

Milena ŠVEDOVÁ\*  
Ivan UHER\*\*  
Tünde DZUROV-VARGOVÁ\*\*\*

## Comparison of Two International Marathons in a Context of Sport Tourism

### Abstract

In the current time of human inactivity running becomes an ideal compensatory means, which acts as prevention against civilization diseases that are in some way affected by the lack of physical activity. In addition to the beneficial physical effect of running on the human body, we can observe a positive impact on psychological indicators as well. Marathon race represents one of the most challenging athletic disciplines in the physiological and psychological terms. In a positive way, it affects cardiovascular, musculoskeletal systems and can act as a stress relieving mediator [5].

We may argue that the dominant motivation of the majority of the marathon runners is completion of the race, for which participant must be systematically trained. Seeing that, marathon races become more and more popular every year and they grow both in quality and quantity [5]. Every year, there are many marathons races organized in the world. Their participants are doing well and overcoming themselves.

In our paper we analyze the two oldest marathon races in the world in particular, the Boston Marathon in the US and the International Peace Marathon in Kosice. As a method for examining individual events, we have selected comparison and SWOT analysis. The history of Boston and Košice marathons creates an important marketing element, that is used to form valuable incentive for promoting the event. While the Boston marathon is considered the oldest marathon in the world, the Košice marathon is the oldest marathon on the European continent and the third oldest in the world. Our analysis shows that both marathons are in a favorable position. An offensive marketing strategy suggests the predominance of strengths over weaknesses and opportunities over threats. From the profile of the cultural point of view and the time of the year, the Kosice Marathon is more attractive and acceptable for some participants than the Boston marathon, where the runners experience much more difficult course. Nevertheless, based on strengths, both events are

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\* Ph.D. in Pedagogical Sciences, Prešov University In Prešov, Faculty Management, Department Tourism and Hotel Management, Prešov, Slovak Republic

\*\* Doc.PhD. in Institute of Physical Education and Sport, P. J. Šafárik University, Košice, Slovakia

\*\*\* Postgraduate student, Prešov University In Prešov, Faculty Management, Department Tourism and Hotel Management, Prešov, Slovak Republic

able to use their opportunities, which predisposes them to consolidate and improve their position in the everlasting competition of international marathons.

**Keywords:** The oldest marathon, sports tourism, runners, world event.

## Introduction

Marathon definition characterize a long-distance race, completed by running, walking, or a run-walk strategy. Marathon (MA) has become a very important social phenomenon influencing large crowds of people and has become an important part of the tourist sphere. Sport tourism is in its nature focused primarily on active recreation and participation in sports events. The event, in terms of sports, can be understood as a planned event, aimed to convey a certain message to the targeted group. From a marketing point of view, an event is a big planned event. Or else, an event where the organizers try to focus to mediate a specific, pre-prepare experience at a certain time, at specific place, to associate a brand, with the certain group of people.

The prerequisite for the experience is to motivate people to actively and voluntarily participate in the event. From our perspective, the sporting event is perceived as a product that creates an experience, where the participants' need are met. A sports event creates a good platform for products that are framed up and adapted solely for cultural and sporting events [19]. Moreover, MA is a sporting event that attracts not only active participants but passive supporters as well. Amateur runners run together with professionals and same rules apply to both groups [9].

Marathon has an official distance of 42.195 kilometers usually run as a road race. The MA was one of the original modern Olympic events in 1896, though the distance did not become standardized until 1921 [5]. Approximately over 800 MA races are held throughout the world each year, with the majority of competitors being recreational athletes as large marathons can have tens of thousands of participants. MA is a part of the most popular track and field sports industry, the so called "Queen of Sports", with a very rich history, dating back to ancient Greece.

## Methods

The aim of our paper is to compare two selected international MA events using the SWOT analysis. Before we started the comparison, we selected specific features of both MA races. We ranked identified entries in each of the events. Individual items were evaluated on the scale from 1–5. The lowest significance rank was number 1, the highest was number 5, respectively. We plot the positive and negative features that have impact on the event. Followed by a comparison

between internal capabilities and the external influences, the comparison is drawn in between.

