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Asics Opens U.S. Flagship in New York

NEW YORK — It took 60 years, but Asics has finally opened its first freestanding store in the U.S.

The Japan-based company on Thursday unveiled a 1,100-square-foot unit at 51 West 42nd Street here, across from Bryant Park, in a space that formerly housed a New Balance unit. The store will open to the public today.

The unit focuses primarily on the company's running products — footwear, apparel and accessories — and offers half men's and half women's merchandise. It also boasts the company's proprietary Foot ID system, which performs a 3-D scan of a customer's foot and obtains a gait analysis to help shoppers choose the right shoe. For the opening, New York City Marathon merchandise is front and center. Asics is the race's activewear sponsor.

Asics chairman Kiyomi Wada made a rare appearance at the store's ribbon-cutting, saying since the company has been a sponsor of the marathon since 1988, it was fitting to choose New York for its first American unit. Asics has only three other stores around the world, two in Tokyo and one in London.

Wada said through a translator that he hoped to open additional units in key U.S. markets such as Boston, Chicago or Los Angeles. In Europe, Germany, France and Spain are on his list, he said. In both cases, he said he has no timetable for when additional stores might launch, adding: "As soon as possible."

Wada said although Asics' business in Japan and China is "not good," its other markets are "stable." Worldwide, running shoes remain the bulk of the company's business but apparel accounts for 40 percent of Asics' sales in Japan. In the U.S., that figure is only 10 percent, so "there's a big opportunity for growth," he said.

In the New York store, some 60 percent of sales are expected to come from footwear and the remainder from apparel and accessories, said Rich Bourne, president and chief financial officer of Asics America. "We'd like to expand from a performance runners brand to a [recreational] runners' brand," he said.

Bourne said New York is a "logical capital city" for the Asics brand. "It's a flagship store for us to present the brand on a global basis. We think it's the right spot at the right time."