

Spirit of St. Louis Marathon

St. Louis, Missouri

April 10, 2005

General comments

- This was my third Spirit of St. Louis Marathon, as well as only the third stand-alone marathon that I've ever done. While it may not have meant as much to me as the first or second, it was definitely the easiest in terms of finishing strongly and recovering quickly. The experience gained over the last few years clearly showed.
- I had put in more miles in training for this marathon than the previous two, so I felt well-prepared. My only concern was that my training runs were at a clearly slower pace than in previous years. Thus, I was hoping that things would go well during the race and allow me to finish close to last year's 3:48:29 or 2003's 3:46:37, but I was at least hoping to finish below 4:00:00. I was pretty well rested. I had run 9.6 miles on Tuesday and 6 miles on Thursday morning before the race. I was ready to give it my best effort.
- The weather was perfect for a spring day--warm and sunny--but a little too warm for a marathon. At the start, the temperature was about 60 degrees, and it rose to about 70-75 degrees by the time I finished at 11:00 a.m. There was a slight wind at times.
- The race organization was not perfect, but that's been the case every year. The aid stations were too far apart and I knew from previous years that I had to bring my own gels since they didn't offer any. Also, unlike previous years, they started the half marathon and full marathon runners at the same location. With 6,000 runners, it was really crowded at the start, and took me about three minutes just to reach the starting line. It was about six or so miles into the race before the group was spaced out enough that there was little risk of tripping over other runners.
- The number of spectators was the largest I've seen, not only at this event (thanks to more runners and better weather than previous years) but at any other. The finish line was great, with hundreds of spectators cheering us on.

Results

- Physically, this marathon was very much like last year. The first six miles were a struggle, as they always seem to be in every run. The next seven miles were uneventful. At the halfway point, my legs were getting heavy and aching in general, but there was no pain in my knees or hips. I just kept pushing myself for the remainder of the race. The mental toughness that I gained over the last several years of doing long running races and triathlons clearly paid off. I gave it my best.
- I went into the race with training-related aches in my left foot, my right hamstring and my right hip. Not only did these not affect me on race day, but I managed to finish without causing any new injuries—like my Achilles tendon injury in 2003 or my ankle pain in 2004.

- For the second year in a row, I ran the entire course. I was prepared to walk if I had to, but I just kept going. The goal to finish under 4:00:00 kept me motivated to continue running. Early in the race, I thought that I might walk the tough hills at the 16 mile mark, but I never did.
- I finished in 4:00:17, which was a pace of 9:11 per mile. I finished 439th out of 1,600 total finishers and 26th of 116 in the male 50-54 age group. My half marathon time was 1:53:40, which was a couple minutes slower than last year.
- I knew at the halfway mark that I was going to have trouble breaking 4:00:00. At that point, I began to keep close track of my mile splits so that I could achieve this new race goal. I tried hard at times to pick up my pace by increasing my cadence—my legs were too sore to increase my stride. However, it didn't seem to do much good. I was able to keep roughly on pace to finish under four hours, although I seemed to be losing the battle in the 20-24 mile range. At mile 25, I gave it all I had. I really picked up the pace. My pace for the last 1.2 miles was 8:24, and I passed a lot of people—probably a bunch who had passed my on miles 8-13. I passed a lot of them on an uphill on Market Street. I surprised myself as to how much determination (or was it the adrenaline?) I showed in trying to meet my goal.
- If I wanted to make excuses for my slower finish, I could say it's because of: (1) being another year older; (2) much warmer weather; (3) crowded conditions for the first few miles; and (4) weighing four pounds more this year than last. Yes, it would have been nice to finish faster, but there's not a huge difference between 3:48 and 4:00.
- Last year, I distinctly recall wondering at mile 20 whether I would ever want to run another marathon. It was just so physically and mentally tough. I never had that thought this year. Maybe it was because I didn't run as quickly.
- I was surprised at how easy my breathing seemed to be throughout the race. It was most noticeable when I was running next to other runners who were running at the same pace, but who were breathing noticeably harder. I think a part of it was better aerobic conditioning, but my slower speed also contributed.
- My race strategy was a bit different this year than in previous years. In 2003 and 2004, I wanted to start out at an 8:00/mile pace or better so that I would have some cushion to finish under 4 hours. What happened in those years is that I was indeed able to consistently maintain an 8:00-8:30 pace for about half the race, but I would slow down considerably in the second half (even walking a bit in 2003) and feel really beaten up. I thought that I would try to maintain a steadier pace throughout this race. I ended up feeling better, although I ended up finishing slower.
- These were my mile splits:
 - Miles 1 and 2 8:15/mile
 - Mile 3 8:33
 - Miles 4 and 5 8:19
 - Miles 6 to 8 8:43
 - Miles 9 and 10 8:54
 - Miles 11 and 12 8:54
 - Mile 13 9:28
 - Mile 14 9:54

