

Who Says Boys Can Run Further Than I Can?

Recently I joined an athletics club and started competing in cross country and track races. I love the mud and outdoors, but one thing has bothered me. I noticed that in some races, girls run a shorter distance than boys of the same age. I soon realised I wasn't the only one annoyed by this. Maud Hodson, who lives near me in east London, has started a campaign called RunEqual against different distances for men and women in cross country races.

She told me: "Before I started running with a running club I had no idea there were races where men and women didn't run the same distance. The idea hadn't occurred to me and I thought 'What? Still? In the 21st century?' Initially we just grumbled between ourselves in the club but then realised if we just did that, it wouldn't change anything."

These unequal distances are present in a whole range of races. For example, I ran over the summer in an UK Athletics series called Youth Development League. In my age group (U13), girls ran shorter distances than boys in almost every race, such as 1200m for girls and 1500m for boys. I have also been selected by my borough to run in London Youth Games Cross Country. Although the distances are the same in my age group, at U15 and older, boys run further than the girls.

Susan Edwards, who coaches children at a local club, has joined Maud in the RunEqual campaign. She told me other girls have started asking questions.

"It's something that was traditionally set up decades ago and in due course it will change because there's no good reason for it. I always tell girls they are capable of running as far as boys. It's good that girls are asking these questions."

RunEqual collected more than 2,600 signatures in a [petition](#). They have also had meetings with the Chairman and Chief Executive of UK Athletics and emailed event organisers. Some of their many supporters wear back numbers and ribbons in the colours of the Suffragettes to spread the word on equality. In addition, Maud, Susan and others are planning to travel to Scotland to run in the Scottish cross country championships instead of the English next year. This is because the Scottish championships hosts a 10k run for men and women, whereas the English championships are 12k and 8k.

Susan said: "It's a positive way of supporting equality to go to an event that has equality rather than campaigning at one that hasn't. Scottish Athletics have equalised their senior races and all their junior races."

When I asked Maud what more there is to do, she confidently responded: "We've made some progress, but there's still a lot to do. We won't be finished this campaign until people look back and say 'What? Men and women used to run different distances?'"

By Abbie Houlton