

# THE RUNNING MANN

Humorous Anecdotes, Observations & Accounts of Marathon Running & Agile Adventures.



30TH APRIL 2024 BY STUART MANN

## Two Oceans 2024: Copycat cutoff chaos

Share:

Two Oceans are known to copy whatever Comrades does. Comrades' prestigious Green Number Club was followed by Two Oceans' Blue Number Club. When Comrades added an hour to their finish time, Two Oceans extended the same favour. When Comrades introduced qualification marathons, Two Oceans added the same criteria to take part. When Comrades introduced the Bill Rowan Medal between silver and bronze, Two Oceans quickly followed with the Sainsbury. I really didn't think Two Oceans would copy Comrades' cutoff debacle but here we are.

This article provides an in-depth independent investigation of organisational deficiencies, statistical analysis of previous results data and first-hand accounts of what happened at the Two Oceans marathon cutoff and top of Constantia Nek. It aims to drop a series of logic bombs amidst Two Oceans' sea of debatable decisions and questionable explanations.

#### Executive Summary:

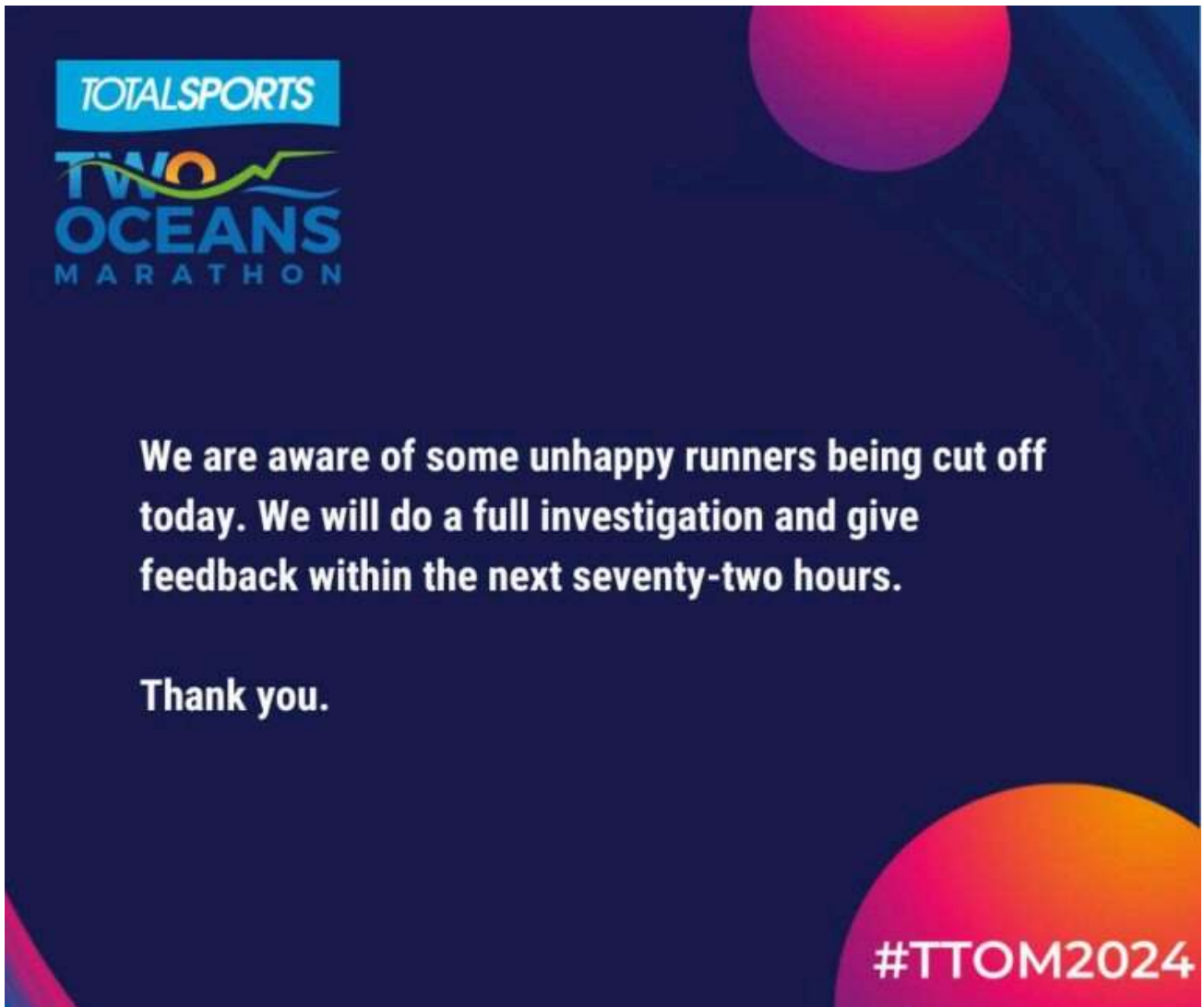
- The 2024 marathon cutoff was 10 minutes stricter than for the 2022 and 2023 event (and 13 minutes stricter than pre-Covid events).
- The change in cutoff conditions was not communicated effectively to participants.
- Data from previous Two Oceans events was not used to determine the stricter cutoff times.
- Data analysis shows that 55 participants who earned a medal in 2023 would have been cutoff with 2024 times. With entry number increases, this equates to +/-70 runners robbed of a medal in 2024.
- Data analysis shows that Blue medallists typically run far faster than the 8:11/km allowed over the final 14km in 2024.
- Female runners, who typically pace ultras better and finish faster, were negatively impacted dramatically more by the stricter marathon cutoff than were men.



Shortly after the 2024 ultra concluded, the Two Oceans Marathon (TOM) were quick to confirm the cutoff issue with the below statement on social media. I was optimistic that a suitable apology and restitution for the runners impacted would follow. Sadly, just like at Comrades 2023, accountability and race organisers do not mix well together\*.

*\*I do want to put out however that there are vast differences in communicating with the TOM board (who have generally been very responsive and open to feedback as compared to that of the Comrades Race Director in 2023). The magnitude of the error in terms of runners impacted was also far greater at Comrades 2023.*





The controversy surrounds the cutoff in Hout Bay at the marathon mark. Since Covid, runners had to cross the marathon mark in a running time of 5h17 from the last batch setting off (N batch in 2024 at 5.39am). If the same protocol was followed, this would have been at 10.56am in 2024.

However, N batch were originally told that they would be starting at 5.34am in their entry confirmation email but this was moved 5 minutes later in the final announcements. To give TOM credit, the communication on the change of batch start times was very clear on social media and direct to runner messages. No one could say that they were unaware of the batch starting times. However, many runners wondered whether there was a basic maths problem and someone should have added 5 minutes to the marathon cutoff and instead deducted 5 minutes.





## Two Oceans Marathon

12 April at 07:26 · 🌐



### SEEDING BATCH START TIMES

**#TTOM2024 ULTRA MARATHON:** Will start in batches of 1000 runners, starting two minutes apart.

**#TTOM2024 HALF MARATHON:** Will start in batches of 1000, three minutes apart.

Batch pens will be clearly marked and have marshal-controlled entry points. Your batch pen corresponds to the letter printed on your race number. You may drop back to a later batch, but you cannot move forward.

Please obey all marshal instructions at the start.

#KeepPushing #ConquerTheCurrent #Totalsports #MoveYourMind #MovementThatInspires

ULTRA MARATHON		HALF MARATHON	
A	05:15	A	06:15
B	05:17	B	06:18
C	05:19	C	06:21
D	05:21	D	06:24
E	05:23	E	06:27
F	05:25	F	06:30
G	05:27	G	06:33
H	05:29	H	06:36
J	05:31	J	06:39
K	05:33	K	06:42
L	05:35	L	06:45
M	05:37	M	06:48
N	05:39	N	06:51
		P	06:54
		Q	06:57
		R	07:00

Communication on the change in batch starting times was clear and no runners complained of not knowing their starting time.

Regardless, the 2024 marathon cutoff was 10 minutes faster than in previous years. This is a massive change potentially impacting thousands of runners. You would expect that such a major adjustment to the running conditions and race day expectations would result the same, if not more, direct communications as runners received on the batch starting times. This did not happen, there was just a social media post (one of many in the race buildup) where the times were not listed directly. A link to the actual cutoffs was provided but it's likely that this had a very low clickthrough rate.



