

# Spirit of St. Louis Marathon

## St. Louis, Missouri

### April 6, 2003

#### General comments

- Throughout my life, I never thought I could run a marathon. It was just too far to run. My knees would never let me run that far. It was just beyond my capabilities. I never even considered doing one.
- Everything changed on September 28, 2002. That was the day of the Ultramax Triathlon. I was just a volunteer at the event, but it was so incredible and inspiring that I wanted to enter it as a participant in 2003. I started training for Ultramax 2003 on the day after the event, although I didn't officially register for it until December 2002. The last portion of the Ultramax iron-distance triathlon is a 26.2-mile marathon. I felt I had to do a marathon before Ultramax, if for no other reason than to give me confidence that I could run that far.
- The first marathon available was in Springfield, Missouri, on December 7, 2002. I started training for that. However, while shopping at Fleet Feet Sports in St. Louis during the Thanksgiving weekend, I was strongly advised by experienced runners not to attempt a marathon so quickly. They said that I risked serious injury without proper training. I heeded their advice. I decided to do just the Springfield Half Marathon.
- I first learned about the Spirit of St. Louis Marathon in late 2002. I decided that that would be my first marathon attempt. I had been running and training over the winter, but particularly harsh weather in January and February prevented me from doing the amount of training that was suggested by various marathon-training programs available on the Internet. I was able to do some serious training in March—including long runs of 20 miles (felt great) and 18 miles (felt tired)—but I just wasn't completely confident that I'd be able to complete the marathon in my goal time of less than 4 hours. I had been able to do my 20-mile training run in 2:50, and I felt confident that, on that day, I could have run another 6.2 miles in less than 70 minutes. But, unless you've done it, you can't be sure.
- I really didn't want many people to know that I was attempting a marathon. I was fearful that I wouldn't finish it and didn't want to risk the embarrassment. I ended up sharing the "secret" with about a dozen people in advance of the marathon. However, I told all of them that I wasn't going to do it if it was raining. I couldn't imagine how awful it would be to run 26.2 miles in the rain.
- When I left the Lake on the Friday before the marathon, I knew that there was a 60% chance of rain and thundershowers on Sunday, the day of the event. I nevertheless went to St. Louis in the hope that the weather forecasters would be wrong. On Saturday morning, the weather forecasters changed the forecast such that the showers would not begin until Sunday afternoon. With that, I went downtown to pay my \$70 registration fee and pick up my race packet. The weather forecast was still the same when I went to bed Saturday night.
- On Sunday, the day of the race, I woke up at 5:00 a.m. As I fixed breakfast and got dressed, I turned on the television to get the latest weather forecast. The

forecast was not good. Showers were expected by mid morning. The color weather radar showed rain several counties away, and moving toward St. Louis. I figured that it was now too late to give up (my registration fee was nonrefundable), so I hoped for the best and headed to the race at 6:20 a.m. I packed a waterproof rain jacket inside my running jacket, just in case.

- I arrived at the event with plenty of time to spare. I stepped outside the truck and, with 10-15 mph winds blowing, felt that I needed another layer to stay warm during the race. The air temperature was about 37 degrees. The wind chill was in the 20s. I would never do a training run in this weather.
- As we lined up at the starting line, it became suddenly clear that this was going to become much more difficult. Less than two minutes before the start, it started raining. The worst possible running weather is either extremely hot and humid, or cold, windy and rainy—take your pick. On this day, we got the latter. The steady—but not hard—rain lasted for an hour (until about mile 8 for me), and fortunately never returned. However, the “damage” was done. We were all wet from head to toe. My shoes felt like sponges.
- Dealing with the weather was a major part of this race. I went from cold at the start of the race, to warm as I completed the first few miles, to slightly chilly as the rain and wind combined to occasionally overwhelm the body heat that I was generating, back to warm again as the rain stopped, and then a tolerable coolness for the rest of the race. Dodging water puddles and watching out for slippery manhole covers required a constant vigilance.
- The most significant weather challenge, though, began at around mile 15. My quadriceps and hamstrings were succumbing to the cold. They literally felt frozen. I had never experienced anything like it. I didn’t stop running until I came upon the first hill on Delmar at mile 16, which I walked just to try to massage some life back into these muscles. I was very worried that they would start to cramp, which would be very bad and possibly the beginning of the end of the race for me. The condition continued until about mile 20, when the problem seemed to just go away, but leg fatigue continued beyond that to the very end. The cold problem may have masked the leg fatigue.
- I ran the entire course except for four hills (two on Delmar at miles 16 and 17, one in Forest Park at mile 21 and one on the SLU campus at mile 24). I was also trying to avoid cramps from overexertion on tired legs on these hills.
- I took two Aleve before leaving for the race. I assume they are the reason I had no hip pain at all. I also had virtually no knee pain. This was really surprising since my knee pain in the past has not been eliminated by the use of Aleve.
- I found the first 6 miles to be relatively easy. Miles 7 through 14 saw a slowing of my pace and fatigue setting in. Miles 15 through 20 were dominated by trying to overcome problems with cold quadriceps and hamstrings. Miles 21 to 24 were relatively slow, as I just trudged along. Mile 25 was mostly downhill, and adrenaline kicked in as I saw the finish line at a distance. When I reached the 26-mile marker, I felt no pain or discomfort whatsoever, only elation.
- I completed mile 1 in 8 minutes. The second mile took 7:30. The next six miles took almost exactly 8 minutes each. The time clock showed that I reached the 13.1-mile mark at Washington U. in 1:45:17, a pace of 8:02. I have never run that far that fast. The second half of the race took 2:01:20, a pace of 9:16. (I’m kind of surprised that my pace was that slow.) The average pace for the entire race

was 8:39. I finished in 3:46:37, about 13 minutes faster than my goal. I finished 233 out of 1,233 finishers. Of the male finishers, I was 203 out of 782. Of the 121 males age 45-49, I was 38<sup>th</sup>.

