

Nelson Mandela Bay Half Marathon back in full force

EPA gearing up for return of event at Pollok Beach on May 1

PREMIUM

VUYOKAZI NKANJENI Soccer reporter 18 March 2021



Elite athletes Melikhaya Frans, Ntombesintu Mfunzi and Lusapho April are looking forward to the return of the Nelson Mandela Bay Half Marathon

Image: VUYOKAZI NKANJENI

After a year of no-shows due to Covid-19, the Nelson Mandela Bay Half Marathon is back in full force and will take place at Pollok Beach in Summerstrand on May 1.

EPA sponsorship liaison Michael Mbambani said preparations for the event were going smoothly and all Covid-19 protocols that needed to be observed before and during the race would be in place.

ADVERTISING

“So far, we are expecting around 250 athletes, which is the maximum of entries — we will not go beyond that,” Mbambani said.

“We have made the limit of around 15-20 international and foreign athletes to participate in the race from different countries like France, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia.

“In terms of all the safety measures, athletes must produce a 72-hour valid Covid-19 test upon their arrival in Gqeberha.

“They will also go through another Covid-19 test here, we have Dr Andile Bovungwana and he is our medical doctor for the half-marathon.

“We just want to make sure that when it comes to safety issues we are spot on and the rest should fall in place.

“There will be no spectators allowed, hence we have live streaming for all those who would want to watch the race.

“They will also be able to watch it on SABC sport.”

The race, which holds World Athletics bronze label status, will also serve as the ASA Half Marathon Championships and will prepare athletes for the upcoming Olympic Games in Tokyo in July.

Bay elite athletes are excited about the return of the half-marathon, but said they were even happier to see that the racing calendar was jam-packed for 2021.

Nedbank Running Club star runner Ntombesintu Mfunzi said: “I am just happy that things are going back to normal.

“We are kind of excited because now we will know what to train for, because it was difficult to not have a goal that you are training towards.

“It was also motivating for me to get the e-mail from Athletics SA talking about the squad for the 50km World Championships in October.

“So I can see that slowly we are getting back to normal so these kind of races, the 10km, they are going to help us to build towards the speed work for the bigger races.”

Double Olympian Lusapho April, who has been out of the running scene for almost three years, plans to make an impressive comeback on race day.

“It’s been a while since I took part in the race,” he said.

“I think it was around 2018, so at least I am happy now that things are getting back to normal.

“The plan is to make a memorable return because I believe people think that I have retired or it’s the end of me.

“I have still got it in me, my body is still fine. And my legs can still carry me.

“So it’s just a matter of staying healthy and putting in the work and then, hopefully, on the day everything goes according to plan and I come back with a bang.

“My main focus now will be based on the half-marathon.”

Melikhanya Frans, who finished 10th in the men’s race in 2019, said he would be more interested in the finishing time than a podium finish in the 2021 race.

“It’s going to be tough for me this year because I am preparing for the Copenhagen Marathon in Denmark.

“We just need a time of 64 minutes to finish the race, that will be fine for me.

“I will be not looking at any position this year.”

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