Sport tourism are often viewed as appropriate means to market and promote the characteristics of a destination and build community (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2010; Dwyer & Fredline, 2008; Misener & Mason, 2006). They often showcase the natural, cultural, and historical characteristics of destinations. This is especially true of marathons and bicycle races where the races occur on streets and roadways (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2010; Hinch & Higham, 2004). Understanding the role of a destination’s attributes in addition to other factors that influence active sport tourists to engage in sport tourism is explored here, through an examination of the perceptions, opinions, and desired travel outcomes of participants in the 2007 Melissa’s Road Race, a 3000+ participant running event. The event was comprised of a 10 km run and a 22 km half marathon, a dinner, and entertainment. Through an examination of these participants this presentation will contribute to scholarly understanding of active sport tourists who are non-elite runners participating in a reoccurring small-scale sporting event. Scholars and practitioners have called for further research that will expand our understanding of small-scale sporting events (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2010) and active sport tourists (Gibson, Attle, & Yiannakis, 1998; Gibson, 2004; Robinson & Gammon, 2004); Factors affecting decisions to engage in sport tourism (i.e., motivations, appropriateness and appeal of setting, involvement in running and sport tourism, perceived event value, and attachment to the race) and general participant characteristics (i.e., intentions to return to the race, recommendation of the race, and socio-demographics) are presented.

The distribution of self-completed questionnaires occurred in the days prior the 28th annual staging of Melissa’s Road Race on September 22, 2007 in Banff National Park, Alberta, Canada. The study was explained to every third participant at registration; each potential respondent was asked to return the completed survey in a postage paid envelop once they arrived home. A total of 1200 questionnaires were distributed to 3500 potential recipients; 394 questionnaires were returned (response rate = 33%). SPSS 17.0 was used to conduct statistical analysis including independent-samples t-tests (2-tailed) to compare 131 first-time (FT) and 241 repeat racers (RR). Qualitative open-ended comments were used to enhance analysis of the quantitative data. Data are presented using two race participant categories: First-time race participants (male=29%; female=71%; mean age=37 years; most frequently cited household income category=CND $100,000-119,000; most frequently cited education degree completed: University bachelor degree) and repeat race participants, participants who had competed in at least two Melissa’s Road Races (male=35%; female=65%; mean age=42 years; most frequently cited household income category= CND $140,000+; most frequently cited education degree completed: University bachelor degree).

Of the 25 motivational items examined, the most frequently cited by the full sample of Race participants were those related to enjoying the scenery and nature and experiencing fun, stimulation and physical challenge. For first timers the following items measured appropriateness of the setting with a 5-point scale (5=Strongly agree) were most frequently cited: “To experience new and different things” (t (367) = 3.67, p < .001), “To experience a Canadian Rocky Mountain Park” (t (367) = 3.36, p < .01), “To continue a tradition of running the Race each year” (t (365) = -1.26, p < .001). A 10-point scale (10=Very appealing) was used to ask survey participants if holding Melissa’s Road Race in Banff National Park made attending the race more or less appealing. No significant difference was observed between first time racers (M=7.95, SD=2.02) and repeat racers (M=8.33, SD=1.87). Two items measured appropriateness of the setting with a 5-point scale (5=Very appropriate). Independent-samples t-tests revealed repeat racer’s greater agreement with items that suggested the physical landscape (t (370) = -2.41, p < .001) and cultural atmosphere (t (370) = -2.55, p=.01) of Banff National Park made it an appropriate location for Melissa’s Road Race. Fourteen items representing cognitive, affective and conative bonds with the event were combined with a 5-point scale (5=Strongly attached) to measure attachment to the Race; an aggregate score was generated from these items. No significant difference was observed between first time racers (M=3.20, SD=.569) and repeat racers (M=3.67, SD=.603). There was also no significant difference between groups in the perceived value of the race entry fee for first time (M=8.09, SD=1.622) and repeat racers (M=8.14, SD=1.794); value was measured with a 10-point scale (10=Very good value). Repeat racers were more likely to “recommend the Race to others” (t (367) = -3.26, p=.001) and “plan to return to the Race” (t (367) = -4.04, p < .001). No significant differences were noted to responses that measured behavioural involvement in running except for “How often do you run for exercise?” (FT: M = 8.07, SD = 12.41) (RR: M = 17.25, SD = 18.96) (t (344) = -4.83, p < .001). No significant differences were found for: Money (CDN) spent on running in the last year (FT: M = $460.22, SD = $173.22; RR: M = $860.22, SD = $265.22).
Eight items designed to measure enduring/psychological involvement in running were combined into an aggregate score; when tested with an independent-samples t-test, repeat visitors expressed greater involvement ($t(367) = -2.152, p = .032$).

No significant differences were observed between first and repeat racers in response to several involvement in sport tourism items. These included: The number of times per year trips are taken to engage in running races and marathons (day trips – FT: $M = 1.30, SD = 3.834$; RR: $M = 1.14, SD = 1.646$) (overnight trips – FT: $M = .72, SD = 1.02$; RR: $M = .64, SD = .898$), and money (CND) spent on overnight trips to observe or participate in a running race during the last 12 months (FT: $M = $553.34, $SD = $792.61; RR: $M = $691.10, $SD = $1246.46).

First time racers expressed a stronger interest in building expertise in running and accumulating new experiences (novelty seeking) whereas repeat visitors indicated a stronger desire to revisit fond memories and relax. Repeat racers appeared more interested in the context of the Rocky Mountain event. This may be related to their interest in relaxing; they probably were not experiencing the same level of anxiety that a first time event participant may have felt. Return racers were more likely to suggest that the mountain park setting was an appropriate context for the race, perhaps this is due to repeat racers’ habituation to the Race’s context or that first timers felt the topography of the mountain park was overly challenging. Unsurprisingly the repeat racers appeared more involved in the sport of running, or at least seemed more experienced. Satisfaction of the participants with the event (as indicated by value of race entry fee), appeal of setting, and plans to return and recommend suggest a bright future for Melissa’s Road Race. The distinct profiles of return vs. first time racers may be used by event organizers to modify event promotion and offerings that are tailored to the divergent travel and participation motives of these two groups. These findings also add additional insight into participants of small-scale running events and active sport tourists. This study of two groups of “soft definition sport tourists” (Robinson & Gammon, 2004) begins to reveal how destination and event experience, involvement in running, and diverse motivations shape travel decisions.