

# BMO Vancouver Marathon eliminates loops for straight ahead route

## Organizers expect participants to enjoy change in course

BY MEGAN STEWART, STAFF WRITER    OCTOBER 5, 2011

Taking its cue from some of the most prestigious road races on the planet, the BMO Vancouver Marathon is changing the routes for the marquee 42-kilometer marathon and shorter, 21-km half-marathon from a repetitive, back-and-forth course to an improved point-to-point race.

Point-to-point races begin and end at different locations and tend to be extremely popular. When Los Angeles changed from a loop course to a point-to-point route, registration soared from approximately 14,000 to 25,000 runners.

In 2010, the Vancouver marathon drew close to 4,000 runners and this year will be capped at 5,000. The half-marathon drew about 10,000 runners in 2010 and this year will be limited as well.

The 2012 event will begin at Queen Elizabeth Park before heading west through Marpole along West 49th Avenue to Dunbar where it enters Pacific Spirit Park, travels near the university and slopes down to Spanish Banks, along Jericho Beach, through Kitsilano and over the Burrard Bridge before completing a complete loop of Stanley Park to finish at the Vancouver Convention Centre.

On Sunday May 6, 2012, the seawall will be closed to the public, a first in the history of the event.

After also setting off from Queen Elizabeth Park, the half-marathon covers only a short stretch of the same terrain on the seawall. The route heads north on Cambie Street, crosses the Cambie Street Bridge and circles through Chinatown and Yaletown before meeting the seawall, crisscrossing through Stanley Park and also finishing at the downtown convention centre.

The previous course started and finished in Kitsilano at Jericho Beach Park, meaning runners ran the same stretch of road twice, which had runners moving in both directions in separated lanes along the same road.

“Some people enjoy going and seeing people go out and back along the marathon route,” said race director Jordan Myers, but he noted the deflated feeling many other runners experience when they see the faster competition has doubled their own distance.

“A lot of people have a hard time with that. You’re at kilometre 28 and you’re already seeing people coming back in the other direction—it’s a little hard, especially if the weather isn’t ideal.”

Two trips over the Burrard Bridge also irked some participants.

“Going over the Burrard Bridge several times, people were just over it,” said Myers, formerly the event’s volunteer coordinator. “They love the Burrard Bridge but they don’t need to be seeing it twice.”

The two race courses were designed by a dedicated group of volunteers who considered as many as 23 different routes. Myers was enamoured with the notion of starting the marathon from the middle of the Lions Gate Bridge, but the logistics proved “tremendous” and ultimately unworkable.

“We argued and debated just ferociously,” he said. They also debated the merits of a looped course, the most common, often most affordable and easily organized long-distance configuration, which would put the start and finish lines at the same location with the course circling the city before looping back.

With point-to-point marathon and half-marathon courses, the BMO-sponsored event joins New York, Boston and London.

Established in 1972, the first runners to attempt the Vancouver marathon circled Stanley Park four times. This city’s long-distance running event came one year after New York’s, which circled Central Park five times. One vital difference: women were barred from almost all marathon events. Five women ran—one completed—the inaugural Vancouver race.

Eventually, the race courses forked and the loops were abandoned. Myers told the story of Fred LaBeau, the founder of the New York marathon, and the commitment he showed to his own vision of a point-to-point course.

“He sold his crackpot idea: everyone you’re going to do this and you’re going to hit all five boroughs. Everyone thought he was crazy,” said Myers, who revels in the diversity and lifestyles of his own city’s neighbourhoods.

“We wanted to make a signature event that showcases some of the best shore lines, cultural neighbourhoods and how we live on the West Coast,” said Myers, detailing the different addresses the half- and full-marathon will pass. “We’ve even got a street of—it kind of warms my heart—Vancouver Specials, huge houses in Kerrisdale and Point Grey, then we go to the university district and then this mix of bungalows in Kits, and then we go downtown and around the seawall.”

Online registration is open now for the May 6, 2012 event. Visit [bmovanmarathon.ca](http://bmovanmarathon.ca).

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