create a challenging summer half marathon that could serve as preparation for Marine Corps Marathon.

"I wanted a race that was half marathon in distance, as a training run for the Marine Corps Marathon," Sissala explains. "It seems as if every major race leading up to the Marine Corps is a training run like the Army Ten-Miler, and so it was a popular race right from the get-go." At the time, half marathons were far less common than they are today, and Riley's filled a niche for local runners preparing for fall marathons.

"It originally started and finished on the eastern side of Seneca Creek," Sissala says. "Then we moved the finish to the other side of the river, and that was the course until maybe 2000."

As Montgomery County developed and traffic increased, the race kept adapting, and the course evolved through several variations over the years. Jordan recalls one especially memorable version that crossed River Road and ran along Hunting Quarter Road during hunting season. After the race, police arrived because hunters had complained.



Runners and lead bikers tackle the infamous hills of Riley's Rumble in 2009, the first year on its current course at the Maryland SoccerPlex.

"The hunters thought there were a bunch of protesters running through Hunting Quarter Road protesting hunting," Jordan remembers, laughing. "They were described to police as wearing 'brightly colored clothing.'"

The image of half marathoners unintentionally staging what looked like a hunting protest remains one of the race's more surreal moments.

Eventually, increasing congestion around Riley's Lock and competition for space from hikers, kayakers, cyclists, and visitors forced another move. "We were taking over that entire road at the start," Jordan explains.

Over time, the race migrated north through several locations, including Poolesville High School, before eventually settling near the Maryland SoccerPlex in Boyds, where it remains today.

Despite the course alterations, one thing has never changed: Riley's Rumble is always hard.

"I know that it's hot and humid most years," Sissala says. "And we've only had a couple years when temperatures were ideal."

That reputation has become part of the race's identity, much like the ice pops traditionally served to runners midway through the race. For generations of local runners, Riley's hasn't been a race for personal records—it's a test of toughness.

"It's kind of a cruel race," says one longtime Club member. "The heat, humidity, and hills... everything about it is just mean-spirited and cruel."

The race has even developed stories that border on unbelievable—one year, a runner was struck by a deer, "and was transported to shock trauma," Jordan says matter-of-factly.

Yet somehow, these stories only add to the race's mystique.

For many participants, Riley's Rumble represents the spirit of MCRRC itself—

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# Running Through Perimenopause: What No One Tells You (and How to Keep Going)

by Jyoti Bisbey

For many women, running is more than exercise. It's a place to think, to breathe, to reset. It's identity, community, and sometimes sanity. Then perimenopause arrives, quietly and without a clear starting point, and running might feel unfamiliar. Effort increases, motivation fluctuates, recovery slows, and confidence wobbles. What makes this phase difficult is not just the physical changes but the lack of honest conversation around them.

Perimenopause doesn't come with a handbook. It can begin years before menstrual cycles change noticeably, and it can affect women who are otherwise healthy, active, and consistent runners. When running suddenly feels harder, they wonder, *What am I doing wrong?*

The answer is: Nothing! One of the biggest myths about perimenopause is that being healthy and fit somehow prevents its effects. Highly active runners may be caught off guard when familiar training loads start to feel heavier or when sleep disruptions make early runs feel brutal. These changes are not a sign that running is harming you. They're a sign that your body is responding differently to stress than it once did.

Another misconception is that pushing harder will solve the problem. Runners are conditioned to believe effort leads to progress, so when performance dips, the reaction is to add intensity or cling tightly to old routines. During perimenopause, this approach can lead to fatigue, frustration, and even injury. What previously felt sustainable may now require more recovery, more flexibility, and more selfcompassion.

One of the most helpful mindset shifts is redefining a "good run." Instead of measuring success by pace, distance, or personal records, focus on

consistency and effort. A slower run is still meaningful. A shorter run still counts. A run that improves mood or clears the head has value even if the watch says otherwise. Letting go of rigid expectations is often the key to falling back in love with running.

Recovery also becomes more important. This doesn't necessarily mean running less, but it does mean respecting rest. Poor sleep, lingering soreness, or feeling emotionally flat are signals, not weaknesses. Treating sleep as part of training, allowing easy days to be truly easy, and giving the body time to absorb effort can make running feel energizing instead of draining.

Emotionally, perimenopause can add another layer to the running experience. Mood swings, anxiety, or irritability may appear without obvious cause, and running can either amplify or ease those feelings depending on how it's approached. When running is used as a way to punish the body or "fix" emotions, it can feel overwhelming. When it's used as a tool for regulation, grounding, or enjoyment, it can become a stabilizing force. Choosing calming routes, running without pace pressure, or simply allowing movement to be enough can restore balance.

