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Owner's vision and massive coordination effort keys to iconic 2010 Honda LA Marathon course and sold-out race
LA MARATHON LLC senior execs delighted with response to new course

LOS ANGELES – March 18, 2010 – Organizing a big-city marathon is a large task. Re-inventing such a race in just months was the challenge presented to Russ Pillar and his management team at LA MARATHON LLC by race owner Frank McCourt. And the result is the sold-out Honda LA Marathon presented by K-Swiss.

Pillar and the senior members of his management team explained the transformation of the race for 2010, with a new course that will run outside the City of Los Angeles for the first time ever, the race's first-ever title sponsor, new communications challenges and more.

"The coordination effort has been monumental," said race director Nick Curl, who has helped to organize 18 of the first 24 Los Angeles Marathons. Those races, he noted, were "all within the City of Los Angeles. That is one police department, one fire department, one engineering department, one sanitation department and one transportation department. Now we're running through five jurisdictions: Los Angeles, West Hollywood, Beverly Hills, the federal government property at the Veterans Administration in West L.A., and Santa Monica. There have been meetings with five different agencies in each one and each has their own staffs."

In creating the Stadium to the Sea course that will begin at Dodger Stadium and finish on Ocean Avenue in Santa Monica, Curl added that the organizers "designed over 50 different marathon routes over the course of 11 months. There were so many meetings that had to be held. So many people that had to be educated. There is nothing that we are doing in 2010 that remotely resembles what we did in 2009.

"The municipalities and the federal government were a charm to deal with. They worked together. Frank McCourt came to us and said this is a great opportunity to get five different groups together. If we can get them to work together on a marathon maybe they can work on public transportation or other social issues. Difficult coordination but very rewarding with what we ended up with."

Pillar pointed out that the inter-governmental cooperation has been a key not only to organizing the Marathon, but may have substantial benefits outside the race. "I've had more than one elected official tell me that he hasn't seen the greater Los Angeles region cooperate on something like this on anything since the 1984 Olympics. I think that is the testament of the faith that the different municipalities have in my management team, in Frank McCourt's vision and the real necessity for events like this that, with goodwill, reach out to the communities both participatory and spectator, and be something we can all be proud; and that athletes and participants of every stripe can take part."

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Massive coordination called key to 2010 Honda LA Marathon success

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Asked if the Stadium to the Sea course included any compromises from what might have been desired, Pillar said that “I don’t think there is a street, sidewalk, direction or incline that we would have done differently given the opportunity. It doesn’t mean we won’t tweak it after this year’s race. We are all about the runners experience and creating something that is meaningful. This will be a challenging course.”

The Marathon’s creative director, Peter Abraham noted that while the new course is iconic, it also required a lot of outreach to inform all of the publics involved with the event. “We have spectators, we have runners, we have charities, we have all the different communities along the route and we use many different channels to communicate with them. Above and beyond everything, we want to build a community around this event. We want an event that the city takes pride in and rallies around.

“Los Angeles is about many different things: pop culture, music, Hollywood, the beach. I try to bring those elements into the event however I can. For instance, I’ve been interviewing celebrities talking about their favorite mile on the course. Kobe Bryant, some of the other Lakers, Julia Louis Dreyfuss, chef Gordon Ramsay, Dwayne Johnson “the Rock,” Baron Davis and other celebrities talking about their favorite part of the course. We had Shepard Fairey’s Studio Number One create a 25th anniversary poster. We use all manner of social media and interactive technology to communicate and build a community around the event. We feel the event needs to be user-friendly and accessible for everybody.”

One area where participation had been contracting was in the corporate sector, but that was changed for the 2010 race. According to partnerships director Dave Klewan, the expansion in sponsorship support came from making the Marathon more exciting for the participants.

“We’ve elevated the experience for the runner and elevated the look and feel of the Marathon, and simultaneous to that we wanted to elevate the experience of the corporate partners,” he said. “Particularly in a challenging economy, you always want to provide opportunities for people to get a great return on their investment and return on their objectives. There are a lot of opportunities to tap into things with 25,000 runners. We are really appreciative of American Honda Motor Corp. stepping up and becoming our first title partner. We’ve had a long relationship with them as a presenting partner and we’re really excited to have them with us as we enter our next 25 years of the marathon route, by our side, with the identity of the race and their brand closely married together. K-Swiss has recently entered into the endurance world and has come on board as a presenting sponsor. They are another Los Angeles-based company who understands what we are trying to accomplish, and side-by-side with us and American Honda Motor Corp. is really committed to growing this race not only domestically but internationally as well.”

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Asked about what he likes the best about the “new” Marathon, Abraham explained that “It’s the experience that will be built around the event. There are four city block parties so spectators have a place to congregate. It’s the Finish Line Beach Party on the beach next to the Santa Monica Pier. I can see a tradition of runners who finish and jump into the Pacific Ocean. It’s the Expo at Dodger Stadium. It’s the outreach with our celebrity involvement. It’s the sum total of all the different elements that will elevate this to a world class event.”

In order to put on that world-class event, Pillar, Curl, Klewan and Abraham will be all over the course route on Sunday, at the start, at intermediate command posts, in on-the-course vehicles and for Pillar, his traditional post for several hours at the finish line, congratulating the 25,000 participants who will make history on Sunday.

ABOUT LA MARATHON LLC:

We inspire athletes and connect communities. With thousands of volunteers, tens of thousands of participants, and hundreds of thousands of spectators, the Honda Los Angeles Marathon presented by K-Swiss is one of the largest organized road races in the country. For more information, visit www.lamarathon.com.

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