## **Marathon history**

The name Marathon comes from the legend of Philippides, the Greek messenger. The legend states that he was sent from battlefield of Marathon to Athens to announce that the Persians had been defeated in the battle of Marathon (in which he had just fought), which took place in August, 490 BC. It is said that he ran the entire distance without stopping and burst into the Assembly, exclaiming “nenikékamen”, “we have won”), before collapsing and dying. However, there is a debate about the historical accuracy of this legend. The length of an Olympic marathon was not precisely fixed at first, but the marathon races in the first few Olympic Games were about 40 kilometers. Nevertheless, only in 1936, the International Athletic Federation established an official marathon length at 42,195 meters [8], [4].

The women’s marathon was introduced at the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, United States. Following the 1908 Olympics, the first five amateur MAs in New York City were held on days that held special meanings. In 2014 an estimated 550,650 runners completed the MA within the USA. This can be compared to 143,000 in 1980. MA running has become an obsession in China, with 22 MA races in 2011 increasing to 400 in 2017. In 2015, 75 Chinese runners participated in the Boston MA and this increased to 278 in 2017. Today MAs are held all around the world on a nearly weekly basis [20]. Nowadays, most participants do not run a MA to win. More important for most runners is their personal finish time and their placement within their gender and age group, though some runners just want to finish the race.

The biennial World Marathon Majors series, award \$500,000 annually to the best overall male and female performers in the series [5]. Some charities seek to associate with various races. Some MA organizers set aside a portion their limited entry slots for charity organizations to sell to members in exchange for donations. Runners are given the option to sign up to run particular races, especially when MA entries are no longer available to the general public. With the growth in popularity of marathoning, many MAs in the world have been filling to capacity faster than ever before. For example, when Boston Marathon opened up registration for its 2011 running, the field capacity was filled within eight hours.

### **A. Kosice Peace Marathon**

The Kosice Peace Marathon is one of the few international MA events held in Slovakia is the oldest MA in Europe and the second-oldest in the world (after

the Boston Marathon). The first race was held in 1924. The MA takes place each year on the first October Sunday. The first women's race was held in 1980. Kosice Peace Marathon received IAAF Bronze Label Road Race in 2016 [12], it is an AIMS- certified race, and it has also been certified as a 5-Star Quality Road Race by European Athletics Running for All in 2015. However, it has to be said that the runners have to run the official 42,195 meters, making this race the only MA in the world that has followed the strictly official distance since its first started.

The Kosice Peace Marathon suffered a discontinuity for seven years. To some extent this was patched up with 5 MA organized under the Hungarian flag during the Horthy occupation of Kosice – without a single foreign runner. Nevertheless, the oldest MA in Europe, remains undiminished by this break. An important milestone for the entire event was year 1997. In that year, the organizers had a challenge not only with the preparation of the classic Košice marathon, but also with the World Championships in the half-marathon held at the same time under the auspices of the IAAF. Until now the half-marathon stands out as the only athletic world championship in Slovakia or former Czechoslovakia since 1918 [8], [12].

**Table 1.** DataBase information of Košice Marathon

<b>KOŠICE PEACE MARATHON</b>	
<b>Date of race</b>	First October weekend of the year
<b>Start</b>	Marathon centre, Main street.1
<b>Finish</b>	Marathon centre, Main street.1
<b>Time limit</b>	6 hours
<b>Age limit</b>	18 years
<b>Registrations</b>	online, <a href="http://www.kosicemarathon.com">www.kosicemarathon.com</a>
<b>Prize money</b>	Financial rewards will be earned by the top 10 men and women in absolute order
<b>Participation</b>	Without restrictions

Source: own processing.

By the year 1989, the course map of the MA had a transitory character. Start, resp. the finish line was in Košice, but most of the race was outside the city. The MA course, one of the fastest, was created in Kosice 21 years ago for the 1997 IAAF World Half Marathon Championships. The course is still fast and very attractive for both elite and fun runners.