Two Oceans Marathon

12 April at 09:20 · 🌐



**Cut-Off Times for the #TTOM2024 Ultra and Half**  
**Your race will be run from batch start gun to mat.**

ULTRA MARATHON: Your cut-off time is 7 hours batch start gun to mat. All your cut-off times are here: [https://www.twooceansmarathon.org.za/event\\_route.../cut-off/](https://www.twooceansmarathon.org.za/event_route.../cut-off/)

HALF MARATHON: your cut-off time is 3 hours 30 minutes batch start gun to mat. All your cut-off times are here: <https://www.twooceansmarathon.org.za/event.../cut-off-2/>

#TTOM2024 #CutOff #KeepPushing



**ULTRA MARATHON CUT-OFF: 12:39PM**  
**HALF MARATHON CUT-OFF: 10:30AM**

*Instead of listing the cutoff times directly in the social media communications, a link to the website was provided.*

There was mass confusion on the marathon cutoff times with 10.46am and 10.50am being listed on different sections of the official website. When I Googled “Two Oceans 2024 cutoff times” after the race, I got the 10.50am link – and most runners were running under the 10.50am assumption\*.

*\* There are also some runners who swear that both sections of the website had 10.50am before and during the race and that the update was done after the race had finished. Whilst this would be epic-level gaslighting from TOM, I do not believe that this is the case.*







----- Original message -----  
From: Vice Chairperson <[Vice\\_Chairperson@twooceansmarathon.org.za](mailto:Vice_Chairperson@twooceansmarathon.org.za)>  
Date: 15/04/2024 13:44 (GMT+02:00)  
To: Julian Matthews <[j.matthews@fhs.co.uk](mailto:j.matthews@fhs.co.uk)>  
Cc: Chairperson <[chairperson@twooceansmarathon.org.za](mailto:chairperson@twooceansmarathon.org.za)>, Hilton Keema <[hilton@twooceansmarathon.org.za](mailto:hilton@twooceansmarathon.org.za)>  
Subject: RE: Ultra 42k Cut Off - Complaint

Good Afternoon Julian,

Thank you for your e-mail received

The Chair and I already had a discussion yesterday with the President of Western Province Athletics. We are awaiting a proper feedback report today. None of us were on the ground, so we need the facts.

Please allow us to investigate properly. If your fear is that this will be swept under the carpet, **rest assured** it won't.

This is a serious issue that needs addressing. We are runners ourselves and understand the frustration.

Despite the unpleasant experience, we hope and trust that you will manage to relax in our beautiful City.

Warm Regards,

*Email promising the cutoff issue would not be "swept under the carpet".*

It was all looking very promising that we would see the accountability and decisive action that was lacking from Comrades in 2023. Unfortunately, over the next 72-hours, the brooms came out resulting in the release of a "cutoff explanation" announcement that was emailed to participants and posted on the website.

Reaction to the announcement was received about as well as if someone had thrown a plastic sachet into the ocean along Chapman's Peak. One runner said, "The announcement put out last night is absolutely insulting and made me angry. I was previously disappointed but now I am angry!" Whilst another complained, "I feel that Two Oceans organizers have stolen this ultra from me. If Two Oceans made a mistake, they need to acknowledge it and own up to it."

The announcement hides behind the digimag which lists a 10.46am cutoff time\*. The cutoff times are hidden away on page 23 of the 76-page document. The digimag link was sent out via SMS the day before the event and requires significant data to read for those without Wi-Fi. The SMS read, "All your race info info in our easy-to-use #TTOM2024 Digimag click...". There was no specific reference or call out to take note of the cutoff times.

*\* I have confirmed that no changes to the cutoff times were made to the digimag after publication.*



### Francois Botha

Where do I find this so-called digimag? And they say they disseminated it via SMS? How exactly? If they expect us to click on random links in SMSs we receive then they're off their rocker and living in the 90s, before Nigerian princes were offering us their heirloom. Nobody should be expected to use links in SMSs for important information. Can't find any references to a digimag in my email either.

SMS is an odd choice as it's not possible to read the magazine properly on your phone and even if you did email it to yourself, the majority (around 78%) of the field travel from outside the Cape and would not have brought their laptops along. I would be surprised if more than 10% of the field opened the digimag before the event and if more than 1% spent longer than 5 seconds on the page with the cutoffs on it.

\* I am reliably told that SMS communications have a much higher click through rate than email. However, this does not answer the question why multiple channels (including SMS, email and social media) were not used to communicate the vital last minute information contained within the digimag.

**TTOM 2024 – EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW**

Here's the A to Z of the 2024 Totalsports Two Oceans Marathon (TTOM), from Anti-litter measures, Blue Number Club, to Timing Chips, Tog Bags, Toilets and Yellow Numbers. Take a few minutes to read this handy guide before you line up for your race.

**A IS FOR ANTI-LITTER CAMPAIGN**  
TOM's official policy is zero tolerance towards littering anywhere on the route, including at refreshment stations, the start and the finish. Littering is defined as the act of disposing of waste items anywhere except in a container provided for that purpose. The event's waste items include paper cups, bottles, wrappers and containers, whether supplied by the organisers or brought to the race by the participants.

**B IS FOR BLUE NUMBER CLUB**  
A Blue Number is awarded to a runner who has officially completed 10 Ultra Marathons, 10 Half Marathons or 10 Full Marathons. You can also earn your Blue Number by winning three titles in a particular race, making Cape's top four most famous Blue Number. Usually, your Blue Number can be earned by attaining a gold medal five times in any race.

**C IS FOR CHARITY ENTRIES AND BENEFICIARIES**  
Applications to be an official charity sponsored ultra-marathon runner are open. Runners are able to log these charity entries directly from the charity website. Limited charity entries for the Ultra Marathon and Half Marathon were made available to the public, while runners were also encouraged to donate to the Two Oceans and other initiatives (TOM).

**D IS FOR CONFIRMATION OF ENTRY**  
All 2024 Totalsports Two Oceans Marathon athletes would have received a final entry confirmation via email and/or SMS. Entries can also be confirmed by logging in to your profile on the TOM website before you arrive. The race confirmation message together with your ID document counts as valid identification methods to collect your race number.

**E IS FOR EARPHONES**  
Head, Bluetooth players or music devices of any sort with earphones or headphones are not allowed, as these are a safety hazard and hinder your interaction with runners, race officials and marshals. Running with these items could result in disqualification, and you will be disqualified if you fail to listen to a marshal or traffic official as a result of wearing earphones.

**F IS FOR CONTINGENCY PLANS**  
Contingency plans are in place to re-make any race in the event of a natural or other disaster (e.g. fire on Chapman's Peak), and we work closely with the relevant authorities to ensure a smooth emergency transition. A detailed operational plan is in place for extreme cases where the race needs to be abandoned, and all affected parties (runners, spectators, etc.) will receive communications via SMS and on social media.

**G IS FOR CLUB KIT**  
All South African runners should wear the official clothing of their athletics club for the ultra-marathon. If you are entered as a club-member in the Half Marathon, club kit must be worn to qualify for team prizes. Your race day kit must also comply with the relevant advertising rules. Remember that your 2024 TOM race numbers must be worn unobscured throughout the race on the front and back of your running vest and not on your running shorts.

**H IS FOR HELP US TO GET TO 2 MILLION AND WIN!**  
Help us to get to 2 million and win!

**I IS FOR INFORMATION**  
Information regarding the race, including race rules, can be found on the website.

**J IS FOR JERSEYS**  
Jerseys for the race are available for purchase.

**K IS FOR KIT**  
Race kit including timing chips, tog bags, and toilets are available for purchase.

**L IS FOR LITTER**  
Littering is strictly prohibited.

**M IS FOR MARATHON**  
Marathon race details and information.

**N IS FOR NUMBER**  
Race numbers and identification.

**O IS FOR OFFICIALS**  
Race officials and marshals.

**P IS FOR PHOTOGRAPHY**  
Photography rules and guidelines.

**Q IS FOR QUESTIONS**  
Frequently asked questions and contact information.

**R IS FOR RACE**  
Race start times and locations.

**S IS FOR SUPPORT**  
Support services and facilities.

**T IS FOR TIMING**  
Timing chip information and race results.

**U IS FOR ULTRA**  
Ultra-marathon race details.

**V IS FOR VEST**  
Race vest information and requirements.

**W IS FOR WEATHER**  
Weather forecast and advice.

**X IS FOR XMAS**  
Christmas and New Year information.

**Y IS FOR YELLOW NUMBER**  
Yellow number information and rules.

**Z IS FOR ZEPHYRUS**  
Zephyrus information and details.

Page 23 of 76 in the digimag lists the 2024 cutoffs. The cutoffs were not included in the 2022 or 2023 digimag.

Furthermore, this is the first year that the cutoff information has been included in the digimag. The 2022 and 2023 digimags are completely cutoff free. All appearances point towards a lucky coincidence that the cutoffs were included within the 2024 digimag, providing some cutoff CYA camouflage rather than it being a deliberate communication strategy.

It appears that the TOM Board is grasping at straws – and they are of the nasty, plasticky, non-biodegradable, turtle killing kind.

Basically, this is all a mess – and blaming your runners for not reading the digimag or trying to decipher which of the three different cutoff times (10.46am, 10.50am or 7:30/km) listed on your website is correct is quite frankly a ridiculous gaslighting attempt. Whilst runners will never read every bit of fine print, the post-race cutoff announcement made it clear that Two Oceans are unable to read the room.

