

《Abbott World Marathon Majors partners with Wanda, aims to ho》

China's Wanda Group put pen to paper on a partnership deal with the Abbott World Marathon Majors (WMM) here on Wednesday, in an agreement that will see three major marathon events held in Asia within the next 10 years.



China's Wanda Group puts pen to paper on a partnership deal with the Abbott World Marathon Majors (WMM) in Beijing, capital of China, April 26, 2017. [Photo: ifeng.com]

The new series of events will include one yet-to-be-decided marathon in a first-tier Chinese city. Such an event in China would mark the first time for a WMM event to be held in a developing country.

Tim Hadzima, Abbott WMM General Manager, said that his organization looks forward to the agreement becoming a platform the global expansion of marathon running.

"Our race directors look forward to working with Wanda to introduce the series to new audiences in new territories, and to involving our runners in new initiatives," Hadzima said.

Hugh Barasher, Virgin Money London Marathon Event Director, says the earliest that China's event could feasibly held, given all the moving parts that need to come into place, would be "2019 or 2020."

Despite the large number of details that remain to be hammered out, Barasher says he has high expectations for the agreement and for the prospect of a major marathon event being held in China.

"We are delighted with the partnership. What we are excited about is that the series has the potential to expand. And we think that marathon running being expanded worldwide is fantastic thing, and it is something that we are all delighted for," Barasher said.

Barashar also says that whatever city is finally chosen to host a major marathon event in China will have its work cut out for it in order to meet WMM's standards.

"There are very strict operational criteria that we have for the races we work with. We will be working with our main corporation, who will be looking at the potential races and talking to the (potential host) cities," Barashar explained.

Rather than replacing an event already on the calendar, the China event, according to Barashar, will mark an expansion of the global major marathon series.

"This would be an expansion of the global series. If a city meets the requirement, then it will be incorporated into the world marathon majors," Barashar said.

Hadzima, for his part, says that China is uniquely fit to play host to a major marathon event.

"China has a great history and great tradition of putting on world-class events. That is why it is exciting for us, and with our partners at Wanda and Ironman to really tap into that."

The marathon organizers were all keen to point out the unique economic and social benefits that hosting a marathon can bring to a locale.

Peter Ciaccia, TCS New York City Marathon Race director, says that marathons are unique in that their venue is the host city itself.

"What these races do is they create an avenue for the communities to come out, and get together, and support the event. We don't own a venue, it would be different if we owned a stadium, but of course we don't," he said.

"In the New York marathon, the economic impact is over 140 million dollars. When (a marathon) builds excitement, it builds participation," he pointed out.

Carey Pinkowshi, Bank of America Chicago Marathon Executive Race Director, agrees, and says that each marathon creates a legacy in the host city that "lives on after race day."

"These events are a celebration of humanity where individuals come from all over the world to take part and to recognize those efforts...we recognize their experience...we have people that may be running their first event, and this may be a lifetime experience for them," Pinkowshi said.

The ultimate test of the success of any new marathon event, each organizer was keen to point out, is the extent to which it gets ordinary people involved in the sport.

Barashar says that marathon is perhaps singularly able to accomplish just that feat: bringing in the masses and encouraging them to put their feet into the race.

"Marathon running is a unique sport where everyday people can stand on the same starting line as the Gods of the sport. It's inspiring, it's life changing, its healthy," he stressed.

Dalian Wanda Group was established in 1988, and has expanded into a conglomerate of commercial properties, culture, Internet, and finance. Its Wanda Sports Holdings has become the world's leading sports business organization.

