

Spirit of St. Louis Marathon

St. Louis, Missouri

April 9, 2006

General comments

- This was my fourth Spirit of St. Louis Marathon, as well as only the fourth stand-alone marathon that I've ever done.
- For whatever it's worth and whatever the reason(s), I recovered very quickly from this race. Within two days after the race, I was feeling very few effects.
- My training mileage in the 11 weeks leading up to this race was well behind last year. Last year, I had run 297 miles, versus only 246 this year. 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. This year, the worst part was a ridiculously long line for food after the race. I wasn't about to stand in line for 20 minutes after having just finished a marathon, so I went without it.
- The number of spectators was probably the same as last year, when the weather was a little better for them.
- I don't recall ever doing a race with so much apprehension as this one. In my training for this race over the last four or five months, I had never run longer than 15 miles in a single run. I had done that distance a number of times, but some of those runs were so pathetically slow that I figured that age finally caught up to me. I was definitely slower, and my endurance didn't seem like what it used to be. I was resigned to a slower finish time than last year's 4:00:17. My best guess or hope was to finish in 4:15-4:30, and I thought that I would have to take a number of walking breaks.
- Just a few days before the race, I was working down below my seawall and was walking on the uneven rocks as I worked. That turned out to be a big mistake. My Achilles tendons and my right ankle suddenly started giving me trouble. That's a potential disaster when you're going to be asking your body to run 26.2 miles in a few days. I had visions of suffering severe pain during the race and having to walk a significant portion of it. This didn't help my confidence at all, and created a lot of anxiety. I kind of wished that I hadn't told so many people that I was doing this race since I was feeling pressure to finish and finish well so as not to look bad. I thought that I would have been better off doing the half marathon.

Pre Race

- I woke up at 4:50 a.m. I didn't sleep well (despite the half-tablet of Tylenol PM) due to an intentional 2-hour nap early in the previous afternoon. I ate some cereal, a banana and some strawberries and blueberries, and a doughnut. I drank a whole bottle of Gatorade. I took two Aleve tablets to ward off pain from inflammation. I took my sports supplements just before leaving for the race at 5:50.

- The weather was perfect for racing, but I wasn't sure how much to wear. I remember last year when the temperature was cool at the start and unusually warm by the time I finished. I had to take off my jacket and tie it around my waist to prevent overheating. I didn't want to make the same mistake again.
- It was just about 40 degrees at the start, with clear skies and just a slight wind. I don't like being cold, so I played it safe. However, I would soon regret having (again) overdressed. I wore gloves, a hat, my red/black running jacket, my blue long-sleeve jersey and a light short-sleeve jersey on top, and my black running pants. Within the first mile, I was starting to get hot. I first took off my gloves and put them in my jacket's pocket. Soon thereafter, I took off my hat and put that away as well. At the end of mile three, I unzipped the sleeves off of my running jacket. I was still too warm, but it felt OK when going into the wind. At mile 12, I couldn't take it any more and stopped to take off my long-sleeve shirt and tucked it into my jacket's pocket. From that point on, I was fine. I was soaked in sweat, and stayed cool, but never cold. I was glad I chose to wear my red/black running jacket because of the removable sleeves and larger pockets. Wearing my Ultramax jacket would have been a huge mistake. I really needed to wear a jacket because I had to carry the gels and nutritional supplements to keep me going. I think maybe I should consider what many other people do and wear old t-shirts that can be tossed away when things warm up.

Results

- I finished in 4:09:17, a pace of 9:31 per mile. I was 61st of 122 competitors in the male 50-54 age group. Last year, I was much higher in my age group. Of the total 1126 men, I finished 634th. I was the 772nd overall finisher.
- Here are my splits:

<u>Mile</u>	<u>Mile split</u>	<u>Cum. time</u>	<u>Comments</u>
1	8:35	8:35	Congested
2-3	8:23	25:22	Flat
4-6	9:00	52:20	Some uphill
7-8	8:23	1:09:06	Market Street hill
9	9:20	1:18:27	Long uphill
10-11	9:05	1:36:38	Mostly flat/downhill
12-14	9:37	2:05:27	Flat; hit halfway point at about 1:57
15	9:59	2:15:27	Legs were starting to hurt badly
16	10:05	2:25:32	
17	11:06	2:36:38	Walked short, steep hill on Delmar
18	10:35	2:47:13	Another hill on Delmar
19-20	10:08	3:07:29	Flat
21	9:44	3:17:13	Flat
22	10:13	3:27:26	Slight uphill
23	10:30	3:37:56	Mostly flat
24	10:52	3:48:48	Uphill near Salvation Army
25	9:11	3:58:00	Really started pushing hard, despite hill
26.2	9:24	4:09:17	Gave it everything I had