The course is flat, completely asphalted and traffic free, covering two laps in the historic city center in Košice . The main disciplines of the marathon event, such as the marathon and the half marathon, hold a certificate issued by the International Athletics Federation (IAAF) and the International Marathon and Road Running Association (AIMS).



**Figure 1.** Map of the Kosice Peace Marathon circuit

Source: [3].

Desirable, fast marathon course is characterized by a low number of sharp turns and, of course, a favorable elevation. The Košice MA successfully fulfills all that. The total number of sharp turns of  $90^\circ$  and sharper is 21. In terms of the difference between the lowest and the highest super-elevation it is only 16.35 m. Another important factor is the sum of all super-elevations of the road and that is 74 m. [12].



**Figure 2.** Kosice Peace Marathon – Profile

Source: [3].

The Kosice Peace Marathon includes not only MA, but also other cross-country disciplines, which constitutes integral part of the MA weekend. This event is the most spectacular sporting event in the city and enjoys huge attention. The event features a festival of sports, social and cultural activities that bring

entertainment, fun to the participants, guests and spectators. Beside the main event, there is also the half-marathon, 4 × 1/4 relay race, 20 km inline skating, hand-bikes, wheel-chairs and corporate run [12].

**Table 2.** Kosice Peace Marathon SWOT analysis

<b>Strenghts</b>	<b>score</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>	<b>score</b>
History	4	Traffic restrictions	3
Credibility of results	1	Environmental factor	2
Contribution to tourism	3	Interconnection of the event with the visibility of the city	3
Discipline offer	2	Join the group of world champions in the Marathon	5
Awards of the event	2		
Cours Profile	2		
Follow-up to other events in Košice	3		
Support of sport	1		
Prize money	3		
Financial burden for the visitors and competitors	3		
No restrictions for entering the race	2		
Regular course for race record	3		
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>score</b>	<b>Threats</b>	<b>score</b>
Use of event to make town visible collaboration with accommodation facilities in Košice	4	Poor economic situation	3
Collaboration with TravelAgency	3	Decrease in level of event	2
Improving service levels	3	Decrease in number of runners	2
Adverse weather during races	3		

Source: own processing.

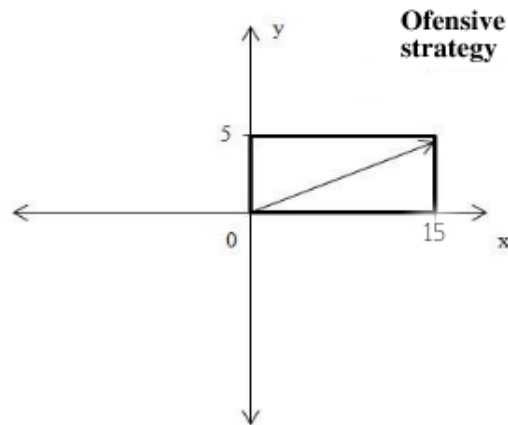
The SWOT analysis matrix of the

$$X = \text{strenghts} - \text{weaknesses} = 29 - 14 = 15$$

$$Y = \text{opportunities} - \text{threats} = 12 - 7 = 5 \quad V = [x; y] = [15; 5]$$

The results of the SWOT analysis show that the Kosice MA maintains its favorable market position. The offensive strategy suggests domination of strong elements over the weak ones, while there is a high chance of consolidating, or even improving the position with the incorporation of presented opportunities. The MA history represents important element of the strengths its name is the core feature of the promotion. We can say that a long history of the Kosice MA represents a crowd-puller for foreign competitors and spectators who raise the level of the event by their presence. More effective cooperation with the city

hall, accommodation facilities providers and travel agencies can, in addition enhance the cultural and organizational level, attracting more fans or sports enthusiasts to the city. The opportunities exceed treats this reality therefore supporting offensive position of the Košice overall event.