## What Should the Marathon Cutoff Have Been?

The Two Oceans post-race cutoff announcement clarified that the 10.46am cutoff was “correct” which opens up a big can of sardines.

Why was it reduced by 10 minutes from previous years? Did anyone do the math and think this was a sensible cutoff time? Did anyone look at the data from previous events to assess the impact of the change?

Requiring your participants to run 7:16/km to get to the marathon mark in 5h07 (10.46am) when they need to run substantially slower than that, 7:30/km for a 6:59:59 finish, makes no logical sense. If you just made the marathon cutoff you would need to run at a lackadaisical pace of 8:11/km to finish and, as we'll see later, this is very easily done even for those at the tail end of the field.



<b>7:16/km</b>	The pace required to make it to the marathon cutoff
<b>8:11/km</b>	The pace required over the last 14km to the finish
<b>7:30/km</b>	The average pace required to finish under 7 hours

I also confirmed with multiple sources that the discussed, agreed and submitted marathon cutoff was originally set to 10.57am for the 2024 event (11 minutes longer than the eventual cutoff at 10.46am). Those that were involved in the original cutoff discussions were as surprised as everyone else to see the 10.46am time.

The explanatory response I received from the TOM Board was, “These times were based on the start time of the last batch. Cutoff at 10:46 – last batch start at 5:39; Cutoff at 10:50 – last batch start at 5:43; Cutoff at 10:57 – last batch start at 5:50”. Essentially the explanation is that there would only have been a 10.57am cutoff if the last batch started at 5.50am.

The “average pace of 7.5 min per km” text on the website was explained away with, “The average time referenced relates to previous years when we had a single start and should have been removed from this statement.” The last single start event was in 2019 so the incorrect information has been hiding in plain sight for the last 5 years.

To my question, “Was there anyone on the TOM Board and / or organising committee that disagreed with the cutoff times?” I received an unequivocal, “NO”.

This is a very disappointing response. I find it hard to believe that anyone of sound mind outside of Two Oceans’ private paddle pool would think the marathon cutoff time was fair or appropriate.

## A Remedial Lesson in Calculating Cutoffs

Cutoffs can be counterintuitive (which is perhaps why so many organisers seem to struggle with them). The point of a cutoff is not to ensure that most people will finish if they reach the cutoff by a certain time but the opposite. You actually want to have a very low success rate (less than 5% and probably closer to 1%) of runners who go through the cutoff with less than 5 minutes to spare actually finishing the race before the final finish line cutoff.

I've used cricket as an analogy before. Most batting teams will lose when faced with a run rate of 25 per over for the last 5 overs of a game but very occasionally you'll see something special. Another analogy is the airline industry where they try to price tickets at just the right amount so that they have one unsold seat on the plane.

Comrades 2023 provided the perfect example of what occurs when the opposite happens – they managed to achieve about a 99.9% success rate of runners crossing the final Sherwood cutoff and finishing under 12 hours but had an empty finish straight in the last minute before the final gun fired to show for it.

**READ MORE:** [Where did all the runners go? The Comrades cutoff debacle.](#)

The full response to my question asking how the cutoffs were calculated was, "Cutoffs are calculated in a manner that allows runners a fair amount of time to complete the event based on the running conditions and elevation. At the same time, we have to be cognisant of the fact that certain aspects of the city need to be returned to normal functionality. Re-opening roads in the area from the climb up to Constantia Nek to the finish is dependant on runners reaching the M3 and moving through those points so that the infrastructure can be cleared. Hence a 10:46 cutoff at the 42km point to facilitate this process. It is also important to note that all the 7 hour pace busses were able to make this cutoff."

The primary reason for cutoffs is so that the roads can open to traffic again. The question then becomes how much of a chance do we give the runners? Adding another 10 minutes to a cutoff makes negligible difference to road opening time but can make a massive difference to thousands of runners.

As an empathic runner, I am personally heavily biased to giving every fellow athlete a chance at glory. Data that I've analysed from both Comrades and Two Oceans shows that there are a small number of runners that can achieve a pace below 6:00/km over the final split when they are under time pressure to make the finish. One can haggle over the exact timing of the final split but anything slower than 6:00/km is just plain wrong from a "fair chance" perspective.

From the data I've analysed from the 2019, 2022, 2023 and 2024 event there were 5 “non-suspicious split\*” Blue medallists who ran under 6:00/km. However, with the marathon cutoff times requiring a fastest pace of 7:30/km (2019, 2022 and 2023) and 8:11/km (in 2024), this has not put runners on “must run under 6:00/km to get a finish pressure”. If the final split required a much faster pace to the finish line for those who just made the marathon cutoff, I expect we'd see a lot more athletes achieving this feat.

\* There are 4 additional athletes running under 6:00/km but they are missing a 50km split time which I would regard as highly suspicious.

It's also important to note that when calculating the final split cutoff, the pace the runner took to get to that point is irrelevant. It is a very simple calculation, all that matters is whether the required pace to get from the split to the finish is humanly possible. What is humanly possible at the back of the pack might surprise many people – there is plenty of data to show that athletes at Comrades and Two Oceans can run their fastest split of the day over the final split when a medal is at stake.

If you want to ensure a close to 0% chance of finishing under 7-hours then you could use the fastest split from the race history which, since 2019 anyway, is 2024 winner Onalenna Khonkhobe who ran the final 14km in 44m09 at a pace of 3:09/km. Clearly, no Blue medallist will ever run as fast as that but a pace of around 5:00/km (1h10 to the finish) would be “almost impossible to achieve”. Anything above 6:00/km and you will be preventing a very small number of runners from earning their medal.

Two Oceans (2019-24): Men's Fastest Last 14km					Two Oceans (2019-24): Women's Fastest Last 14km				
@runningmann100 / www.runningmann.co.za					@runningmann100 / www.runningmann.co.za				
Rank	Name	Time	Pace	Year	Rank	Name	Time	Pace	Year
1	Onalenna Khonkhobe	44:09	03:09	2024	1	Gerda Steyn	51:16	03:40	2019
2	Lloyd Bosman	44:37	03:11	2024	2	Gerda Steyn	52:00	03:43	2024
3	Givemore Mudzinganyama	45:51	03:16	2024	3	Gerda Steyn	53:12	03:48	2023
4	Lebello Mopenyane	45:58	03:17	2024	4	Gerda Steyn	53:22	03:49	2022
5	Mphatso Nadolo	46:16	03:18	2024	5	Irvette Van Zyl	53:55	03:51	2024
6	Edndale Belachew	46:26	03:19	2022	6	Irvette Van Zyl	54:10	03:52	2022
7	Nkosikhona Mhlakwana	46:29	03:19	2022	7	Carla Natalia Molinaro	54:51	03:55	2023
8	Givemore Mudzinganyama	46:50	03:21	2023	8	Caitriona Jennings	55:56	04:00	2024
9	Nkosikhona Mhlakwana	47:10	03:22	2023	9	Kerry-Ann Marshall	57:06	04:05	2019
10	Dan Matshaliwe	47:12	03:22	2023	10	Ann Ashworth	57:21	04:06	2022
10	Lebenya Nkoka	47:12	03:22	2024	11	Ann Ashworth	57:27	04:06	2023
12	Degefa Lafebo	47:25	03:23	2024	12	Ntokozi Mkhize	57:44	04:07	2022
13	Bongmusa Mthembu	47:40	03:24	2019	13	Carla Natalia Molinaro	57:44	04:07	2024
14	Msawenkosi Mthalane	48:09	03:26	2023	14	Nobukhosi Tshuma	57:46	04:08	2023
15	Sithembiso Mqhele	48:30	03:28	2022	15	Mamorallo Tjoka	58:12	04:09	2019
16	Khoarahlane Seutoali	48:34	03:28	2024	16	Amelework Fikadu Boshu	58:28	04:11	2022
17	Sboniso Sikhakhane	48:55	03:30	2022	17	Jenet Mbhele	58:30	04:11	2024
18	Pule Sibeko	48:59	03:30	2024	18	Adele Broodryk	58:32	04:11	2022
19	Teboho Sello	49:01	03:30	2024	19	Adele Broodryk	58:51	04:12	2024
20	Sithembiso Mqhele	49:02	03:30	2023	20	Kathryn Van Meter	59:19	04:14	2019

One additional benefit with a late cutoff is that it gives those that do miss the final 7-hour gun the dignity of getting to cross the finish line even if they don't get a medal or an official finish (and they avoid the horrors of the bailer bus which we'll cover later). All the cutoff runners I've spoken to do not want easy concessions or special allowances, they just want a fair crack at crossing the finish line.



