

More than 45,500 Runners to Participate in Race Weekend Events during 2nd Annual Star Wars Half Marathon – The Dark Side

Runners from galaxies far, far away will embrace the power of the Dark Side, as more than 45,500 runners will take part in the 2nd annual *Star Wars* Half Marathon – The Dark Side at Walt Disney World Resort.

Among them are three runners for whom the Force is particularly strong.

Orlando runner Gelcys Casteneda is participating in the *Star Wars* Dark Side Challenge (running the 10K on Saturday and the half marathon Sunday) **despite battling severe scoliosis, fibromyalgia and a brain disease** that causes chronic migraines. At 15, she had surgery to correct a **53-degree curve** to her spine, which was threatening to crush her heart. But by the time she reached adulthood, her spine had regressed, returning to a 34-degree curve, again making it difficult to breathe while she also battled the fibromyalgia, leaving her in constant pain.

Except when she's running, which somehow alleviates the pain.

In addition to Casteneda, **Kurt Blankenship from Little Rock, Ark.**, will try to be one with the Force when he pushes his racing wheelchair in the half marathon race on Sunday.

Blankenship was paralyzed from the waist down in 1999 after a car accident. For years Kurt struggled to adjust to his new reality, but things changed when he and his wife Carrie started a family, adopting three children who were all born premature and have their own challenges just like their father. Kurt now views his children's medical challenges as motivation for him to be an inspirational example for them on the power of persistence and fortitude. Hence, Kurt is pushing his racing wheelchair in the half marathon to show his children that it is possible to overcome the obstacles they are facing in their lives. In fact, his son Ryan, born with spina bifida, which doctors said would prevent him from moving, communicating or making eye contact, is now walking, talking and even participating in the *runDisney* Kids Races with his sisters.

Finally, there's **Lucas Wallenberg, a sixth grader from St. Louis, Mo.**, who is running the 5K race on behalf of Noah's Light Foundation in his ongoing efforts to help other children nationwide who are suffering from pediatric cancer. Lucas, 12, who started running to help his mom build up her strength after she was diagnosed with a blood disorder, now raises money through running to help kids with cancer after one of his friend's sister died from cancer in 2014. And despite his own medical difficulties, he continues to raise money and awareness for pediatric cancer, recently growing his hair for 18 months, so he could donate it to make wigs for children battling cancer. In 2016, he and his family ran in 10 5K races, one 8K and two 10Ks, all while fundraising for pediatric cancer.

Star Wars Half Marathon – The Dark Side begins Thursday, culminating in the half marathon race on Sunday. This galactic-themed *runDisney* race weekend includes *runDisney* Kids Races, 5K, 10K and half marathon races and the *runDisney* Health and Fitness Expo. Start time for races are below:

***runDisney* Health & Fitness Expo**

Thursday, 10:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Saturday, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

***Star Wars* Half Marathon – The Dark Side**

Star Wars 5K • Epcot

Friday, 6 a.m. start

Star Wars 10K • Start: Magic Kingdom| Finish: Epcot

Saturday, 5:30 a.m. start

Star Wars Half Marathon – The Dark Side • Start: Magic Kingdom| Finish: Epcot

Sunday, 5:30 a.m. start

Media interested in covering the weekend events must contact Disney Sports Public Relations a day in advance to arrange for credentials. See table below for coverage opportunities:

Star Wars 5K

Arrive at Epcot by 5:00 a.m. for live coverage of the start and finish line.

Star Wars 10K

Arrive at Magic Kingdom by 4:30 a.m. for live coverage of the start line.

****Media must choose between covering the start or finish line***

Arrive at Epcot by 5:00 a.m. for live coverage of the finish line.

Arrive at Magic Kingdom by 4:30 a.m. for live coverage of the start line and charter to Epcot after the first corral of runners.

Star Wars Half Marathon – The Dark Side

Arrive at Epcot by 5:00 a.m. for coverage of just the finish line.