**Figure 3.** Results of the SWOT analysis

Source: own processing.

## B. The Boston Marathons

The capital of the state of Massachusetts has been venue for world's oldest annual MA that ranks as one of the world's best-known road racing events. It is one of the six World Marathon Majors, and one of the five major events held in the United States. The Boston Athletic Association (BAA) has organized this event since 1897. It is always held on Patriots' Day, the third Monday of April weekend [13]. Amateur and professional runners from all over the world compete in the Boston MA each year, braving the hilly Massachusetts terrain and varying weather to take part in the race. The event attracts 500,000 spectators each year, making it New England's most widely viewed sporting events. Though starting with 15 participants in 1897, the event now attracts an average of about 30,000 registered participants each year.

The Centennial Boston Marathon in 1996 established a record as the world's largest MA with 38,708 entrants, 36,748 starters, and 35,868 finishers. The Boston MA is open to runners aged 18 or older from any nation, but they must meet certain qualifying standards. The exception to the qualification times is for runners who receive entries from partners. About one-fifth of the marathon's spots are reserved each year for charities, sponsors, vendors, licensees, local running clubs, municipal officials, consultants and marketers. Nowadays, the number of starters is set to 30,000 athletes.

Women were not allowed to enter the Boston MA officially until 1972. During the 2013 Boston MA, on April 15, nearly three hours after the winners crossed the finish line, two explosions occurred. The race was halted, preventing many from finishing, three spectators died and 264 were injured. The perpetrators of the bombing, was found guilty and was s sentenced to death penalty [1].

**Table 3.** DataBase information's of Boston Marathon

<b>BOSTON MARATHON</b>	
<b>Date of race</b>	Third April weekend of the year
<b>Start</b>	Main St. in New England (Hopkinton)
<b>Finish</b>	Bolyston St. (Boston)
<b>Time limit</b>	6 hours
<b>Age limit</b>	18 years of age
<b>Registrations</b>	Online, <a href="http://www.baa.org">www.baa.org</a>
<b>Prize money</b>	Top 15 men and women in absolute order will earn financial rewards
<b>Participation</b>	Limited to 30 000 athletes

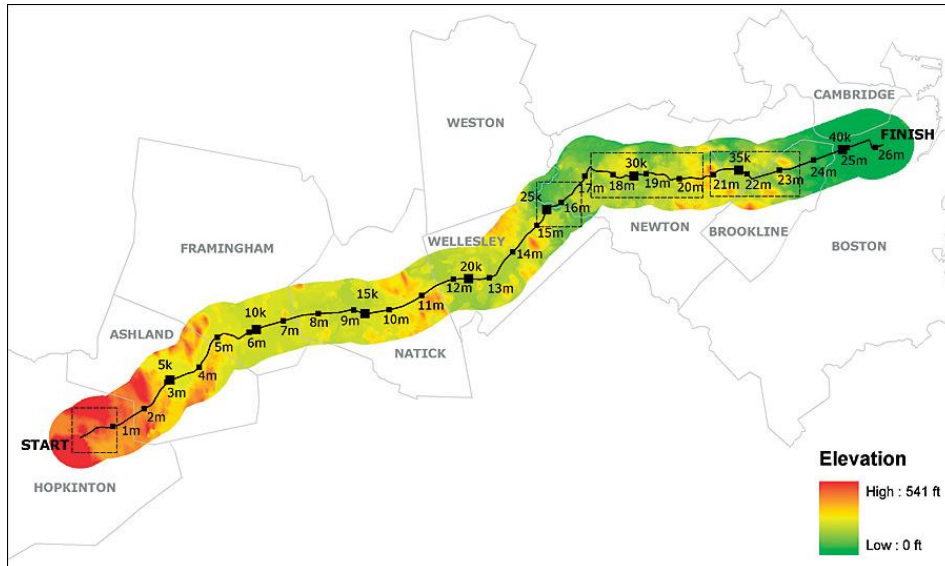
Source: own processing.