A final point here is that pacing bus calculations are very different to split cutoff time calculations. The pacers use some very complex algorithms taking into account the elevation and various other factors. Pacing buses plan for a close to 100% success rate with a (usually a 5-minute) buffer built into the pacing plan.

Cutoffs need brutally simple maths, focussing only on distance / time to the finish. The question that needs to be answered is, 'What cutoff time would mean that any runner just making the cutoff would have no realistic chance of making it to the finish in time?'

The good news is that Two Oceans has all this data at their disposal. The bad news is that no one ever looks at this data except for pesky social media bloggers.

## Playing with Time

The below table shows all the various marathon cutoff and pacing permutations based on the three different cutoff times appearing on the Two Oceans website, those from previous events and those that would give all runners a fair chance of finishing.

<b>TWO OCEANS 2024: Marathon Split Cutoffs Scenarios</b>								
<b>@runningmann100 / runningmann.com</b>								
<b>10.46am Time on Website</b>								
From	To	Time of Day	Running Time	Kilometres Done	Kilometres To Go	Split Distance	Slowest Pace to Get There	Pace to Finish in 6:59:59 (if you just make split)
Halfway	Marathon	10:46	05:07:00	42.20	13.80		7:16	8:11
Marathon	Finish Line	12:39	07:00:00	56.00	0	13.80	7:30	
<b>10.50am Time on Website</b>								
From	To	Time of Day	Running Time	Kilometres Done	Kilometres To Go	Split Distance	Slowest Pace to Get There	Pace to Finish in 6:59:59 (if you just make split)
Halfway	Marathon	10:50	05:11:00	42.20	13.80		7:22	7:54
Marathon	Finish Line	12:39	07:00:00	56.00	0	13.80	7:30	
<b>Even 7:30/km Pacing</b>								
From	To	Time of Day	Running Time	Kilometres Done	Kilometres To Go	Split Distance	Slowest Pace to Get There	Pace to Finish in 6:59:59 (if you just make split)
Halfway	Marathon	10:55	05:16:30	42.20	13.80		7:30	7:30
Marathon	Finish Line	12:39	07:00:00	56.00	0	13.80	7:30	
<b>2022 &amp; 2023 Events</b>								
From	To	Time of Day	Running Time	Kilometres Done	Kilometres To Go	Split Distance	Slowest Pace to Get There	Pace to Finish in 6:59:59 (if you just make split)
Halfway	Marathon	10:52	05:17:00	42.20	13.80		7:31	7:28
Marathon	Finish Line	12:35	07:00:00	56.00	0	13.80	7:30	
<b>2018 Event</b>								
From	To	Time of Day	Running Time	Kilometres Done	Kilometres To Go	Split Distance	Slowest Pace to Get There	Pace to Finish in 6:59:59 (if you just make split)
Halfway	Marathon	11:50	05:20:00	42.20	13.80		7:35	7:15
Marathon	Finish Line	13:30	07:00:00	56.00	0	13.80	7:30	
<b>"&lt;5% Chance" to Finish under 7 Hours</b>								
From	To	Time of Day	Running Time	Kilometres Done	Kilometres To Go	Split Distance	Slowest Pace to Get There	Pace to Finish in 6:59:59 (if you just make split)
Halfway	Marathon	11:20	05:41:00	42.20	13.80		8:05	5:43
Marathon	Finish Line	12:39	07:00:00	56.00	0	13.80	7:30	
<b>"&lt;1% Chance" to Finish under 7 Hours</b>								
From	To	Time of Day	Running Time	Kilometres Done	Kilometres To Go	Split Distance	Slowest Pace to Get There	Pace to Finish in 6:59:59 (if you just make split)
Halfway	Marathon	11:30	05:51:00	42.20	13.80		8:19	5:00
Marathon	Finish Line	12:39	07:00:00	56.00	0	13.80	7:30	

Of note is that both the listed 2024 cutoff times (10.46am and 10.50am) require athletes to run much faster to the marathon than the average pace needed for finish the race in under 7-hours. The 2024 marathon cutoff was the most stringent since the race moved to a 7-hour final cutoff.

The 2022 and 2023 marathon cutoff times were very close to requiring even pacing. The 2018 event is notable as there was a single start at 6.30am meaning roads were closed for about an hour longer than in post-Covid events.

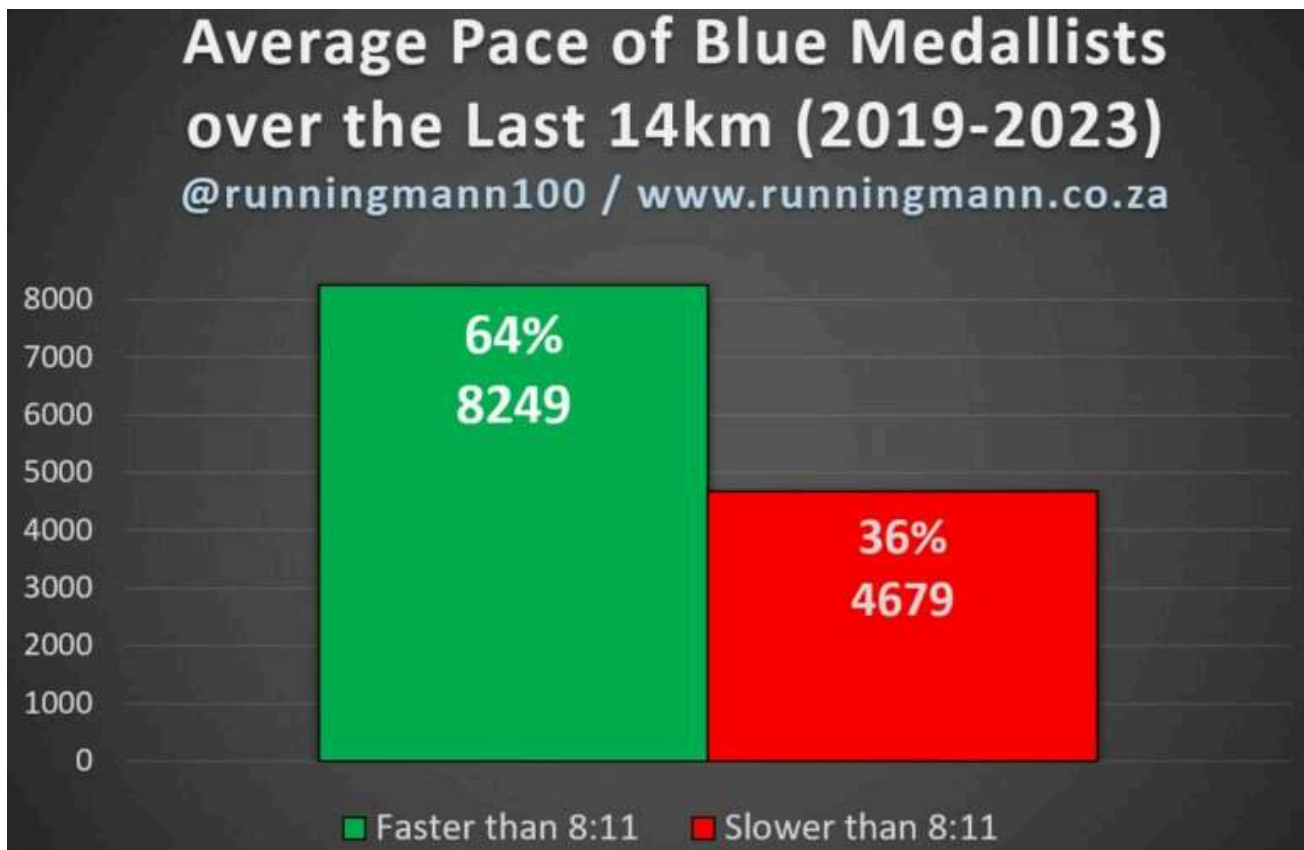
The <5% and <1% chance tables show what the marathon cutoff should ideally have been set at if you want to give all athletes a fair chance of finishing. To restate a previous point, those just making in-race cutoffs should have a very low probability of being able to finish the race in the remaining time.

## What do the Stats say?

If you made the 2024 marathon cutoff by 1 second from N batch, you would have run at an average pace of 7:16/km to get there and would need to run at a sedate average pace of 8:11/km to get home. Analysis from the 2019, 2022 and 2023 events shows most Blue medallists run faster than this “required run rate”.

Over the last three events, a massive 8,249 Blue medallists ran faster than 8:11/km over the last 14km. In fact only about a third (4,679) of the Blue medallists ran slower than 8:11/km from the marathon mark at the same three events. It should also be noted that the majority of these athletes were not under any time pressure to finish (if they were you could expect them to have run significantly faster).





The average pace that the same 13,000 Blue medallists covered the last 14km over the previous three events is exactly 8:00/km – well below the required 8:11/km pace in 2024. If one removes the runners finishing between 7h and 7h30 in 2019, the average pace for Blue medallists over the last 14km drops to 7:53/km which once again highlights just how non-sensical the 2024 marathon cutoff was.

