

Over the golden gate

San Francisco Marathon, USA. 31 July 2005

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Everyone knows that San Francisco is one of the greatest running cities in the world. Cool summers and wonderful waterfront trails attract hundreds of everyday runners every week of the year. But the 28th San Francisco Marathon and companion events beat all expectations with a record 11,290 finishers. Runners choose this race without the lure of prize money that many of the other 300 marathons in North America can boast. They are lured not by lucre, but by the scenic beauty of the course and the clockwork organization of the event.

The unbeatable beauty of the course was this year crowned with the pearl of the coast – Golden Gate Bridge, spanning the entrance to San Francisco Bay. Marathon runners can now make the round trip journey across this legendary symbol of the city. But the organizers catered for more. They offered a rich mix of events for different ages, tastes, and levels of training. Apart from the marathon, there was a 5km run/walk, and two classic half marathon events.

The half marathons started within three hours of each other. The “first” one started together with the marathon at 05.20 and followed the first half of the marathon course. It is a treat for those who want to see Golden Gate Bridge in the rays of the rising sun. The “second” Half Marathon starts at 08.15 in Golden Gate Park, the finest and largest city park on the West Coast of the USA, and follows the second half of the marathon course. To do this one, you don’t have to get up in the dark.

At 05.00 on the cool summer morning of 31 July the Marathon and ‘first’ Half Marathon participants gathered at the start line - conveniently located in downtown San Francisco. It was on the waterfront, by the famous Embarcadero, near the newly renovated Ferry Building. The course goes west through Fisherman’s Wharf, the city’s most visited area, famous for its seafood restaurants, family entertainment, and art galleries. It

then goes past Aquatic Park and up Fort Masson Hill, suggesting stunning views of Golden Gate Bridge.

The gloomy silhouette of Alcatraz Island Prison is also discernable. Alcatraz served as a military fortification in the 1850s, as an incarceration facility for Spanish-American War prisoners at the close of the 19th century, and as a Federal maximum-security prison from 1934 to 1963. It was closed due to high costs and security issues, but over the years it was home to Al Capone, George “Machine Gun” Kelley, and Robert “The Birdman” Stroud. It is now a very popular tourist attraction.

From the starting gun 25-year old Simon Isaacs of Washington DC led the race. Tracking him, 35-year old Californian Tony Torres, was preparing a surprise. “I felt that the early pace was slow, and I knew that I could do better than that”, said Torres after the race.

Another Californian, Sarah Hallas, headed the women’s field and with every kilometre increased her lead. Without female rivals she competed with the men and strove to improve her personal best. “There were a couple of men that I was able to run with most of the way. That was great, so I got through the hills okay”, she said. She finished unchallenged, improving her personal best by 47 seconds. “It feels great to be a winner” – she said of her first marathon victory.



Right next to the bay, runners are early on treated to a fresh sea breeze and stunning views of the coastline. Then, after 8.5km, they step onto the Golden Gate Bridge.

The design of the famous 2.8km-long suspension bridge, built from 1933-1937, echoes an Art Deco theme. Architect Joseph Strauss defied the conventional wisdom of the time that the Golden Gate could not be bridged, and through his work



helped to define and project San Francisco's image in much the same way as the Brooklyn Bridge did for New York.

Making a round trip on the famous span runners can admire panoramas of the Pacific Ocean, San Francisco Bay, the city's skyline, and the hills of Marin County.

While most of the participants were enjoying breathtaking sights from the bridge, Tony Torres made a breathtaking effort and took the lead at 16km. From there on he headed the race. Finishing at the Ferry Building in 2:31:57, he looked fresh and strong. "It's a pretty hard course, so my time was kind of slow", said Torres, who ran his first marathon only last December, just 150km away up Highway 80 in Sacramento.

Simon Isaacs lost three minutes to Torres to finish second, fending off Austria's Niklas Kroehn, by only six seconds.

Coming off the bridge runners took in the Pacific Ocean coastline at Baker Beach and entered the

magnificent Golden Gate Park, almost 5km long and 2.5km wide, and a favorite stamping ground for local runners. The park is bigger than New York's Central Park, and is home to over a million trees from almost every country of the world, nine lakes, a lily pond, an arboretum and a botanical garden. Runners headed west to the half marathon point at Spreckels Lake.

"First" Half Marathon winners Michael Western (1:17:48) and Eileen White (1:29:12), and anyone else who finished in under two hours, could take a shuttle bus to the Marathon finish line on the Embarcadero and watch the finish of the marathon winners. Those "first" half marathoners who reached the lake in under three hours could see the start of the "second" Half Marathon.

After that start runners were greeted by buffalo grazing in a paddock on a huge glade in Golden Gate Park, as wearying marathoners embarked on the second half of the course. Together they ran around Stow Lake, with Strawberry Hill in the centre, past the Japanese Tea

MEN			
1	Tony TORRES	USA	2:31:57
2	Simon ISAACS	USA	2:34:52
3	Niklas KROEHN	AUT	2:34:58
4	Duncan LARKIN	USA	2:37:26
5	Chikara OMINE	USA	2:38:01
6	Fritz VAN DE KAMP	USA	2:38:38
7	Vytautas EZERSKIS	USA	2:42:56
8	David SIEGEL	USA	2:44:43
9	Rodrigo RUELAS	USA	2:44:59
10	Steve RADTKE	USA	2:47:28
WOMEN			
1	Sarah HALLAS	USA	2:56:55
2	Tyler STEWART	USA	3:04:27
3	Shana BROWN	USA	3:05:12
4	Caroline RADTKE	USA	3:09:26
5	Jane BLOOM	USA	3:14:01
6	Ashley CLARK	USA	3:14:44
7	Stephanie KSENZULAK	USA	3:14:51
8	Kelly KRONIN	USA	3:14:55
9	Patty CHEN	USA	3:15:52
10	Valerie CURTIS	USA	3:18:13

Garden (the oldest in the USA), the De Young Art Museum and the Conservatory of Flowers, one of the finest examples of Victorian architecture in San Francisco.

Exiting the park runners continued through the suburbs, eventually reaching the Giants Baseball Stadium. From there they returned under a stretch of palm trees to the finish in front of the Ferry Building. The winners of the "second" Half Marathon were Sean Nixon (1:15:20) and Lisa Daan (1:21:46). But they had already been beaten to the mark by those who had crossed the Golden Gate, and persevered to the Marathon finishing post.