The course runs through 42,195 km of winding roads, following suburbs routes and city streets into the center of Boston, where the official finish line is located. Boston MA is considered to be one of the more difficult marathon courses of the Newton Hills. Heartbreak Hill is an ascent over 600 m between 32–34 km. Even though Heartbreak Hill itself rises only 27 m vertically it comes in the portion of a MA distance where muscle glycogen stores are most likely to be depleted. Because of the tailwind, the Boston MA does not satisfy criteria necessary for the ratification of world record [12].

Nevertheless, the IAAF International Athletic Association has awarded the Boston MA a golden mark of quality, and this event has been ranked among the 17 best marathon races in the world [1], [12]. With approximately 500,000 spectators, the Boston MA is New England's most widely viewed sporting event. About 1,000 media members from more than 100 outlets received media credentials each year.

For the entire distance of the race, thousands line the sides of the course to cheer the runners on. For about 400 m local College students form what is referred to as the "Scream Tunnel" students scream and offer kisses. In 1975, the Boston MA become the first major MA to include a wheelchair division competition. In addition to the push rim wheelchair division MA hosts a blind/visually impaired division and a mobility impaired program and handcycle participants. Similar to the running divisions, a set of qualifying time has been developed for these divisions.





**Figure 4.** Map of the Boston Marathon – Profile

Source: [1].

Starting Elevation: 465 ft. | Ending Elevation: 15 ft.  
 Minimum Elevation: 13 ft. | Maximum Elevation: 465 ft.



**Figure 5.** Boston marathon – Profile

Source: [1].

More than 1,000 people with disabilities and impairments have participated in the wheelchair division. Also, a number of people choose to run the course in a variety of costumes that Boston Athletic Association did not outright ban. The marathon is not the only discipline of this event, the runners can take part in a 5–10 kilometers race, organizers also offer relay and 1 mile race [1].

**Table 4.** Boston Marathon SWOT analysis

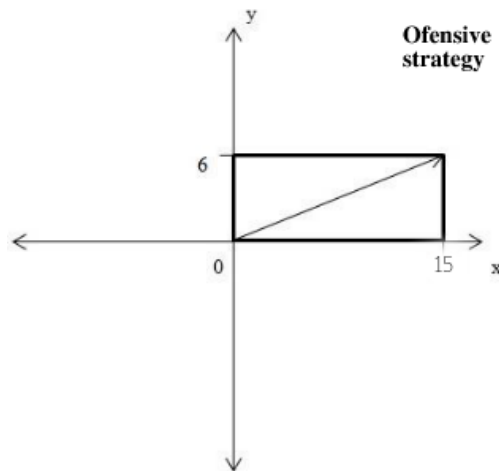
<b>Strengths</b>	<b>score</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>	<b>score</b>
History	5	Tough qualification	3
Variety of participating countries	4	Track Profile	3
Event level	4	Traffic restrictions	3
Prestige	5	The credibility of the results	3
Discipline offer	1	Safety shortcomings	4
Awards	4	Enterfees \$130 per person	2
Sports Support	3	Restricted number of participants	2
Opportunities to Travel Agency	3	Course regulations	2
Collaboration with Travel Agencies	4		
Belongs to the group of World Marathon Majors	4		
<b>Opportunites</b>	<b>score</b>	<b>Threats</b>	<b>score</b>
Using the event to make the city more visible	3	Repetition of terrorist attacks	5
Linking events with the other 3	3	Concerns of participants	3
Preservation of qualification times	2	Environmentalissues	2

Source: own processing.

The SWOT analysis matrix of the Boston Marathon

$X = \text{strengths} - \text{weaknesses} = 37 - 22 = 15$

$Y = \text{opportunities} - \text{threats} = 16 - 10 = 6$   $V = [x; y] = [15; 6]$

**Figure 6.** Results of the SWOT analysis

Source: own processing.