Furthermore, there are a massive 4,427 Blue medallists that have run 7:30/km or faster (the average pace required for a 6:59:59 finish) over the last 14km from the last four events.

Pirates runner Kathryn Keeling in her debut ultra marathon at the 2023 event provides an example of what is possible. She went through the marathon mark in 5:16:50 (10 minutes after the 2024 cutoff) and then ran the final 14km at a pace of 7:18/km (significantly faster than her pace up to the marathon) for a 6:58:33 finish. No doubt Keeling is still regaling tales of this epic Two Oceans voyage at the Pirates club in Greenside but she would have been marooned in 2024.

## How Many Medals were Robbed?

There are some nuances with the TOM historic stats when trying to work out just how many runners were impacted and denied a likely medal. The post-Covid 2022 event is

not a good comparison year because it has a field about a third of the normal size and coming out of Covid many runners were not in their usual form. The last pre-Covid race in 2019 is also not a good cutoff comparison as this was the 50<sup>th</sup> running and a special 7h30 final cutoff was allowed (so you cannot compare like-for-like to 2024). The 2018 run would make an interesting comparison but the online results data is missing split times\*. Therefore, we can only make comparison with the 2023 event (which runs the risk of distorting projections as it is a sample of one).

*\* I have requested access to the full 2018 results extract but they have not been provided at the time of writing.*

In 2023 there were 55 runners who went through the marathon cutoff after 5h07 (i.e. the equivalent of 10.46am) and managed to finish the race under 7-hours. This number is lower than I was expecting to find but it is still a significant number of runners who would have been denied a legitimate finish if the illogical 2024 marathon cutoff time was applied in 2023. There was a 26% increase in the number of 2024 entrants so this would raise the predicted number of impacted runners to roughly 70.

55	2023 finishers whose marathon split was >5h07
70	Approximate 2024 impact with 26% larger field.

However, it should be noted that 320 athletes have run slower than 7:16/km to the marathon mark and finished under 7-hours in 2019- 2023, so the figure of 70 runners denied a medal may be too low.

## Gender Bias

There was much fanfare after the Annual General Meeting held on 28 September 2023 announcing a “Watershed moment for Two Oceans Marathon (TOM) NPC as first female Chair and Vice Chair are appointed to lead new board”.

It is therefore ironic that the most glaring (and definitely unintentional) impact is to prejudice female ultra runners. I have previously shown that women run much better

than men at Comrades. Comparing men and women from the same batch (i.e. and therefore ability because batches are determined by qualifying time), men start faster and perform better than women over the first third of the race.

However, women run faster than men over every split in the second half of Comrades. In addition women have a faster average finish time than men from the same batch. I do not have the capacity to perform the same detailed analysis on Two Oceans data but I would expect the same pattern to hold true – namely, that female runners pace themselves more sensibly and finish Two Oceans much faster than men.

**READ MORE:** [Run Like a Girl \(A Guide to Optimal Pacing at the Comrades Marathon\)](#)

What I can easily analyse is the gender impact at the marathon cutoff and here the results are damning. The percentage of female runners in the Two Oceans Ultra is just under 30% of the entrants. From the results there were 205 runners who made the 28km split but have no marathon split – this means that they were definitely disappeared from the race somewhere between halfway and the marathon mark: 114 (56%) of these were male and 91 (44%) female. Adjusting for the male/female entrant ratio means that proportionally 65% of those seemingly cutoff at the marathon mark were female (and you were twice as likely to be cut at the marathon if you are female).



There were more than the 205 runners stated above who were impacted by the marathon cutoff. Unfortunately the data is not 100% clean as someone turned off the timing recorders for a short period as the marathon cutoff was implemented. Analysis is further complicated by the wave starts as I only have running time and not time of day in my extract. I also do not have the starting batch of the runners. However, in addition to the 205 runners listed above, there were 190 runners who had a marathon split of 5h07 and above\*.

*\* Some of these runners may we have started in an earlier than N batch and therefore legitimately went through the marathon cutoff before the gates were closed, others were those who got cut at the marathon mark and/or managed to escape and continue running.*

Here the breakdown of the 190 runners is similar to those definitely cut: 108 male (57%) and 82 female (43%). Once again, with only 30% of the field being female this means that the strict marathon cutoff appears to have impacted female runners twice as much as men. It is difficult to draw definitive conclusions from this subset of data as it's not clear who was actually impacted by the cutoff and prevented from continuing versus those that were able to carry on running. In addition, the bailer buses drove the running route so some of those on the buses recorded a 50k split time which makes the data even messier.

However, these figures do enable calculating the total possible number of runners impacted by the marathon cutoff: 205 definitely cut + 190 runners with a marathon split slower than 5h07 = 395 athletes. Bearing in mind that there would be some athletes who are genuinely out for the count at the marathon mark, my best guess would be that it's around the 200 – 250 mark (and the earlier figure of “70 athletes robbed of a medal” may be too low).

One final conclusive stat is that 39 runners (22 male and 17 female) did go through the marathon mark over 5h07 and finished under 7-hours in 2024. How many of these came from earlier batches and made the actual cutoff and how many snuck around the fences is unclear. However, I do have 100% confirmation that one runner who was stopped at the marathon mark was able to secure a 6h55 finish despite losing many minutes stuck behind the cutoff gates.

## Cash Cows

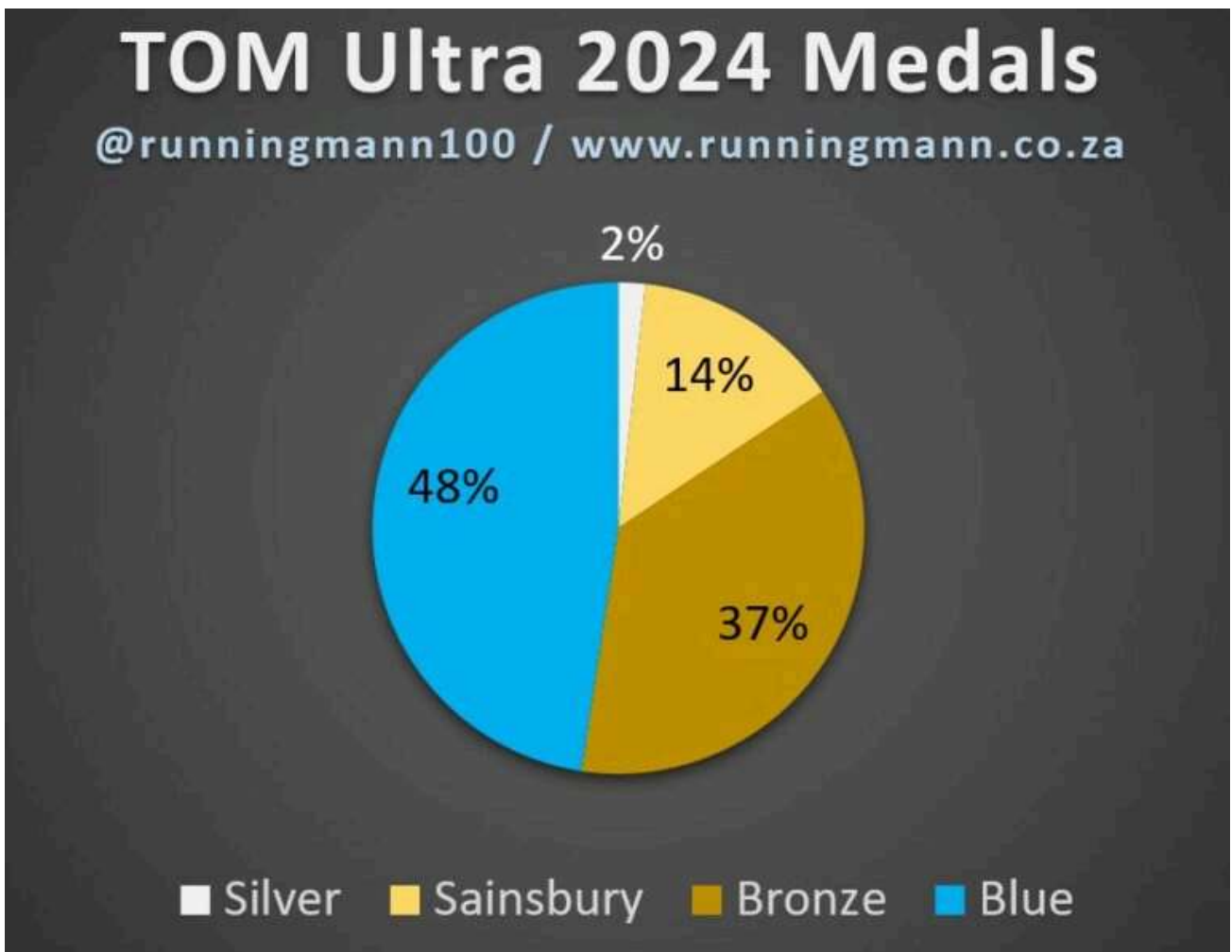


## Two Oceans Ultra: Finishers by Medal

@runningmann100 / runningmann.com

	2019	2022	2023	2024
Silver	1%	3%	2%	2%
Sainsbury	10%	15%	13%	14%
Bronze	29%	35%	36%	37%
Blue	59%	46%	49%	48%

Blue medallists are the cash cows of the Two Oceans Marathon. Usually, just under 50% of the ultra finishers complete the race between 6 and 7 hours. In 2023, it was 49% and in 2024, 48% of finishers earned a Blue medal. The 2019 event, which had a special 7h30 cutoff for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, had a massive 60% of the field earning Blue.