- Mile 15 9:29
- Mile 16 9:53
- Mile 17 9:53
- Mile 18 9:33
- Mile 19 9:41
- Miles 20 to 22 9:52
- Miles 23 and 24 9:38
- Miles 25-26.2 8:24

Pre Race Nutrition

- I woke up at 5:00 a.m. and ate some cereal, a banana and a doughnut with my Gatorade. I took my standard group of supplements an hour before the race. I ate a PowerBar and some chocolate about 35 minutes before the start, and sipped from a bottle of Gatorade until 15 minutes before the race began.
- I took two Aleve an hour before the race. I had been having pain in my right hamstring area during training over the last few months, but I didn't have any pain during the race thanks to the Aleve. I was also free of the hip pain (I think it's bursitis) that I've had during the winter for the last few years. Aleve is a miracle drug.

Race Nutrition

- During the race, I took water and/or Gatorade at every station (about 2 miles apart to mile 10, then 1 mile apart). I brought seven gel packets with me and consumed four—at mile 6 (45 minutes), mile 10 (about 1:25:00), mile 15 and mile 19. I took my supplement concoction of two Endurolytes, one Lava Salt and one Enduro Cap at roughly the 1:10:00 and 2:00:00 hour marks. (I brought a third dose, but never took it.) Between the supplements, the Gatorade and the salty snacks consumed the day before the race, I never had any cramping at all despite the warm weather. A bunch of people stopped along the way to deal with leg cramps.

Clothes

- The weather was warm, but I don't think it affected my finish time as much as it affected my comfort. I had a tough time deciding how to would dress for the race. The problem was that the air temperature between the beginning and end of the race would range between cool and warm, and the forecasted winds could make things feel cooler. After months of running in cold weather, I knew how much I hated being cold and wet. On my long training runs, I would always err on the side of dressing too warmly. I just didn't want to be out on the course for four hours or more and be chilly. If I had to walk, I would cool off quickly.
- I wore two pairs of socks: an ankle-height pair of Ironman polyester socks, and a crew-length pair of normal cotton socks. I wore my knee supports, running shorts (I put Vaseline between my legs to minimize chafing), my DeSoto sleeveless triathlon jersey, my Ultramax lined windjacket and Ultramax mesh cap. I was just about the only person who wore a jacket. However, it did come in handy for carrying a disposable camera, gels, and a towel.
- I started getting warm in the first few miles. I unzipped my jacket and jersey. I became increasingly uncomfortable as I reached the 10-mile mark. All I could

think of was the discomfort and the fear that I might overheat. I then took off my jacket and tied it around my waist. It was a bit awkward running like that—I had to re-tie it several times to tighten it up—but I was pretty comfortable. My race belt helped to hold it in position. I took off my hat occasionally in the first few miles, but then took it off for good at around mile 11.

- Vainly, I put my jacket and hat back on with less than a mile to go so that I would have a decent-looking finish line photo. (The photos of me running with my jacket tied around my waist were pretty bad.)

Event

- I knew what to expect from the race organization, so I wasn't too disappointed in any of the problems. You can't let them bother you.
- The spectators were absolutely super. The finish line was lined with cheering spectators. I did a little bit of a finish-chute celebration, but not as much as I had planned, since I was so focused on breaking 4 hours, and every second counted.
- Here's what I wrote in my 2003 race report, and it still holds true: "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." I plan to do this event again in 2006, and break 4 hours.

Marathon Training

- I ran over 300 miles in the last three months in preparing for this marathon. It was about 40 miles more than I ran for the 2004 race and 60 more than in 2003. My longest training run was 20 miles. I did a couple of other long runs around 16 miles. They were all at a pace of well over 9:00/mile and included walking some hills.

Important Lessons Learned

- Don't overdress in milder weather. Thank heavens I was wearing a sleeveless jersey.
- Push a little harder in the early miles. You just can't expect to pick up the pace at the end to make up for lost time. It's too hard to do.

4/18/2005