In accordance to our findings, the Boston Marathon, like the Kosice MA is in an offensive strategy. Those MA events bring, glory, popularity and worldwide success. History and prestige are the main factors of high participation of racers and fans. The offensive strategy is supported by the fact that the number of strengths clearly outweighs the overall weaknesses. By defining the weaknesses, we create a platform for their gradual reduction until their ultimate removal. By identifying opportunities, the event creates a reference platform to strengthen its position on the market. The threats stemming from the analysis have been overwhelmed by opportunities, but they should not be taken lightly. They are factors that in some way cannot be influenced by organizers, they cannot be absconded from. From the time resp. dates perspective MA are organized in good times frame. The Košice marathon is organized annually in October, the favorable month for racers. Temperatures are no longer too high, and the weather is still relatively stable. On the other hand, the Boston is held in April, at the beginning of the running season. An important factor is the tourism traffic to cities that are rising in spring and early summer. The marathon route and its profile are also elements that distinguish both MAs. The Košice MA, after a few changes, alternated the city center circuit, which, in addition to the sporting experience, brings cultural and historical benefits. The track profile is ideal for runners, with its minimum of slopes and sharp curves. The Boston marathon preserves the point-to-point character of the course, starting from the Boston suburb – Hopkinton, with a 42,125-kilometer designated finish line in the center of Boston.

This character of the course is maintained mainly because of its history, as the first Boston marathon was performed on the same road in 1897. However, the runners are up for unpleasant climbs, and some declines that are in violation of the IAAF rules. The alteration of the Boston course distance changed, but in 1936 the IAAF Congress definitely confirmed 42,195 meters to be the exact distance of the MA, which has been copy the oldest European marathon ever since its inception [8].

History is a major marketing element of the MA in Boston and Košice, which they actively exploit for their promotion. While the Boston is considered to be the oldest marathon in the world, Košice is the oldest marathon on the European continent and the third oldest in the world. Good organization of the event, popularity, prestige, financial rewards, number of competitors and other factors also influencing the subsequent marathon appreciation by national and international runners' federations. The presented analysis shows that both of the examined MA occupy a good position on the market. The offensive marketing strategy is dominated by the strengths over weaknesses and opportunities over threats. It is with the help of strengths that both events are able to take advantage of the presented opportunities. Both of these MA have the attributes, which predestines them to consolidate and improve their position in relation to strong competition from other international marathons.

Cooperation with travel agencies is a significant element in sport tourism, which can contribute to increase the MA tourist traffic. People, competitors and visitors who are looking for accommodation in other countries, towns and cities are more than happy to use the travel agency offers. In that respect the Boston MA is on the list of offers from both domestic and foreign travel agencies and therefore, it is in a more favorable position to attract and retain different kinds of crowds. On the contrary, the Košice MA is far behind in such cooperation, which emerges as a limiting factor to make the event visible for a wide variety of people.

### Conclusions

In conclusion we can utter that Sport tourism can have a positive impact on the overall economy of individual countries, regions and places (i.e. the direct benefit of tourists in the destination is cash inflow, as tourists who are interested in sporting events spend a certain amount of time and money in the place of the sporting event they came to enjoy). The second positive impact on the economy can be observed in mediated indirect impulse, that helps along with arriving over again for the next sporting event [11].

In our opinion, the most serious shortcoming of Kosice MA we can see is the lack of cooperation with travel agencies and accommodation providers. We propose that the accommodation facilities in the city of Košice should be included, which will unburden both domestic and foreign visitors of the search for accommodation. Disadvantages associated with accommodation can on the other hand discourage some foreign guests from having a pleasant sporting experience. Active cooperation of travel agencies, accommodation providers with marathon organizers can more fully satisfy the needs of the participants. A special offer can comprise a package of services consisting of accommodation, boarding, transport and relaxation resources. The facilities for instance can offer accommodation in 1–2 bed rooms with perhaps extra beds. Travel agency offer should include catering services tailored to the needs of customers. Accommodation facilities should provide clients with transportation from the airports, stations and so forth, that will make it easier for visitors to move around the city. Even though, Kosice MA has a rich history and tradition, this does not guarantee an ideal, trouble-free course of the event. Professional training of staff of the sporting events is also absolutely necessary. In our opinion, the favorable side of Kosice MA, in comparison to Boston MA, can be the possibility of registering an unlimited number of participants into the race, in the higher prize money, the course regulations (recognition of the course record), as well as a higher possibility for lower financial costs for the visitors.

