

How to Keep Your Race Out of the Headlines


Sometimes any publicity is NOT good publicity

Doug Thurston, Course Consultant, Level A Measurer

Maker of Many Mistakes over the Last 40 Years

Thurston Event Solutions, Santa Fe, NM





WRONG TURN!
1994 NYC Marathon

Niagara Falls Marathon disqualifies winners after leading them the wrong way

A lead cyclist's early turn sent top runners off course on Sunday, costing them their medals

CAMERON ORMOND [PUBLISHED OCTOBER 28, 2025](#)



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RIVER BANK RUN

Some runners disqualified from RBR 10K race

by: 24 Hour News 8 web staff
Posted: May 11, 2019 / 08:18 PM EDT
Updated: May 12, 2019 / 03:58 AM EDT



SHARE    

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (WOOD) — Some runners that went off-course during the 10K race at the Amway River Bank Run were disqualified.

Questions about
firearm safety
are questions
about health.

Two Kenyan runners disqualified at the Quad Cities Marathon for getting lost

Should race winners be disqualified for accidentally stepping off the course?

MARLEY DICKINSON PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 29, 2021



Other Recent Incidents of Runners Going Off Course

- **Seattle Marathon (December 2025):** Over a hundred runners were disqualified or marked as "Did Not Finish" (DNF) after they followed an unmarked path around mile 19. The mix-up occurred where the course looped near a multi-use trail, and insufficient signage led runners onto the wrong, unofficial path.
- **Peachtree Road Race (July 2023):** Elite runner **Senbere Teferi**, the defending champion and race favorite, took a wrong turn less than 150 meters from the finish line after following a police motorcycle that turned off the course. She ended up finishing in third place, costing her the win and a significant monetary prize.
- **Quad Cities Marathon (September 2021):** The two leading Kenyan runners were disqualified after a volunteer on a bicycle mistakenly led them straight instead of making a required turn. An Illinois man, **Tyler Pence**, who stayed on the correct course behind them, went on to win the race and the **\$3,000** prize.
- **Portland Marathon (October 2019):** Around 15 top runners missed a critical turn due to poor course markings and a lack of volunteers/bike marshals at the spot. Some runners ran up to two extra miles, ruining their race times and qualifying attempts for other marathons.

Ideas to Help Keep Runners on Course

- ✓ Tape arrows on turns; tab ends, confirmation arrows
- ✓ Chalk or flower arrows (can be done race morning with precursor bikes and water bottles)
- ✓ Signs on barricades, delineators
- ✓ Trained course monitors
- ✓ Trained bike marshals with proper credentials (vests, signs on bikes, etc.)
- ✓ Measurer on site to check course/precursor/lead vehicle
- ✓ Any or all of the above!
- ✓ YOUR race ideas? Please share!

If a Prize Money Race, Tech Meeting with Elites to go through the Do's and Don'ts

No outside assistance (USATF Rule 144)



Elites/Tech Meeting Ideas, Contd.

- Make sure elites understand the course
- Explain who to follow and who NOT to follow (police, lead vehicles, OFFICIAL bicycles)
- Understand what happens as elites near the finish line
- Cover the assistance rule: no outside drinks, food, coaches, family or friends on bikes, etc.
- No course cutting, running over curbs, through driveways, etc. (often done in int'l events)
- No race information can be communicated from the lead or media trucks
- Other suggestions from your race? Please share!

Lead Cyclists

- ❑ Local cycling/triathlon clubs and bike shops can be a source
- ❑ Ride/drive the course with key cyclists the weekend before; assign area/section leaders
- ❑ Proper credentials: placards for handlebars, vests, jerseys, "Follow Me" signs on back of jersey, etc.
- ❑ Ride 50-100 feet in front and try to ride the tangents if possible (be the "blue line")
- ❑ Should not communicate any race information to athletes except upcoming turns or obstacles
- ❑ Should stay out of camera range if event is televised
- ❑ Should show runners the correct course and NOT ride outside the designated, certified course
- ❑ There may be other official cyclists on the course (med teams, race officials, etc.)
- ❑ Can be helpful to escort cars or rogue cyclists off the course
- ❑ Scooters and now Ebikes are great options as well (can go much faster to put out any fires)



Police/Public Safety

- ✓ Make sure you have contact info for sergeants on race day
- ✓ Distribute course maps, first-last timelines, and if wheelchair/hand cranks affect timeline
- ✓ Tape arrows or directional signs helpful to officers who are not familiar with course
- ✓ Course operations team drives 20-30 minutes in front of precursor to chat with each officer
- ✓ Precursor is final check and has cones with them and a bicyclist who can stop to deploy
- ✓ Official lead cyclists and policies for non-lead cyclists (first female, media, etc.)
- ✓ Officers are concerned about traffic more than runners and often face away from runners
- ✓ Tips from your race. Please share!

SOCIETY

Runners infuriated after SF Marathon miscalculates course length

Instead of being 13.1 miles, the course through the city was actually only 12.6 miles.

By Tim Johns

Thursday, August 1, 2024



Dear Runner,

Following Sunday's event, we discovered an issue concerning the second half-marathon course. It came to our attention that, despite being measured and certified by a USATF-certified course measurer, the course was incorrectly measured, resulting in a length of 12.6 miles instead of the full 13.1 miles.