Another overlooked challenge is the change to sense of self. Many female runners have spent years seeing themselves as strong, resilient, and mentally tough. Perimenopause can feel like a threat to that identity when effort increases yet results in a plateau or even a decline. The reality is that strength does not disappear during this transition; it changes shape. Adaptability, patience, and selfawareness are forms of strength, too. Running does not need to look forever the same to remain deeply meaningful.

Talking about perimenopause with other runners can feel intimidating, especially in mixed-gender groups. Women may worry about oversharing, making others uncomfortable, or being dismissed. In practice, honest conversations are often received with curiosity and respect. With women runners, sharing experiences frequently leads to recognition and relief. With men, a simple, matter-of-fact explanation can be powerful. Saying "My body is going through a hormonal transition that affects recovery and energy" or simply "I'm adjusting my training right now" normalize the conversation without making it medical or dramatic.

Including men in these conversations also helps dismantle the idea that menopause is something secretive or shameful. All runners are familiar with injury, fatigue, or training adaptations. Framing perimenopause as another form of physiological change helps build understanding and support, whether that means adjusting pace in group runs, modifying a workout, or reducing pressure to perform.

Ultimately, running through perimenopause is not about fighting change. It is about learning how to work with a body that is evolving. It may require gentler expectations, more flexibility, and more honest conversation, but it does not require giving up the joy of running. With time and adaptation, many women discover a different, deeper relationship with movement, one that honors both where they have been and where they are now.

Running is not over. It is simply asking for a new kind of partnership.

—Jyoti Bisbey has been an MCRRC member for more than fifteen years and has coached in multiple Club programs (5K, 10K, and half marathon) for more than six years.

# Sheila Patel



by Lisa Levin

**S**heila Patel trained for her first half marathon in MCRRC's Summer Half Marathon program, about three years after joining the Club. Not long after, she stepped up to coach her pace group in the Winter Half Marathon program, and she hasn't looked back, serving as a coach in all of MCRRC's 5K programs, Summer Half, and Fall 10K. Sheila was recognized for her contributions to the Club with both the Coach of the Year and a Volunteer Service Award at this year's banquet. When she isn't running, coaching, or volunteering at MCRRC's low-key races, Sheila works as a pharmacist in long-term care, auditing charts at nursing and assisted-living homes for appropriateness of medication therapy. She lives in Rockville, close to her sister and her sister's family, and enjoys spending time with her adult niece and nephew, as well as their dog.

## Did you run or participate in sports when you were younger?

I was not an athlete as a child, and truth be told, hated gym class. When my niece was about eight or nine years old, Girls on the Run in Montgomery County was in its infancy, and I was her running buddy for the race. That experience propelled me to train for my first 5K. I joined MCRRC around 2008, mainly running in the Summer 5K and Speed Development programs for a few years.

## What was your first race? What do you remember most about it?

I ran the Kentlands 5K as my first 5K and I remember it being somewhat hilly. I promised myself I would never run another 5K race, and yet here I am, eighteen years later.

## What has been your favorite race?

The Frederick Half has always been a favorite race for me because the community comes out to cheer on the runners and the route goes through the historic center and neighborhoods. Last year, I ran the Richmond Half for the

first time. The organizers bill it as one of the friendliest races in the country. There were many first-time half marathoners who had trained with two major local training groups and their coaches not only encouraged their runners at every mile, but all runners.



Photo: Dan Reichmann

**Sheila Patel posts a solid finish at this year's Capital for a Day 5K.**

## What is your proudest running-related accomplishment, and why?

As I mentioned, I really did not enjoy running hills when I started. So, in recent years, I have come to mentally accept the hills (obviously they are not going anywhere) and actually "like" doing hill repeats for their strengthening benefits.

## What keeps you motivated to continue running?

My pace group continues to motivate me in countless ways. The fact that I know someone is waiting for me to do a run gets me out the door when I don't want

to run. In recent years, we have started to run not just local races but destination half marathons as well.

## What's the best advice you've received as a coach or a runner?

While coaches in various programs have mentioned the importance of having a strong core, it took me a solid decade before I regularly started incorporating regular Pilates, barre, and other training to my exercise routine. I have also started to do most of my runs at a slower pace, understanding that it prevents injury and improves recovery. A running friend recently did a six-month heart-rate running trial and improved her speed, something the rest of our pace group would like to attempt in the coming year.

## Do you have any standout coaching memories?

In recent years, we have had a few runners reaching PR distances while in the training program. It is always fun to see others reach a milestone even before running a race.

