

# Chasing women in the City of Angels

Los Angeles Marathon, USA. 19 March 2006



**By Sergey Porada and Yelena Kurdyumova**

For a city that was founded at the end of the 18th century by a raggle-taggle group of 46 men, women and children El Pueblo de la Reina de Los Angeles (The Town of the Queen of Angels), has since reached for the stars, and found them.

Marathon runners habitually do something similar. They may feel at home here.

Everybody loves LA, the "City of the Angels". As the second largest city in America and a world center, it has a marathon worthy of its reputation.

Lying between the Pacific Ocean and the snow-capped mountains of the Sierra Nevada, Los Angeles has one of the best climates in the world. That's what drew the glamorous presence of the television movie industries to Hollywood, and what continues to draw visitors year-round. It is also what made it an ideal location for a mass-participation marathon.

Hollywood has it that dreams come true. For the Los Angeles Marathon the dream enabled it, in its 21-year history, to become the fourth largest in the USA, and the seventh largest in the world. The race reflects the spirit of the city by offering live performances at almost every mile along the course and in challenging elite runners with a thrilling "battle of the sexes".

The Challenge has run for three years and in 2006 the stakes were raised. Banco Popular signed on as its title sponsor. Women are given a head start and the first person to cross the finish line, male or female, is the overall

winner. To them the spoils: the Banco Popular's \$100,000 bonus, plus a \$35,000 for being the first in his or her division. The combined total makes it the largest guaranteed first place payout in the US and heightens excitement for athletes, spectators and TV viewers.

In the first year, the women set off 20:30 ahead of the men. Tatyana Pozdnyakova (UKR) kept ahead of all the men to become overall winner. Next year the men evened the score, with Mark Saina (Kenia) winning when the women's start was reduced to 15:50, based on what a race official called a "regression analysis." Women's race winner Lyubov Denisova (RUS), in perhaps less than angelic fashion, complained that the difference was not enough to make women viable competitors for the bonus [the difference between men's and women's world records is 10:30]. She argued that the start should be based on the difference between the men's and women's course records [in the case of LA, 16:46]. The race organizers agreed to her proposal.

This year a record 25,256 participants from 50 states and 100 countries gathered in the downtown corridor of high rises, where the race starts and finishes. The morning was clear and cool (9C) and promised excellent conditions for record-setting performances.

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa fired the start gun to set the elite men chasing after the women. A motley group of runners hurriedly discarding plastic ponchos, waving homemade signs and plugging in iPod earphones followed close behind them, but just at the outset.



Accompanied by the booming sounds of Japanese Taiko drummers, the race set out on a loop course through downtown Los Angeles. More than 20 bands lined the route, along with cheerleading squads, and 12 entertainment centers – Chinese, Mexican, Ethiopian, Korean, Ecuadorian, Guatemalan among them, - which reflected the ethnic and cultural diversity of both the city and the runners themselves.

Thousands of spectators lined the course several deep, offering runners non-stop support, food and drink on their long way to the finish line near the city's historic Public Library. Everyday runners enjoyed the weather and the on-course entertainment and spectator support, but among the elite the battle was joined.

Denisova, two-time defending champion and LA marathon record holder led from the start until 37km, closely followed by Gete Wami of Ethiopia and Russian Lidiya Grigoryeva. Denisova led in an attempt to pre-empt Wami's fearsome finishing kick, demonstrated more on the track than in the marathon. The effort told on her. In the final kilometres Denisova fell back. Grigoryeva in turn tried to break Wami but the diminutive Ethiopian clung on. With only 400m remaining Grigoryeva sprinted to victory in the race and in the Challenge.

Neither Wami nor the male winner Benson Cheron (KEN) could reply. Cheron remained with the pack of Kenyans, who took turns



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sharing the lead, until 34km. Only once he had broken away could his mind turn to thoughts of chasing the women. The battle of sexes resulted in new course records for both Grigoryeva and Cherono. Cherono finished only 16 seconds adrift, running 3:45 short of Paul Tergat's world record [Grigoryeva was 9:45 short of Paula Radcliffe's women's mark].

The business was disposed of at the head of the race. Beyond that, the Marathon and its associated events became a holiday for everybody. The weekend events included the 22-mile Acura L.A. Bike Tour at 05.50 and the Emerald Nuts 5km Run/Walk at 09.30. In total these attracted more than 45,000 participants. Thousands of runners completed their individual challenge and then celebrated their achievement

with friends and family at the finish line.

The Family Reunion Area offered post-race massage, live music, food and drink. Many regular runners said they were sure to come back again because ...it's the one time a year when the city just all comes together ...and that's a very cool thing.

Those who had come to Los Angeles for the first time had another marathon ahead of them. They could not miss Hollywood Blvd. There they could compare their handprints, and footprints, to legendary stars like Marilyn Monroe and John Wayne.

They could also take the Walk of Fame (but running is frowned upon) treading on the stars of famous actors and actresses, like



Tom Hanks, Denzel Washington, Leonardo DiCaprio, Julia Roberts and many more.

At the Universal Studios theme park visitors can go "behind the scenes" and learn movie industry secrets about how special effects are used to make movies come to life. Those who take the Backlot Tram Tour will experience an 8.3

MEN			
1	Benson CHERONO	KEN	2.08.40
2	Laban KIPKEMBOI	KEN	2.10.08
3	Simon WANGAI	KEN	2.10.35
4	Thomas OMWENGA	KEN	2.11.47
5	Habte JIFAR	ETH	2.12.39
6	Robert KIPROTICH CHERUIYOTKEN		2.14.26
7	Mikhail KHOBOTOV	RUS	2.15.05
8	Nicholas MUREI	KEN	2.15.23
9	John KAGWE	KEN	2.15.32
10	Odilon ROJAS	MEX	2.16.44
WOMEN			
1	Lidiya GRIGORYEVA	RUS	2.25.10
2	Gete WAMI	ETH	2.25.26
3	Lyubov DENISOVA	RUS	2.26.18
4	Nuta OLARU	ROM	2.30.30
5	Irina SAFAROVA	RUS	2.34.45
6	Tatyana POZDNYAKOVA	UKR	2.35.46
7	Lyudmyla PUSHKINA	UKR	2.41.15
8	Christine LUNDY	USA	2.43.14
9	Supina MAPON	USA	2.57.57
10	Sarah HALAS	USA	2.58.35

earthquake, have a close encounter with the great white shark – Jaws, and swing on the Empire State Building with King Kong.

For those who sought more earthly experience Watts Towers offered a unique folk-art masterpiece, a 30m-tall group of steel towers, decorated with scrap metal, bed frames, bottles, ceramic tiles, and thousands of seashells. One of LA's famous local landmarks, the towers were created by a construction worker who toiled over them in his spare time for 30 years until their completion in 1954... Now that was some marathon.