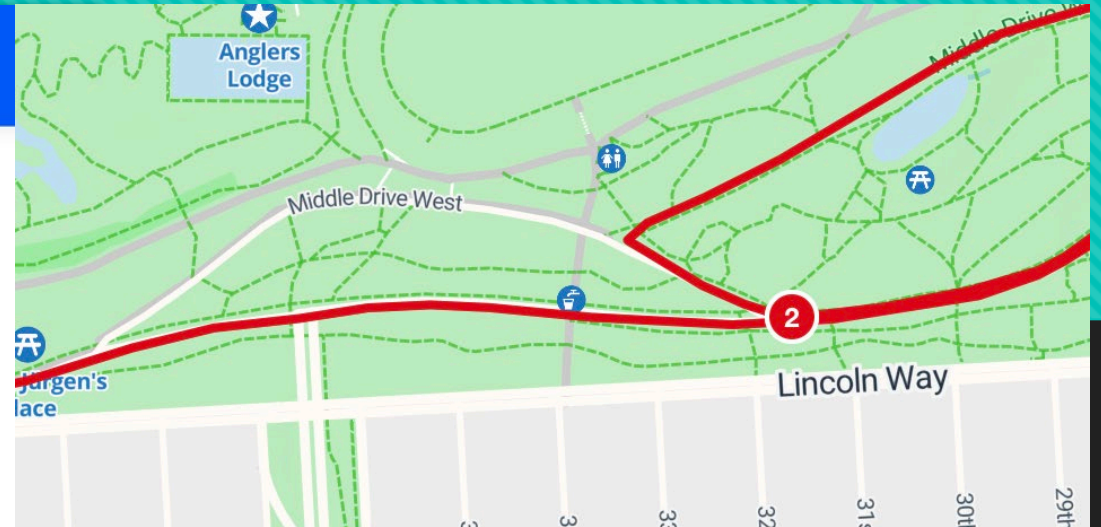
We have updated the race results to reflect the accurate distance of 12.6 miles. We deeply apologize for this oversight and appreciate your patience while we address the issue. This was a human error, and we understand the frustration this may have

NEW DETAILS

**SF MARATHON COURSE MISCALCULATED
RUNNERS DISAPPOINTED AND SEEKING COMPENSATION**

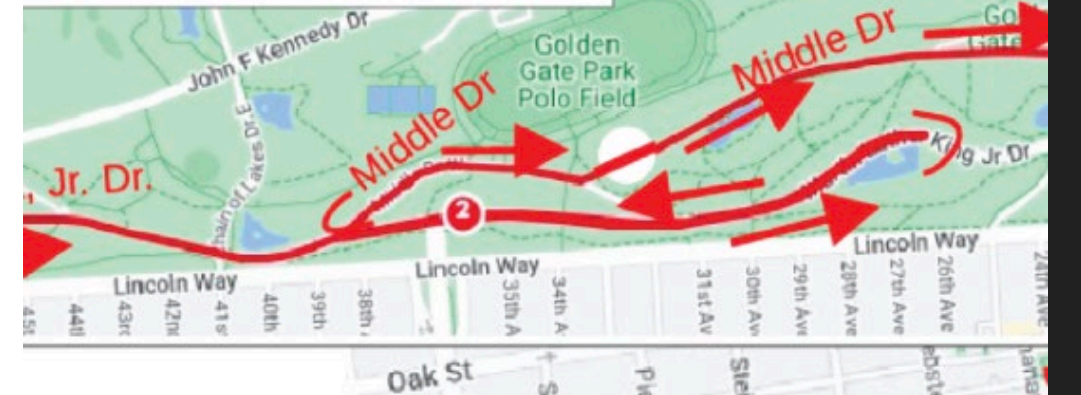
course.

On Tuesday, SF Marathon participants received an email stating that a mistake had caused organizers to miscalculate one of the half marathon courses.



imp post on the southeast corner, northbound side.

SPR except:
enter line on MLK, Jr.
1 side of JFK Drive.
the south onto bike path at
ast crosswalk before Kezar Dr.
nd lanes of The Embarcadero.



SF Marathon almost repeats egregious course mistake

The San Francisco Marathon's second half-marathon course was 0.5 miles short in 2024.

By **Alex Simon**, *Sports Editor*
July 22, 2025



Ensuring You Run the Certified Course

- Ask if certifier is willing to refresh mile marks, turn-arounds, start/finish week of race (for a small stipend)
- Is certifier available on race day to ensure course is set-up correctly? (For a small stipend, hotel room, etc.)
- Check certified map before race weekend to make sure it makes sense and is correct (see example from San Francisco Second Half Marathon from 2024)
- Ride the course on a bike with a Garmin to check accuracy a week or two before and to make sure YOU understand the course
- (Note: Garmins and other GPS devices are 99% accurate; in other words, a reading of 13.24-13.26 for a half marathon is NORMAL and to be expected on a watch and bike GPS)
- Other ideas from your races?

Questions and Comments?

Thank you!
Doug Thurston