

Olympic Test Marathon Monday 30 May 2011 Report by Kay Farrow of Beverley AC

Photo courtesy of the London Olympic Committee



Darran Bilton, number 1, and club athletes test out the Olympic marathon course on the Mall

In the run up to next year's Olympic Games four local athletes were given the honour of taking part in the Olympic Test Marathon in London on Monday morning.

Former Beverley AC member Darran Bilton, now with Leeds City AC, was given the number 1 bib and was asked by the London 2012 Organising Committee (LOCOG) to pace the group of 39 elite club athletes to three hours. He was joined by Beverley AC's James Pearson, Graham Gagg of City of Hull and Gregan Clarkson of Kingston-upon-Hull AC.

For the organisers it was an opportunity to test out the timing and technology elements and ensure that race management and logistics are on target for next year's Olympic Games. For the specially invited club athletes it was a chance to test out the course and imagine that they were competing for Olympic glory.



Darran Bilton described the day as "amazing" and was thrilled to rub shoulders with stars such as Paula Radcliffe, Sonia O'Sullivan, Mo Farah and Iwan Thomas. He led the group of club athletes around the course in 2 hours 59 minutes. They would normally run a much faster marathon and Bilton's job was to set a steady, even pace to finish in three hours.

Darren Bilton on the Westwood in the Beverley 10k 2011



Beverley AC's James Pearson admitted that the slower pace enabled him to really enjoy the experience. His verdict on the course - "apart from a few tricky twisting sections it should be quite fast as it is fairly flat." The course starts and finishes on the Mall with one 2.2 mile lap and then 3 laps of 8 miles that take in a lot of the sights of London. The looped course is expected to produce a very tactical Olympic marathon as athletes will know the course as they approach it for the second and third time.

Also taking part in the test marathon was Chris Finill of Harrow Athletic Club who has run in every London Marathon since the event began. This outstanding achievement was recognised by his fellow runners who allowed him to cross the finishing line first rather than them all competing against each other in a sprint finish down the Mall.

James Pearson in the Beverley 10k 2011

As the athletes ran round the course they were observed by senior members of the IAAF and the LOCOG. The timing, scoring and technology arrangements all worked well and the LOCOG was encouraged by the feedback from the runners afterwards. They will all be watching with great interest when the Olympic Marathon takes place next year.

Unbelievably Darran Bilton ran in the BUPA London 10k an hour after finishing the marathon! He cruised round the course in 34 minutes and then joined his coach, Beverley AC's Ian Boardley, for a well deserved coffee before a round of media interviews. Bilton thoroughly enjoyed this experience of a lifetime and his final comment - "This is life in very fast motion!"