- Ironman Wisconsin was broadcast the day before this race. I found myself thinking of that event many times during the race. When I was really tired and wanted to take a walking break, I would tell myself to just keep going, as ironmen just work through the pain and discomfort. Also, the goal of finishing in less than 4 hours was constantly on my mind. I didn't want to take any breaks any earlier than absolutely necessary, so that I could have some "cushion" available toward the end of the marathon if I needed it.
- The E-Clif 3:30 group (8:00 pace) reached me at mile 6. I pretty much stayed with them until mile 14, when they pulled out of sight. The 3:40 group (8:24 pace) reached me at mile 21. I stayed with them until about mile 23, when I walked parts of a hill on the SLU campus. I never saw the 3:50 group (8:45 pace). Those group leaders were remarkably accurate in their paces.
- My legs felt well rested prior to the race. I had done no training on Tuesday and Wednesday (my legs were really tired on Monday). I did a short run on Thursday. I rested Friday and Saturday.

### **Pre Race Nutrition**

- At 5:00 a.m., I ate a bagel with peanut butter, a banana, cereal, strawberries and grapefruit. I drank some Gatorade.
- At 7:00 a.m., I drank Gatorade with my E-Hammer supplements and half an E-Clif cookie.

### **Race Nutrition**

- During the race, I took PowerAde at nearly every station (about 2 miles apart to mile 10, then 1 mile apart), except that I took water whenever I ate a gel (miles 6 and 20). I ate a small piece of bagel at mile 10. Looking back, I perhaps should have eaten another gel at mile 10. That might have eased some of the fatigue from miles 14 to 20.

### **Clothes**

- I wore two pairs of socks (ankle-height CoolMax socks inside crew-length cotton socks). Cotton socks are obviously not good in wet weather. I also wore running tights, running shorts, polyester short-sleeve and long-sleeve shirts, running jacket, baseball cap and light gloves. Shortly before the race, I added a cotton T-shirt over my two polyester shirts for additional warmth in the cold, breezy weather.

### **Event**

- The event was extremely well organized. There were plenty of volunteers and enough aid stations. The miles were well marked. The police did a great job of giving us the right of way at intersections.
- The spectators were super. They yelled out encouragement all along the course. I'm sure the weather kept many spectators away, but the ones who braved the lousy weather were all that we needed.

- While running on the course, I thanked many of the volunteers and even more of the spectators. The spectators really appreciated the verbal thanks, but also responded to other ways of acknowledgement (waving, high-fiving, thumbs-up and even just smiling). I even played with some of the crowd. At one point, I asked some girls if I looked sexy, and when they said “yes”, I thanked them for lying.
- Two things are especially memorable during the race. It’s obvious that some spectators at the finish line were also watching along the course earlier in the race. One person came up to me at the refreshment area at the finish line and said he remembered me as the guy who smiled every time he saw me during the race. Even more memorable was what occurred at the finish line. As I rounded the very last corner and headed between the barricades toward the finish line, I stopped long enough to snap a picture of the finish line. I resumed running with my arms raised in the air and hollered “Wooohoo!” The crowd went nuts. I then extended my right arm toward the barricade on the right and caught as many high-fives from the spectators as I could. (I’ll never forget overhearing one spectator saying to another, “I like that guy.” I was really touched by that.) It was such an awesome, exhilarating moment to be completing such a difficult event with the spectators’ congratulations. It’s too bad that experience only lasts a few seconds.
- Running 26.2 miles is a daunting challenge. The distance is almost overwhelming. It seems impossible to run continuously for nearly four hours. The fatigue and discomfort are almost inhumane—even in good weather. The miles and hours of training for a marathon are hard. The actual event is longer and harder than any training run. Would I do another marathon? Yes and no. No, in that my original reason for doing this marathon has been answered—I now know that I can complete a marathon. Yes, in that it is a great test of one’s physical fitness, endurance, perseverance, desire, discipline and mental toughness. But the event is so hard that the weather should not be a factor. I wouldn’t want to do it again in the weather extremes we had on this day. I risked injuries and immune-suppression illnesses by doing this event in this weather.

### **Physical Effects**

- My quadriceps, hamstrings and calves were understandably sore (but not so bad as to be debilitating) for about two or three days. Stairs were difficult to handle for two days. I found that stretching in the hours after the event helped enormously. I didn’t run for a week after the event.
- My right Achilles tendon was extremely sore the morning after the race. I don’t understand why it wasn’t sore during or immediately after the race. Perhaps the Aleve taken before the race prevented the pain from being felt. The tendon slowly improved, but it took nearly two weeks for me not to feel at least some pain while going down stairs.

### **Marathon Training**

- Long runs are necessary to prepare for a marathon, but I’m not sure how long they need to be to complete the event. I believe long runs of 14 miles are probably sufficient as long as your aerobic base is high. Being able to do an 18- or 20-mile

run is certainly helpful—if for no other reason than self-confidence—but I don't think it is absolutely necessary.

### **Important Lessons Learned**

- Finishing is the most important goal of participating in a marathon, but having a time goal is also important, especially if you are pursuing your personal best. I was constantly keeping track of my performance, and pushing myself so that I would finish the race in less than my goal of 4 hours. Without that time goal, I think I would certainly have walked more and finished later.
- Proper fueling and hydration are supremely important in long distance events.

4/20/2003