The Boston MA belongs to the group of World Marathon Majors that in some way is testified by the fact that the last year event had competitors from 87

countries. In the Boston area, there are many offers for accommodation, dining and transportation services related to the sporting event. There is also a large-scale offer of the related travel agencies.

Tourism/tourist service is on high end. Multiplicity of races, shows and in all entertainments is invincible in comparison to Kosice MA. We can see that MA in the same way with similar result (SWOT analysis) are in a more detailed view different. They put their name on different attributes, which ultimately brings them success.

At the very end, we wanted to point out to the importance, opportunities of sporting events for tourist industry. Participation in a sporting event is considered as one of the motivational means that affects not only the temporary changes of residence but can have positive impact, influence not only on close and distant environment but on society as a whole.

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## **Porównanie dwóch międzynarodowych maratonów w kontekście turystyki sportowej**

### **Streszczenie**

W obecnych czasach ludzkiego braku aktywności bieganie staje się idealnym środkiem kompensacyjnym, który działa zapobiegawczo w stosunku do chorób cywilizacyjnych, które są w pewnym stopniu spowodowane brakiem aktywności fizycznej. Ponadto w odniesieniu do dobroczynnego wpływu fizycznego biegania na ludzkie ciało, możemy też zaobserwować pozytywny wpływ na wskaźniki psychologiczne. Bieg maratoński reprezentuje jedną z najbardziej ambitnych dyscyplin lekkoatletycznych w sensie fizjologicznym i psychologicznym. Pozytywnie wpływa na układ sercowo-naczyniowy i mięśniowo-szkieletowy, a może także działać jako mediator rozładujący stres [5].

Można argumentować, że dominującą motywacją większości maratończyków jest ukończenie biegu, do którego biegacz musi się systematycznie przygotowywać. Wziąwszy to pod uwagę, popularność biegów maratońskich z roku na rok rośnie oraz wzrasta zarówno ich jakość, jak i ilość [5]. Co roku organizuje się na świecie wiele biegów maratońskich. Ich uczestnicy mają się świetnie i pokonują swoje słabości.

W naszym artykule analizujemy szczególnie dwa najstarsze biegi maratońskie na świecie – Maraton Bostoński w Stanach Zjednoczonych oraz Międzynarodowy Maraton Pokoju w Koszycach. Jako metodę badania poszczególnych zawodów wybraliśmy porównanie i analizę SWOT. Historia maratonów w Bostonie i w Koszycach tworzy ważny element marketingowy, którego używa się do tworzenia cennych bodźców promujących te zawody. Chociaż Maraton Bostoński uznawany jest za najstarszy na świecie, maraton w Koszycach jest najstarszym maratonem na kontynencie europejskim i trzecim co do starszeństwa maratonem na świecie. Nasza analiza wskazuje,

że obydwa maratony zajmują korzystne dla nich pozycje. Ofensywna strategia podkreśla przewagę mocnych punktów nad słabymi i możliwości nad zagrożeniami. Z profilu utworzonego pod kątem kultury i pory roku, Maraton w Koszycach jest bardziej atrakcyjny i zadowalający dla niektórych uczestników niż Maraton Bostoński, gdzie biegacze mają do pokonania o wiele trudniejszą trasę biegu. Jednakże, jeżeli chodzi o mocne punkty, obydwie imprezy potrafią wykorzystać swoje możliwości, co pozwala im umocnić i poprawić pozycję w nieustającej konkurencji międzynarodowych biegów maratońskich.

**Słowa kluczowe:** najstarszy maraton, turystyka sportowa, biegacze, zawody na poziomie światowym.