Slower runners bring in the majority of the entry income (especially if you add the entries that are paid for but not fulfilled due to entrants not running a fast enough

qualifying marathon). Whilst Blue medallists are the backbone of Two Oceans, they seem to be treated as second rate citizens by the current organisers when it comes to sensible race day decisions to provide the best opportunity to earn a medal.



*When you're a cash cow you get herded into a cattle pen.*

## One Last Stat to Close the Case

Joseph Stalin is attributed with saying, "One death is a tragedy, a million deaths a statistic." I thought I'd conclude this section on statistics with one example of a tragedy avoided.

Can a runner go through the marathon mark much slower than 5h07 and still finish comfortably under 7-hours? Sometimes it's best to use the data from one runner to illustrate a point, in this case let's look at the race history of TOM Race Director Hilton Kearns.

Event	Date	Race	Club	Start	10-18 km	28 km	42 km	50 km	Finish
TOM	2015/04/04	Ultra	CELTIC	00:05:57		03:18:30	05:13:41	06:16:08	06:55:55

*Two Oceans Race Director, Hilton Kearns', debut ultra splits from the 2015 event. Luckily he benefitted from a sensible marathon cutoff.*

Kearns has completed three Two Oceans ultras between 2015 and 2018. Luckily, Kearns was the beneficiary of a sensible marathon cutoff at his debut ultra in 2015 where he went through the marathon mark in 5:13:41 (almost 7 minutes slower than the

2024 cutoff) and finished in 6:55:55. It's a pity the same fair chance was not available to 2024 participants.

Case closed.

## Pressure from the City

As previously stated, the primary reason for on route cutoffs is so that the roads can be reopened to regular traffic again. Relations between the City of Cape Town (CoTC) and TOM were severely strained after the 2019 event when the organisers allowed far more entrants to participate than they had agreed with the City's safety officers. TOM further conceded that, "Our hosting a 2 day scenario on Easter weekend [in 2022] did not help to reconcile this relationship."

The wave starts, which most assume is a legacy of Covid restrictions, are in fact prescribed but CoCT as a safety precaution so that emergency vehicles are able to get to runners in need of medical attention.

The unfortunate reality of the wave starts is that the slower runner now faces double jeopardy. They start last because they have the slowest qualification times but also have the least amount of time to make each cutoff. Whilst only those who finish under 7 hours from gun to mat receive an official finish, someone in A batch had 5h31 to make the marathon cutoff whereas N batch had just 5h07 – 24 minutes fewer. A batch runners don't need the extra time, many N batch runners do.

I would expect that your stereotypical ill-informed civil service bureaucrat would think nothing of asking for a 10.46am cutoff. This is where your Board and Race Director need to come in to fight for their runners. In terms of Two Oceans ultras, the Board is relatively inexperienced with only half having run the Ultra and the Chair and Vice Chair only having 7 half marathons between them\*. One wonders if this inexperience leads to acquiescing to illogical cutoff times?

*\*I do want to put a disclaimer on this. There is no pre-requisite for having run a race to be a good race organiser (and no doubt the chair and vice chair have done valuable work to be elected into their positions) but the question does need to be asked. There are major differences between organising a major half marathons and the second largest ultra marathon in the world.*

Two Oceans states that the event brings R672 million per annum into the local economy – that should be more than enough to offset the inconvenience of having the

roads closed for another 10 to 20 minutes. Anyone who is unable to negotiate conditions favourable (or just sensible) for their runners on this basis, especially in an election year\*, has no business in being involved with the organisation of a race of this stature.

\* A case in point is the return of the City to City 50k Ultra Marathon in Gauteng after a long absence. The ANC basically used this as part of their election campaign handing out food parcels to the runners along the route. It was the most service delivery Gauteng has seen in a couple of decades.

**#OMTOMRules**

**OMTOMRule 72:**

**The cut-off time for the 56km Ultra Marathon is at 13h30 (7 hours). Athletes who have not reached the following marks in the times specified will not be allowed to continue, and will be transported back to the finish:**

**A: 28km at 10h00 - Halfway, Noordhoek Main Road.**

**B: 42.2km at 11h50 - Outside Four Season's Guest farm, Hout Bay Main Road**

I also wonder whether the sins of past race organisers have led to a “Yes baas” mentality amongst the current TOM Board when it comes to negotiations with CoCT. As a point of comparison and to close off the “roads must be opened” debate we can look at the 2018 event. In that year ultra runners had a full 5h20 to cross the marathon mark and the final cutoff gun fired at 13.30pm – resulting in a full hour of additional road closures when compared to 2024.

## The TOM NPC Board of Directors





*TOM NPC BOARD 2023 FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Mr. Angelo Kriger, Mr. Ian McDonald, Mr. Graham Bentz, Mr. Garth Schreiner (Chair of the finance sub-committee), Ms. Ilhaam Saban, Ms. Phumzile Mlotshwa, Ms. Ilse De Wet (Chairperson), Ms Liezel Short (Vice Chairperson), Ms Antoinette Cavanagh, Mr Ashraf Orrie, Mr. Allan Ryninks, Mr William Swartbooi. (picture from TOM website)*

The TOM NPC has 12 Directors that comprise:

Four representatives from Celtic Harriers (as elected by the Club), four representatives from Western Province Athletics (as elected by WPA) and four Ordinary Members (as elected by the Ordinary Members).

These members serve for a two-year cycle, alternating in order for six members to remain constant.

The current board, together with the number of TOM ultra and half marathons completed (before the 2024 event) is listed below:

<b>Two Oceans NPC Board of Directors</b>				
<b>www.runningmann.com / @runningmann100</b>				
<b>Category</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Club</b>	<b>Ultras</b>	<b>Halves</b>
<b>Celtic Harriers</b>	Ms. Ilse De Wet (Chair)	Celtic Harries	0	3
	Mr. Angelo Kriger	Celtic Harries	0	12
	Mr. Ian McDonald	Celtic Harries	30	3
	Ms. Phumizile Mlotshwa	Celtic Harries	0	2
<b>WPA</b>	Mr. Graham Bentz	Pinelands	13	0
	Mr. Allan Ryninks	Wild Runners	33	0
	Mr. Garth Schreiner	Not a club member	0	0
	Mr. William Swartbooi	Eastern Kraaifontein	6	8
<b>Ordinary Members</b>	Ms. Elizabeth Short (Vice Chair)	SATORI	0	4
	Ms. Ilhaam Saban	Ommiedraai	1	5
	Ms. Antoinette Cavanagh	Not a club member	0	4
	Mr. Ashraf Orrie	Brimstone ltheke	7	1

Only half of the current board have run the ultra marathon and just three have an ultra Blue Number Club number (there is one member with a half marathon Blue Number).

It is important to note that the Board is made up of volunteers (as opposed to the positions like TOM Race Director and Comms Manager which are full time paid positions).

Like in any team, I am sure that there are some people who are doing a fantastic job, some an average job and some who are just along for the ride. However, these are the people who are responsible for lifting Two Oceans back from the level of mediocrity experienced in recent years to a truly world class event. It a tough job but it's the one they've signed up for and they should be held accountable for it.

## Other Delays on the Road

The 2024 water tables were the worst organised from the 19 Two Oceans ultras that I've run. I am fully supportive of reduced or plastic free support tables for runners at my pace. However, the support tables (especially those in the first two-thirds of the race) were not able to handle the volume of arriving runners. This results in stop-and-wait delays of 30 to 60 seconds at each table to get some water. I expect the tables would have cost most slower runners 5 to 10 minutes of running time.

Satirically speaking, perhaps this is why there were only tables every 4-5km this year instead of every 2-3km in previous years – so that runners were only slowed down half as much at the water tables. However, on a serious note, the table situation would have resulted in medical issues on a hot day.

Many runners also complained of losing time at the stop-and-go rope at Sun Valley. This is normal practice and has been present at TOM for many years to allow cars to pass on the busy intersection but it results in the loss of another couple of minutes in the first half of the race. Combine this with the time lost at the tables and you really need to be generous with your split cutoffs.

