



THE 2012 GAMES, SA STYLE

Richard Asher redesigns the Olympic Marathon route to suit the South African contingent ...



When the route for the Olympic marathon was unveiled, it was greeted by an outcry. The course features multiple laps around central London, completely ignoring the East End, home of the Olympic Stadium and other major venues.

For Eastenders (the townsfolk, not the soap opera), it was a slap in the face. Some suggested the organisers were ashamed of the east; there was talk of legal action. The whole thing forced London 2012 Organising Committee Chairman Sebastian Coe into rather a lot of sheepishness.

Since the route is such a bone of contention for Londoners, we at *Road to London* would like to step in and propose our own Olympic marathon course. A proudly South African one, which any self-respecting London Saffa could run backwards, with their eyes shut, and carrying 2.5kg of Iwisa. We believe our fantasy route will inspire our top distance runners to a sweep of the medals, and encourage the rest of London's vast South African community to join in and make up the numbers.

Let's fire the starting gun in front of Buckingham Palace, just as the real marathon will do. Conveniently, the real route will head straight to Trafalgar Square and swing past South Africa House. We're happy with that. High Commissioner Skweyiya will doubtless have a *tjop 'n dop* going on the balcony, and Leon Schuster songs blaring out from the speakers. Thus

boosted, we'll stick with the real route as it winds back to Westminster. After all, it would be rude to bypass Madiba and Jan Smuts, whose statues stand in Parliament Square. As we all know, Madiba Magic is way better than those performance-enhancing drugs some countries favour.

At this point, the field peels off the real-life route and heads along the Thames. It will flood into Putney, a thriving South African colony on the

south bank. Onward they will pound, Southfields the next port of call, as the race heads deeper into the Saffa Triangle. It's a good place for the runners to stop in at one of London's flagship South African shops. Game sachets would be the purchase of choice for the serious athletes, but *droëwors* and *creme soda* may also sell out fast ...

Then it's past the All England Lawn Tennis Club, where great South African

memories are, we must admit, a little thin on the ground. But now that we're coming into Wimbledon, the green and gold fans will be in force to cheer on the competitors. The odd rogue Aussie may sneak in wearing the same colours, but they'll be easy to spot by their enormously swollen heads.

Those in need of a serious break will find Wimbledon a fine place to crash on someone's sofa for a mid-race siesta. As the old proverb goes, you're not South African if you don't know someone in Wimbledon. And if you haven't camped on a sofa there, you haven't lived.

From here the route swings west, across the Womble-infested Wimbledon Common and into deer-infested Richmond Park. Wild animals safely negotiated, it's back over the Thames and past the squad's training facility at St Mary's University in Twickenham. The sight of the practice track will remind the front-runners of all the work they've put in, and give them a final spur to the finish.

That conclusion will be at Twickenham Stadium, scene of 53-3 (if you've forgotten it, lucky you) and other ugly episodes in South African rugby history. What better motivation for a South African athlete than the prospect of completing a victory in England's own rugby fortress?

Problem solved, Mr Coe? <

The Mall, which forms part of the 2012 London Olympic marathon route



Asher is an uber-patriotic UK-based sports journalist with a burning desire to shoot a level-par round of golf and to see the Boks thrash the All Blacks by 30 points in a Test match.