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Marathon runner will bare his soles

One competitor says he will shed his shoes for today's race

By EZEKIEL GUZA

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About 140 runners will lace up their shoes this morning to run in the 45th annual Heart of America marathon, but Rick Roeber won't be one of them. He plans on running the race barefoot.

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"This will be my third marathon with no shoes," Roeber said. "I started running barefoot about a year ago."

Roeber said he tried running the Boston Marathon barefoot this year but the 110 degree blacktop throughout the course forced him to run five miles with sandals.

"I like to feel the ground underneath me," he said. "It's almost like a Zen thing. You become one with the road."

Gustavo Gaitan, 30, flew from New York City with four layovers to run in today's race.

"I had never run very much before but this year, but on my 30th birthday I decided I wanted to run a marathon," he said. "I looked on internet and liked this one because it is small."

Alvaro Prieto, a native of Columbia, South America, has run 20 marathons but none in the United States.

"I'm excited to run in this marathon because the country interests me," he said.

Prieto, who lives in Englewood, N.J., said the Heart of America Marathon is good preparation for the New York City marathon, which he plans to run on Nov. 7.

Race Director Joe Duncan said Larry Hennier of Rich Fountain and David Dobkowski of St. Louis are favorites to win the race, which the Columbia Track Club sponsors.

Hennier, who has been running as many as 70 miles a week, said he thinks he has a good chance.

“I’m hoping to win it,” he said.

Mark Speed of Little Rock, Ark., said he is been preparing to run the race for about a year.

“I’m looking forward to just getting out there and running it,” he said. “This is my tenth marathon in my tenth state and I hope to run one in all 50 states.”

Eladio Valdez III of Kansas City, who owns The Runner’s Edge, a company that helps adults train for marathons, said he heard The Heart of America is one of the toughest in the country.

“They said it was a tough course with all the hills and the heat.”

John Schulz of Columbia, has run the race eight times and agrees it is extremely tough.

“It’s probably the most challenging one in North America,” Schulz said.

Valdez said, despite the difficulties, he thinks the marathon will be one of the best.

“The bigger marathon’s have a circus like atmosphere with thousands of spectators, but this marathon really intrigued me because this is one of the oldest marathons despite being in a smaller town,” he said. “I am running it because I want to go back to the roots of why I run, which is to experience the journey.”



Heart of America Marathon Route

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