



What to Expect From the IMT Des Moines Marathon Q&A with the Director of Racing and Events

Get an inside look at the course, the city and the experience of the IMT Des Moines Marathon. Want to know what to expect from the Marathon or Half Marathon in Des Moines? *Prevention* Magazine talked to Chris Burch, Director of Racing and Events, to find out everything from the amazing fall colors that line the course to the delectable Downtown Des Moines Farmer's Market.

Q: What makes the IMT Des Moines Marathon so unique?

A crisp, late October day in Iowa showcases the wonderful fall colors and harvest themes that our Midwestern destination offers to visitors. The IMT Des Moines Marathon features a Marathon & Half Marathon, Bankers Trust Marathon Relay, Principal Financial Group 5K Road Race and Bankers Trust Kids Run presented by Iowa Kidstrong start and finish at Nollen Plaza in downtown Des Moines. There are a variety of family-friendly activities that are all within walking distance of race weekend events that include the Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield Sports & Fitness Expo, Scheels Sports Speaker Series and Asics Pasta Dinner.

The IMT Des Moines Marathon & Half Marathon shares much of the same course, which is great for entertainment and spectator support. Athletes in the Marathon will complete one loop around the famed track at Drake University, home of the Drake Relays, while discovering our quaint neighborhood associations and city parks. Athletes in the Half Marathon will enjoy the views of downtown Des Moines as they loop around Gray's Lake Park.

If you are visiting Des Moines for the first time, you will likely leave noting how friendly and accommodating everyone is. Our race has an outstanding reputation for knowledgeable and hospitable volunteers and spectators. The host hotels, restaurants and downtown shopping districts are all aware that IMT Des Moines Marathon athletes and their families are in town and they are ready to roll out the red carpet for you.

Q: Have you ever personally walked or run the course?

I completed my first half marathon in the 2004 as a participant in the Des Moines Marathon before getting involved with the race as the full time race director. The course has changed since then, but I do run portions of the current course throughout the year to try to get a feel of the race from the athlete's perspective and as a part of my own fitness program. I really like running the IMT Des Moines Half Marathon course, and I also enjoy riding portions of the IMT Des Moines Marathon course on my bike from time to time.

I get asked on a regular basis if I run the IMT Des Moines Marathon on race day. As flattering as that is to my organizational skills, I simply am too busy in October to log any real miles when it comes to my personal running. Sometimes I feel like I am running around just as much over the course of race weekend as if I were running a 26.2 mile course. It is easier for me to focus on completing marathons and half marathons in the spring so I can spend my time putting together a seamless event for our athletes in October.

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Q: What is the toughest thing athletes will encounter along the way?

The IMT Des Moines Marathon can pose some challenges. The Marathon course presents elevation rises (more than rolling hills) mile 3 through mile 8 that will test your dedication to your training later in the day. If you are not from the Midwest, don't let what you think you know of Iowa fool you in preparing for race day. Marathon athletes should try to incorporate hills into their training at least once a week to prepare for race day.

The IMT Des Moines Half Marathon course is extremely flat. We don't encounter any elevation issues. Water Works Park can pose a challenge to some walkers later in the day. Although the park is closed to vehicle traffic, the course does loop out and back before exiting to Gray's Lake Park. There will be periods where runners and walkers will be coming from both directions, while the Marathon course merges with the Half Marathon course within Water Works Park.

Q: For walkers, it often takes a bit longer to get to the finish line. What can walkers expect along your course to keep them going?

The IMT Des Moines Marathon & Half Marathon offer aid stations, portable potties and entertainment at least every 2 miles along the course. We do everything we can to encourage spectator support in the later miles of the race, especially Water Works Park and Gray's Lake Park to cheer on each and every athlete. Some of our aid stations are split into 2 shifts so the later afternoon crowd of volunteers is fresh and full of energy for walkers who have been on the course a little longer.

We ask for specific course feedback each year and receive many comments from people walking the course and how we can meet their specific needs. Race day is as important to them as it is to people who may finish a few hours earlier. The IMT Des Moines Marathon race committee is as dedicated to our walkers as we are to our elite athletes.

Q: Many walkers are first-timers and may not have experienced a race day atmosphere. Any words of wisdom you would like to share with them?

The world of the marathon is a life-changing experience. Race day is the culmination of the hard work, dedication and perseverance you have shown to complete your training. Enjoy the day. Enjoy your accomplishment. Be proud of yourself and walk with your head held high as you join an elite group of people who have the determination to compete and complete in a 26.2/13.1 mile race.

Many times walking with another person can make the miles go by a little quicker. Find someone you enjoy spending time with. The two of you can find many things to talk about, can train together for race day and can become an important support system for each other.

Regardless, the IMT Des Moines Marathon encourages you to consult with a physician, physical therapist and/or nutritionist if you have any concerns or encounter any problems during your training for race day. It is not uncommon to over train for your first event so take it easy and trust the training program that you are following. We are proud of you and thank you for selecting Des Moines as your marathon destination.

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Q: A lot of people make marathons a destination event. Are there any places that first time visitors must visit while they are in Des Moines?

Des Moines features a Saturday morning Farmer's Market on Court Avenue with fresh food, entertainment and crafts. It is a great way to start the day and shop the city street vendors who offer much more than just fresh fruit and vegetables. The Science Center of Iowa, with IMAX, Iowa Hall of Pride and All-Play are great family activities that will keep the kids occupied for hours. And be sure to buy your tickets in advance for the Civic Center presentation of the Broadway hit "9 to 5".

If shopping is your bag, check out the East Village on Saturday afternoon, while the rest of the family tours the Iowa State Capitol and Iowa Historical Building. Also, be sure to visit Jordan Creek Mall and West Glen in West Des Moines with upper-scale stores that one might expect to find in Chicago, New York or Las Vegas.

Des Moines is also known for its great restaurants. You won't have to wander farther than Court Avenue to find a variety of dining choices from the Splash Seafood Oyster Bar to tacos at El Bait Shop. Stop by the Greater Des Moines Convention & Visitors Bureau information booth at the Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield Sports & Fitness Expo for tips on where to eat your perfect pre race meal.

Q: Has there been an overall trend of increased participation over the past few years?

Yes, and I believe participation in marathons and long distance running is a trend that is going to continue to grow even in today's economy. The idea of the marathon as a goal that can be broken down into a series of objectives makes the support extremely rewarding. We are realizing that the sport of the marathon is obtainable by more and more people. It wasn't too long ago that it was thought you had to be male and be able to run fast to be accepted at the marathon distance. We know today that simply is not true. All you really need is a good pair of running or walking shoes and a goal to get out the front door and down the street. That is where it starts. The rest will fall into place.

We'll see you at the finish line in October!

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