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Photo by Rich Morallo.
Waiting for the LA Marathon to begin are, from left, Manuel Duarte, Division 7; Luis Diaz, Division 18; and Jaumen Ramos, Division 1.

Three Friends Pushed Each Other to Finish LA Marathon

By RICH MORALLO

(March 12, 2004) Metro bus operators Luis Diaz, Jaumen Ramos and Manuel Duarte follow assigned bus routes as they transport thousands of passengers every week along Los Angeles streets.

Diaz drives Line 204 on Vermont Avenue; Duarte, Line 2 on Sunset Boulevard and Line 30 on Pico Boulevard. Ramos, on the extra board, may drive any of several other Metro Bus lines.

As marathoners, the three followed their own instincts, strategies and hearts as they pounded those same Los Angeles street pavements for 26.2 miles during Sunday's 19th Los Angeles Marathon.

Eager and fresh, Diaz of Division 18, Ramos of Division 1 and Duarte of Division 7 smiled for the camera near the Los Angeles Library just before the race start.

The youngest of the three at 38 years old, and the fastest, Ramos expected a challenging day.

"I normally reach my wall at the 25th mile, and it's awful," he says, referring to the part of the race where a runner is most likely to give up.

Hitting the wall

"I reach my wall after 20 miles," grinned Duarte, 43, who had run in all of the 18 previous Marathons, and introduced Diaz, also 43, to long

distance running five years ago.

The 90-degree weather slowed the trio, who drifted apart from one another in the crowd of 23,000 other runners during the next two hours.

"At the 13th mile, I met one of my regular running partners, Jose Lopez from Division 10," Diaz says. "All I could think of was keeping my goal pace, a nine-minute mile." He finished in four hours, 40 seconds.

Duarte, who had trained for four months, wanted to finish before the four hour, 30-second mark.

"But even with good preparation, sometimes circumstances during the day of the race and the weather can change everything," he reflected, after crossing the line at 5:53.

Ramos finished ahead of his fellow operators at 3:53. "I kept on thinking about those pictures before the race started and, because we poised for them, I knew I had better finish the marathon."

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