## Pre-Race Pandemonium

I have heard from multiple well-placed sources that the organisers were “spinning” in the weeks ahead of the run. I personally could not get a reply from the dedicated media mailbox nor from the fulltime comms manager to my April marathons article (where I had done all the donkey work and was just asking for confirmation of information).

A lack of response to queries has been a constant complaint from TOM runners online. Runners who put their entries up for substitution in February have still not been refunded. Likewise, enquiries from these runners to any of the official channels hit radio silence.



**Jacqui Garbers**

Top contributor · 3 d · 🗨️



Asking for some advice please. Please let me know how I can get my refund back from [Two Oceans Marathon](#) for my half marathon substitution. I am feeling rather helpless and wonder if I will ever see the money again. Sent an email with all the required info and document with bank details on 22 February. In the substitution information it said 3 weeks for refunds. This is now 2 months and the race is over. I sent a follow up email last week Monday and have had no response. Has anyone else experienced this? Thanks





Perhaps the best illustration of just what a shambles the TOM communication engine was in the build up to the 2024 event is the post below from David Heyneke who has been piloting his visually impaired wife, Lynda, at the Two Oceans half marathon for the last decade. David followed the normal entry procedure for disabled runners and indicated that they were entering as a visually impaired runner and guide. To their dismay, they noticed that they were allocated different starting batches. David tried to sort this issue out over a couple of weeks of continual emails – he was even told that “the blind runner can run slower” at the start so that David could catch up to her quickly once his batch started. You can’t make this stuff up, imagine telling a blind runner and her guide to coordinate plans to meet up along the route amongst 16,000 other runners?

**David Heyneke**

5 April at 19:08 · 🌐



New low for Two Oceans when claiming to be inclusive.

On entry form ask if runner has disability, but ignore it when seeding.

A blind runner with a permanent blue number placed in a different seeding pen than her guide, even after both provided all the information on the entry form about this.

Raised this with Two Oceans since 20 March when seedings came out and given many undertakings that would be sorted.

All attempts to have it resolved met with lack of understanding of what the impact of their decision has on the blind runner. From blaming the IT system to even suggesting that the blind runner run slower so that her guide can catch up from his pen or that he and she start in different pens but try to meet up the back of hers and front of his in the dark, crowded pens, after trying to convince a volunteer Marshall to ignore their seedings.

The response from the Two Oceans Board and race office to understand what it is to run as a blind runner astounded me today.

It is hard for a runner with a disability to keep fighting just to participate in a race and to feel like they are burden and irritation.


[Two Oceans Marathon](#)  
[Modern Athlete Magazine](#)  
[The Running Mann](#)

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34 comments

Despite engaging with a current TOM board member, it was only after David Heyneke took to social media that he got any traction. The TOM Vice Chair, Liezel Short, was noticeably present and proactive on social media ahead of the event and stepped in to sort the issue out. The Heyneke’s were able to start at the front of the field with the wheelchair athletes for a special race day experience. It is just a pity that runners need to take to social media to get basic, fundamental, commonsense issues addressed.

Amongst all this chaos, it is no wonder that the cutoffs were a stuff up. However, trying to blame the runners for not reading the fine print rather than the organisers taking accountability for their own shortcomings is a disgusting abdication of responsibility.



**56KM CUT-OFFS**

Cut-off is 7 hours batch gun to mat, with the final cut-off time to be determined by the start time of the last batch.

Runners who have not reached the following marks in the times specified will not be allowed to continue

- 25km Ultra cut-off at Sun Valley, Corsair Way: 8.35 AM
- 28km Ultra cut-off at Noordhoek Main Road: 9.09 AM
- 42.2km Ultra cut-off (outside the Oranje Mor Primary School on the right): 10.46 AM
- Finish: 12.39 AM

Not to get to “technical” but there were some “attention” to detail issues at TOM 2024. 26,000 shirts with a spelling mistake and, according to the digimag, all runners had an extra 12 hours to finish the race at 12.39 AM (i.e. just after midnight).

## Missing Boards

What is clear is that most of the runners were expecting a 10.50am cutoff as were the marshals and officials stationed around the marathon cutoff point. Multiple eyewitness reports state that the officials were excitedly cheering and cajoling the mass of runners towards the marathon cutoff and were as surprised as everyone else when the gates closed ‘early’.

Perhaps the expectation was that the race officials should also have read the digimag from cover to cover before the race?

There is normally a big board 1km before the marathon cutoff stating “1km to go” with the cutoff time as well as a clock showing the race time – none of these were present in 2024. A 10.46am cutoff would never be right from a pacing perspective but at least having the board there as it was in previous years would have avoided all the confusion and angst.

I did manage to get a concession from TOM on this score, “These [the cutoff warning boards and timing clocks] have not been used since the 2022 event. We do need to re-introduce this.”



*How it's done: Even in Japanese the Tokyo cutoffs are clearer than those at Two Oceans (photo credit Gabi Runs)*

## What Actually Happened at the Marathon Mark

As runners approached the marathon mark, marshals and race officials were shouting encouragement and counting down the remaining time, “Come on. Five minutes to go!”, “You can do it, just four minutes left!”. And then to everyone’s horror, a gunshot rang out and the gates were slammed shut.



Here's an eyewitness account from an eight-times TOM ultra finisher, "I never even thought of missing the cut-off. I have never missed one before. The first time the cut-off came to mind was when I was 100m away from the marathon mark and a guy on a bicycle came past shouting to the runners that we have 4 minutes to cut-off. I did not panic as I was now less than 100m away, but when I got into the chute at 42km, they started closing the gates and I was the second person to be cut-off. I immediately asked why they closed the gates early, and the person just ignored me and the other lady that was cut-off first. As the other runners approached, we all had the same question, WHY DID THEY CLOSE THE GATES EARLY???"

Sarah Thom (who secured a comfortable 6h56 finish) was one of the last runners through the gate (in fact she reported that "it closed on her bum"). Her splits show the time of day being 10.46:58am which confirms the precise time that the marathon cutoff was enforced\* (assuming that the clocks were correctly calibrated).

*\* Some runners have suggested that the gun was fired much earlier than 10.48am but I have found no evidence to support this.*

In the build-up and execution of the cutoff, multiple runners and spectators also observed heated discussions between officials at the marathon mark as to what the correct cutoff time was. When the trigger was eventually pulled a few seconds before 10.47am, it left scores of runners stranded behind the cold metal cattle pens.

Subsequently, it has emerged that the 'correct' cutoff time according to TOM was in fact 10.46am (as per the post-race cutoff announcement). We have established earlier in this article that this time makes no logical sense, but that is the time that the Joint Operations Centre (JOC) in Tygerburg was working on. It is important to note that the JOC is the highest race day authority and, as they may have big picture information that those on the ground do not have, instructions from them have to be followed. Anyone ignoring or overruling a direct instruction from the JOC can find themselves in serious trouble (especially if there is a subsequent incident, accident or death).

There are a couple of videos of the cutoff showing runners pleading for mercy. You can hear one runner arguing, "The cutoff is usually 5h17?" Another video shows runners chanting, "We were on time! We were on time!" What is noticeable in the videos is that these runners still look like they are alert, energetic and in good shape to complete the remaining 14km with relative ease. In boxing terms, they have their gloves up and are ready to punch their way up Constantia Nek but the referee has stopped the fight too early.

## 2024 Two Oceans Ultra Marathon cutoffs



## 2024 Two Oceans Ultra Marathon cutoffs



Whilst the post-race cutoff explanation claimed, “runners proceeded to jump the fence and continued running”, multiple eyewitnesses have refuted that any fence jumping\* occurred, there were some runners who managed to escape the kraal by simply going around the fencing. These runners were sworn at, threatened with disqualification, banning and having their license numbers removed.

*\* Although most of the runners were indeed hopping mad.*

Less bold runners accepted their fate and headed to the bailer buses. After about 20 minutes they were told that they could restart the race. A lot of runners assumed that

they would have still have to finish under 7 hours and, having lost so much time, decided to stay on the bus.

Petrus Campher, a WPA official, appears to have taken the initiative to allow the cutoff runners to start running again. According to a runner who restarted,

“The instruction given was that:

- We go back to the 42.2km mark
- Save the time and kms recorded on our watch
- Start a new race
- They will give us two hours or so (Can't remember the exact time) to complete the remaining 14km
- Then He said we should start at 11:07 [This would be about 20 minutes after the original cutoff]
- Then we started”

### 2024 Two Oceans Ultra Marathon cutoffs - restart



After all the emotional distress and having cooled down for 20 minutes, a group of aspirant Two Oceans medallists headed up Constantia Nek, a wild mood swing of a climb (215m elevation gain over 4km) and the toughest section of the route.