- The first mile was mostly spent trying to avoid the huge crowd of runners. I stayed on the outside of the group, and managed to move up pretty well. I was surprised that I reached mile 1 in 8:35--I thought the crowd slowed me down more than that.
- Everything was going normally for the first 15 miles. It was by then that my quadriceps were pretty well trashed. The next 11.2 miles would be a battle of mind over body. I just kept putting one foot in front of the other, telling myself to keep running and not walk. At mile 17, I decided to walk the steepest, toughest hill on the course on Delmar Boulevard. My legs were very tired, and I was afraid that they would cramp up on me, since they seemed to be on the verge of it for a couple miles. (The sensation of impending cramps stayed for the remainder of the race.) It was just a coincidence, but there was a portable toilet at the bottom of the hill, so I stopped to urinate. I had been drinking a lot of fluid before and during the race, and I could feel a need.
- Once I reached the top of the hill on Delmar, I started running again and ran the rest of the race. It was very, very tough. The worst part was running the hills near Kingshighway as we exited Forest Park and the long, gradual hill starting on Forest Park Blvd. and continuing on Market Street.
- At the 21-mile mark, or 3:17 into the race, I started doing some calculations to see how soon I might reach the finish line. I didn't know exactly what my pace was, but I figured that I could break 4:10 if I could average 10:00 per mile. That became my all-consuming goal: break 4:10. I checked my watch at every mile marker to see if I was on track. I reached mile 24 in 3:48, and realized that I didn't have any time to spare. I had less than 22 minutes to run 2.2 miles. I picked up the pace. Unfortunately, it meant having to run faster on the Forest Park Blvd./Market Street hill, and that was extremely tough. I passed a lot of people who were walking that hill. The last 1.2 miles had a long downhill on Market Street to Union Station, and then a final uphill. I had 12 minutes to do it if I was going to break 4:10. I gave it all I had. I thought I was going faster than a 9:24 per mile pace.

The finish

- My watch indicated around 4:08:30 when I reached the first of two turns near the finish line. There was still a ways to go, and I ran quickly. I looked around and saw some relay team members wanting to cross the finish line together, and I decided to let them go ahead of me so that I could have the finish line all to myself. As I made the finish turn, I hollered "Woohoo! I did it!", and weaved a little right and left while sticking out my hands for virtual high-fives. As I approached the finish line, I looked up and gave a thumbs-up to the sky. I was elated. Not only did I finish a race that I had doubts about in the days and weeks before, but I managed to push myself as hard as I've ever done in those last 50 minutes.
- After crossing the finish line, a volunteer put a finisher's medal around my neck, asked me how I was, and said "You look great!". Another volunteer removed the timing chip from my ankle strap. I was given a bottle of water and sat down on a lone folding chair nearby. Now that all the pressures of this race were gone, I was so relieved that my emotions almost took over. I just sat there for five minutes or so, reliving the race and the experiences of the last few months.
- Prior to the race, I had doubts as to whether I would ever run another stand-alone marathon. As I was sitting at the finish line, though, I thought that I'd like to do it

again. While the experience of training for and running this marathon were not very pleasant, the end result made it all worthwhile.

Race Nutrition

- I carried a bottle of Gatorade with me to avoid the crush at the early aid stations. I finished the bottle at mile 12. I stopped at a few aid stations (they were 2 miles apart for the first 18 miles) to get water and Gatorade to supplement my bottle. It was helpful to be able to drink more steadily from my own bottle as needed, rather than try to take in larger quantities in quick gulps at the aid stations.
- I learned from past Spirit of St. Louis Marathons that energy gels were not available when needed, so I carried my own supply. I took in gels about every four miles. They had gels available at miles 10, 20 and 23.
- I took my electrolyte and other supplements every hour. I can't prove that they work, but I've never had cramping problems when taking them as prescribed.
- 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."

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