

Marathon course set

Runners won't be asked to go up area hills

By Shane Frederick

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MANKATO — The course has been set and registration is now open for the inaugural Mankato Marathon.

It's all downhill from here.

Well, at least the 26.2-mile route is.

Organizers have found a way to design a marathon course that takes some of the hilliest parts of Mankato out of play.

"As crazy as it sounds, this is a fairly flat course," race director Mark Bongers said. " The rest of it is downhill."

The Mankato Marathon, presented by HyVee, will be Oct. 23. The event will also feature a half marathon, a 10kilometer race and a kids run.

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When it comes to the marathon, Bongers said, the most- challenging climbs will take place outside of the city, when runners go into the Le Sueur River valley east of Highway 22.

" To be very honest, it's a nice course," Bongers said. " We're very happy with it.

We couldn't ask for a better course. I see good times, and I see people being very happy."

The race will begin at Minnesota State University near the corner of Monks Avenue and Stadium Road, and it will end downtown on Front Street. Post-race activities will take place near the Verizon Wireless Center.

Runners will follow Monks Avenue south and run east along County Road 90 and into the Le Sueur River valley before returning to Mankato on Highway 83 and heading back toward campus.

From there, the race will go out on Monks again, then head west, eventually using the Red Jacket Trail to go to the YMCA and into Sibley Park. Front Street will be the home stretch.

The half marathon will follow the second half of the marathon course, skipping the eastern loop.

The western loop features the longest hill of the race, which will come around the 18-mile mark on County Road 90. But runners will be going down, not up.

When it comes to Mankato's hills, they're "great for training for other marathons, but they're not good for racing," said Jen Blue, Minnesota State's women's track and cross country coach and a member of the marathon's planning committee. " They are not minor hills. ...

"Just mentally, Gage hill (Stadium Road) is a great training run, but put Gage in the middle of a marathon and you'd be mentally defeated."

Blue, a veteran of three marathons and several half marathons, said the Mankato Marathon, which will be a qualifier for the Boston Marathon, will be good for first-timers, too.

Courses for the 10-kilometer and kids races will be set later.

Anna Thill, president of the Greater Mankato Convention & Visitors Bureau, said interest in the marathon is so high that officials changed their goal of getting 1,000 runners to capping registration at 2,000 participants. They hope to grow the field in future years.

"I've got big dreams of this being a signature race in the state of Minnesota," Thill said.

The marathon's Web site went live on Tuesday, and runners can use the site to register for the races.

"By (Tuesday) night, we already had people registered," Bongers said.

For runners who register by March 15, the individual marathon fee is \$ 50 (\$ 65 after March 15 and \$75 after June 1). There is no race- day registration. The half marathon fee is \$ 35 by March 15 (\$45 after March 15 and \$55 after June 1).

For more information, go to the marathon's Web site, www.mankatomarathon.com



Mark Bongers is the race director.