I was initially very sympathetic to the initiative shown by Petrus Campher to resolve a bad situation and proactively prevent controversy for the race by allowing runners to continue. However, it was subsequently clarified that Campher received a direct instruction over the radio from the JOC that the gates should not be reopened and he

overruled this instruction which unfortunately cannot be condoned. However, Campher should never have been placed in this position in the first place if the race day instructions were clear and the cutoff time was sensible.

## What Actually Happened at the top of Constantia Nek

Directly after the gate was opened by Petrus Campher, the JOC gave the instruction to cutoff the runners at the top of Constantia Nek. This might seem harsh but it is the correct call from a safety perspective. If a runner were to get knocked over and killed because the roads were open to traffic again or someone collapses from dehydration because the support tables have been packed away, then that is a major issue. The JOC's primary concern is safety and disaster management and, however distasteful the outcome, the call they made was the correct one.

The 'officials' at the marathon cutoff comprise a combination of WPA officials and staff from the events company Itheke. Following the instructions of the JOC, the officials drove to the top of the Nek and created an impromptu road closure by dismantling the railings from the Hollywood Bets support table that was positioned there.

So now you've got three groups of runners submitting the Nek – those who've narrowly made the marathon cutoff legitimately, those who've missed the cutoff and managed to escape and carried on running and those who've restarted after a 20-minute delay at the cutoff.

The unfortunate reality is that, in their zeal to implement the JOC's orders, the officials closed Constantia Nek before some of the runners who had legitimately made the marathon cutoff were able to pass. You could say that the overeager officials caught some dolphins in their gillnets. This is another organisational blunder that needs to be acknowledged and accounted for.

A runner who made the marathon cutoff with a few seconds to spare spoke about finding her path blocked, "I immediately asked what is happening here as we need to keep moving! All I got was we should have been cut-off at 42.2kms and cannot continue. I was totally blown away. How was it that I made it through the gun and the closing of the gate and then to get told no sorry you can't continue?"



This runner, who was diagnosed with Stage 2 breast cancer in June 2023 and had a major operation a few months later in August, managed to plot an escape, “After about 10 to 12 minutes of fighting and getting no clear answers out of anyone, the spectators encouraged us to go round them. And that’s exactly what I did, as well as a few other runners in tow. I jumped over the sidewalks, through the spectators, through the police cars and policemen and managed to find my way back onto the road. I even went back up the hill to make sure there was no finish time stand set-up as I didn’t want to miss anything and then get disqualified later for not checking in.” This dolphin escaped the cruel gillnets cast at the top of Constantia Nek but unfortunately the time lost in the fiasco meant that her voyage ended as an unofficial finisher – narrowly missing a sub-7-hour finish.

However, there was still plenty of fight in our heroic lady, “Once I had finished, I immediately asked for a manager as I wanted an explanation. I made my way to the information tent and the staff working there contacted Hilton [Kearns], the race director. I told Hilton my story and he said he was very much unaware of the cut-off and will definitely look into it from their side. I said that would be great. I then said I plan to run the half the next day and could I pop in after that. He said that is perfect and he will look out for me.”

Despite her best efforts to phone and track Hilton Kearns down after the half marathon\* she was not successful and still has not personally heard back from anyone at TOM.

*\* Sadly, there was another death at the half marathon and it is likely that the race director was dealing with this tragedy.*

## Bailer Bus Horror

Based on the stories I received from runners, the bailer bus is to be avoided at all costs. Four buses were filled with disappointed runners who’d just run a marathon for no reward.

Two Oceans is an AIMS Gold level event. World Athletics label event criteria include the suggestion that bailer buses provide blankets, a basic first aid kit, a qualified first aider, a cell phone that allows those on the bus to make contact with supporters, water, hydration and energy / food. Race numbers should also be immediately recorded and

the app updated so that everyone knows exactly where their runners are. What were conditions like on the buses? Here's an eyewitness account:

"Firstly, and of most concern to me is that there was no water/Coke/Powerade whatsoever at the cut-off point or on the bus. We'd just run a marathon." Another runner who was on one of the buses was a medical doctor. I asked whether the lack of water was negligent and could have resulted in serious medical issues – our disappointed doctor agreed.

"Secondly, the bus trip back took well over two hours. We literally followed behind the last runner." From a logistics point of view, the marathon mark does not make sense for a cutoff as there are no access points. It is also unclear why the bus did not detour at the top of Constantia Nek to avoid the race route.

"Thirdly, we (and 3 other buses) drove straight past the finish and were then dropped off in the most obscure place 3km from the finish. We then had to walk back to UCT with no official guidance. I arrived on the field with the club tents and then had to borrow phones again to contact the people meeting me at the finish and try find them. Long story short, it took us 3hrs and a walk to get back to UCT and then, only if we had a club tent or supporters could we get our first drink."

Whilst the TOM cutoff explanation inferred that digimags are the internationally recognised method of communicating last minute race condition changes to runners, they seem oblivious to the international protocols on immediate communication when runners withdraw from the race and the apprehension this can cause. At a minimum, runners entering a bailer bus should have their numbers recorded and their status updated on the app or you place the family of cutoff runners under undue stress and anxiety.

Julian and Ruth Matthews spent over £4,000 (R100,000) on a holiday centred around the Two Oceans event. Julian secured a 6h05 finish but Ruth was not so lucky and got caught up in the cutoff debacle, eventually ending up in a bailer bus at the top of Constantia Nek. Julian waited eagerly on the finish straight hoping his wife would pop around the corner as time ticked by. On the app it appeared that she was still at the 42km mark, "I had no idea what had happened to her. Will she ever arrive? I waited an hour after the final gun and then went back to our guest house but she wasn't there."

# The Last Word from a Debut Ultra Runner

I have interacted with about 40 runners directly impacted by the marathon cutoff. Whilst there were runners of all experience levels impacted, I did get a high proportion of novice Two Oceans Ultra runners sharing their stories with me.

I have provided a dump of many of these stories in a standalone article but I thought there was one additional story worth sharing.

**READ MORE:** [Two Oceans Ultra Marathon Cutoffs: Unedited Runner Stories](#)

This novice runner saved for several months to afford the R32k cost for her and her husband to travel from Johannesburg to the Cape Town for Two Oceans weekend. She was a dedicated attendee of her club's long runs and mid-week training sessions. After running her first half marathon at Two Oceans nine years ago she was looking forward to doing her first ever ultra at the same event. She told me that she, "Had a great run – with not even a blister to report. Everything felt good, I was following my watch, I was on target and I knew I could make it."

This runner took the opportunity to chat to all the more experienced runners at her club, "From preparation, to recovering from injury, to the race itself – I followed all the advice that I was given." She admitted that there was just one piece of advice she ignored, "The only advice I didn't follow was quite a few people said to me 'Don't do Oceans as your first ultra because the organisation is shocking'. I wish I had listened because you can't get a first ultra back."

She concluded, "If you are a back of the pack runner you are just going to be susceptible to all this crap and it's just not worth it. I am very sad and I will advise against any runner doing Oceans as their first ultra. I am so disillusioned by it all. I hope that someone within the Two Oceans organisation starts to show a conscience."

## Afterword: What Can You Do?

Feel strongly about the future of Two Oceans? Here are some practical ideas that you can implement:

- Hold the TOM NPC Chair, Vice Chair and Race Director to account with a sensible, **civil** email voicing your concerns and issues.
  - The stated email to use is [info@twooceansmarathon.org.za](mailto:info@twooceansmarathon.org.za)
  - Historically, the above email has had a very low response rate. I removed the [@twooceansmarathon.org.za](mailto:@twooceansmarathon.org.za) email addresses of the Chair, Vice Chair and Race Director on their request but am happy to provide them to anyone who struggles to get a response.
- Clubs with a large amount of TOM participants can send a formal communication to Two Oceans from the running club.
  - Cape clubs may want to consider nominating a club member with the time, passion and skills to stand for the board.
- Attend the TOM AGM (which should be held in September and does allow for remote attendance and proxy voting).
  - If you are a Blue Number holder, ensure that you register to become a member (it's free).
- If you believe you have the time and the skills to make a difference, stand for the TOM Board. Last year there were just four nominations for three available positions.
- Hold the elected boards members to account. They run amongst us. Many runners will know them personally, especially those in the Western Cape. Have a frank but polite conversation if you think they're making incorrect decisions and letting standards slide.
- I would never recommend boycotting a race (I think in the long run it is counterproductive) but if you're a slower runner, I would wait until the 2025 cutoffs times are confirmed (or a firm commitment to ensure that they are sensible is provided) before parting with your money and entering.
- Contact your local race referee and provincial athletics administrators if you feel that any race is violating the high standards laid out in the ASA rule book. This will hopefully get them to focus on improving the quality and safety at road races rather than focussing on disqualifying people for wearing branded clothing and sewing badges on their vests.

[The list of original questions I sent to the TOM Board and answers provided are provided below:](#)

[TTOM2024\\_Stuart\\_Mann\\_Qs](#)

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