



2012 Pacific Road Runners “First Half” Half Marathon, Race Preview

The 23rd “First Half” Half Marathon in Vancouver on February 12th, which additionally hosts the 2012 BC Half Marathon Championship and is the third race in the 2012 Timex BC Road Race Series, has attracted another very competitive field, featuring many of Western Canada’s top runners. Starting and finishing at the Roundhouse Community Centre, the route includes a circuit of the Stanley Park seawall.

Returning champion and event record holder (1:04:39) Dylan Wykes is the clear favourite. Vancouver based Wykes will be using the “First Half” as a final tune-up before the Lake Biwa Marathon in Japan on March 4, where he’ll be looking to run 2:11:30 or quicker in order to qualify for the London Olympics. Most recently he won the PF Chang Rock ‘n’ Roll Half Marathon in Phoenix in 1:02:39.

The race for the remaining podium places, that award prize money to the top 5 men and women, is expected to be very close. Three time Victoria Marathon champion (2:16:47 best) and 2006 “First Half” champion Steve Osaduk from Langley consistently runs around 1:06. Last year’s third place finisher, and twice runner-up, Jerry Ziak of Vancouver, will again challenge. Ziak also frequently clocks 1:06 for half marathons, with a marathon best of 2:17:23. Saskatoon’s Jason Warick, last ran the “First Half” in 2009, placing third, and is another sub 2:20 marathoner. Last year’s fourth and fifth place finishers, Oliver Utting and Dylan Gant, also return. Three new faces at the “First Half” will be ultra-marathoner Adam Campbell, Abbotsford’s Jeremiah Johnston and Penticton’s Jeff Symonds, third place finisher at the 2011 Ironman 70.3 World Championships.

If any of those athletes don’t perform at their best, they can expect some serious competition from the top masters, who will have to run close to Bruce Deacon’s masters’ record of 1:09:13 to win. Victoria’s Deacon, a three time “First Half” champion and Olympian returns. Kevin O’Connor ducked under 1:10 to win the April Fool’s Run Half Marathon last April. Graeme Wilson finished sixth overall last year, and has since turned forty. And Craig Odermatt out-sprinted Deacon for top master at last fall’s Goodlife Fitness Victoria Half Marathon. Calgary’s Donnie King was top master at last year’s “First Half”, while Neil Holm is another former “First Half” champion. Two more former Olympians and “First Half” champions entered are Carey Nelson and Art Boileau.

Unlike the men’s race, the women’s event record of 1:12:47, set by Tina Connelly in 2004, does not appear to be in danger of falling. Nevertheless, a very close race is anticipated, with more than a dozen women predicting finish times between 1:15 and 1:20. They are led by Port Moody’s Natasha Fraser,

who will be looking to add a provincial Half Marathon Championship to the 5K, 8K and 10K titles she won last year. Fraser has a best of 1:15:27 set when bettering the Goodlife Fitness Victoria Half Marathon course record last fall. Her closest competition may come from Vancouver's Shauna Skinner, who set personal bests at all distances she raced in 2011. Other local contenders include the top Canadian at the Toronto Waterfront Marathon, Katherine Moore as well as Anne-Marie Madden and Melissa Ross. Calgary will be well represented in the women's race by last year's third place finisher Pauline McLean, as well as Melissa Kendrick, and Emma Neuner.

The top masters will also be right in the mix, led by two former "First Half" champions and friendly rivals Lucy Smith and Lisa Harvey. Harvey, from Calgary, has placed first or second in all but one of the last eleven editions of the "First Half", including four victories. While Smith, from Sidney, has two victories to her credit. They will be challenged by Victoria's Marilyn Arsenault who beat them both when returning from injury to run 1:18:03 in Victoria last fall; plus the 2011 Canadian Masters Cross Country Champion, Catherine Watkins.

Further up the age groups, some age category records for the "First Half" may be under threat. Deacon has to finish under 1:11:53 to improve the M45-49 record. Herb Phillips already owns event records in three age groups, and has to run better than 1:37:20 to additionally claim the M70-74 record. The current holder of that record, Frank Kurucz, has only to finish in order to establish an M80-84 record, but will be looking to duck under two hours. The oldest competitor will be 84 year old BJ McHugh, who has been running the "First Half" regularly since its' inception, and is holder of all "First Half" age group records from F60-64 and upwards. BJ is also a multiple world record holder, and can set another single age world best performance at this year's "First Half" by running quicker than 3:11:22. Her time last year, at age 83, was 2:21:45.

The race gets underway at 8:30am, with a loop around BC Place, before heading out to Stanley Park. The race sold out all 2,000 entries last November, and has attracted entrants from five Provinces and seven States.

Proceeds from the event benefit the Variety Telethon. This year's contribution will bring total donations to Variety, the Children's Charity to over \$500,000 since 1995.

Additional information on the event website: www.pacificroadrunners.ca/firsthalf