## What's your favorite volunteer role within MCRRC?

While I don't volunteer as a course marshal enough, I enjoy cheering on fellow runners. And while I have never run a marathon, a few of us in my pace group have gone downtown multiple times to cheer on runners we know who are running the Marine Corps Marathon. Our running friends have appreciated the encouragement, especially when they are in the higher miles. I have received similar encouragement and support in races I have run, which is what I feel makes MCRRC special.

—Lisa Levin has been with MCRRC for more than two decades. She is a member of the Competitive Racing Team and co-founder of Run Farther & Faster.

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## Running Saved My Life

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Coughing came first, then shortness of breath. *Asthma*, they said, but inhalers didn't work. Pulmonologist, ENT, more medicine, still no answers. I could barely breathe on a run. I'd just left a twenty-nine-year career under hard circumstances. Steroids left me looking like the Michelin Man. Depression hit like a freight train, and the one thing that had always quieted my brain was slipping away.

I remembered the runner I'd been, and I wanted her back. So I advocated for myself as if my life depended on it—because, it turned out, it did. After I assembled a new medical team, the answer arrived: thymoma, a rare cancer on my thymus gland. I named the tumor Theodore.

Running gave me the courage to tell my doctor that the surgery had to wait. I was leading a group up Mount Kilimanjaro—the world's highest free-standing mountain—and many of them were MCRRC friends. I wasn't going to miss it. So I climbed to Uhuru Peak, 19,341 feet, with Theodore still in my chest. A few months later, this past February, he was finally evicted.

But the part that broke me open wasn't the mountain. It was back home, buried in medical bills, doing the math on treatment and recovery and a job search all at once. A friend watched me struggle and told me, "Lean on your happy place." She organized a community 5K and a fundraiser, and my people showed up—in full force.

For the first time in months, I could breathe. Not the keel-over, faint-from-anxiety kind of breathing. Real breathing. I could focus on healing and getting back to running instead of panicking about the cost of staying alive.

Running didn't just save my mental health back in 2013. This time, the community that running built around me saved my actual life—and made sure I could afford to keep it.

Now I'm starting over, one mile at a time. My lungs are expanding. My legs are remembering. My brain is relearning what calm feels like. And I know the secret now: It was never really the miles. It was the people—the ones who show up, who make the shouting stop, who turn a terrified stranger into someone strong enough to climb a mountain with a tumor in her chest. If you've ever found

people like that, you know exactly why I keep coming back.

*—Lulu Muze, an MCRRC member since 2013, has run with nearly every program the Club offers and has paced First Time Marathon and Winter Marathon Training runners for more than a decade. The marathon is her favorite distance; she has Berlin, Valencia, and Cape Town on her horizon, as well as a someday dream of qualifying for Comrades. She leads adventure treks through her company, Sitzel Adventures, and she is training toward her comeback marathon as a thymoma survivor.*



## How Running Saved My Life. Twice.

by Lulu Muze

In 2013, post-divorce and stumbling into perimenopause without knowing it, my brain felt like a crowded subway car at rush hour—everyone shouting, nobody willing to sit down. Desperate to quiet it, I Googled “running groups near me.” MCRRC came up first.

I signed up for a 5K training program, convinced I’d be laughed off the track. My anxiety had already drafted its usual list, *1,001 Reasons This Will End Badly*. I showed up anyway.

Coach Wanda [Walters] made it feel possible—she understood that some of us were barely holding it together and just needed someone to say we could do hard things. I landed on a pace team, and for the first time in years my brain felt less like a junk drawer on a trampoline and more like... well, still a junk drawer, but

one finally sitting still.

So I kept going. 5Ks, 10Ks, half marathons, my first full marathon in 2016. My ADHD brain—convinced for decades it was lazy or broken—finally had

proof it just needed structure, community, and a reason to wake up at an ungodly hour. Running was the off-switch for the anxiety spiral. When a friend once asked when I’d “finish with this running thing,” I felt slapped. Running is my antidepressant. You don’t “finish” with that.

For eight years I paced first-time marathoners, watching them cross finish lines with disbelief on their faces. Priceless! I’d found something that was just mine, and I was proud—not performing proud, *actually* proud. Running carried me through a hysterectomy, through turning 50, through a Chicago Marathon PR. When people count on you for a long run, sometimes it’s the only thing keeping you tethered.

Then my body started lying to me.



Photo: Ezron Barnaba

**Majid Raissi, Sarvin Moghaddam, Lulu Muze, Bridget Fox, Dayna Rashidian, and Nargol Raissi celebrate their summit of Kilimanjaro in August 2025.**

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