

Spirit of St. Louis Marathon

St. Louis, Missouri

April 15, 2007

This was my fifth year of running the Spirit of St. Louis Marathon. It was definitely the toughest. In fact, it was without a doubt the hardest event I've ever done. It make not have been as long or as exhausting as an Ironman triathlon, but it was extremely painful. The last fifteen miles were sheer, utter torture.

The problems actually began in winter. We had the worst winter weather in about 10 years. The ice, snow and extreme cold prevented me from running as much as I needed to. In the 4-1/2 months before this year's marathon, I ran 245 miles. Last year, I put in 365 miles in the same time. Also, I only did three 15-mile runs this year, and only one of them was halfway respectable. To make matters even worse, I was about six pounds heavier than last year.

Three weeks before the marathon, I was at mile 14 of a 15-mile run, and pulled a hamstring muscle. It was only the second time I've ever had to walk home while running. I didn't run for a week. In the three subsequent runs prior to the marathon, the hamstring started getting tight around mile 6, so I was worried that I might have to walk a significant part of the marathon.

Because of all this, I had no expectation of matching last year's finish time of 4:09. I just wanted to finish and get it over with. I thought that after finishing the marathon in last year's Redman Triathlon in 4:53, I should be able to finish a stand-alone marathon in no more than 4:30. A 4:20 was possible if everything went well. If my hamstring acted up, it could be 5-6 hours.

After having done so many events over the last four years, I don't take race day preparations as seriously as I used to. I pretty well know what to do, and what not to do. It's almost become routine.

The race started at 7:00 a.m. As usual, the first few miles were spent trying to work my way through the slower runners and avoid a collision. I brought a bottle of Gatorade with me to sip from, so that I could avoid the congestion around the early aid stations. I had planned to toss it at mile 6. Little did I know that I'd keep it until mile 25, occasionally adding some Gatorade to it that I picked up at aid stations along the way. I found that it helped me stay hydrated.

My early splits were as follows:

<u>Mile</u>	<u>Split</u>	<u>Cumulative</u>
1	8:28	8:28
2	8:21	16:49
3		
4	25:06 (8:22 avg.)	41:56
5		
6	10:16	52:12 (this mile had a few uphill)

<u>Mile</u>	<u>Split</u>	<u>Cumulative</u>
7		
8	45:52 (9:10)	1:38:04
9		
10		
11		

Mile 11 is when things suddenly changed for the worse. My quadriceps started tightening. Running became uncomfortable. My pace started to slow, even though the next few miles (in Forest Park) were flat or slightly downhill.

<u>Mile</u>	<u>Split</u>	<u>Cumulative</u>
12	9:52	1:47:56
13	9:57	1:57:54

I was pleased that I reached the halfway mark in about 1:58:xx. That was just one minute slower than last year. More importantly, though, I didn't have any hamstring problems. I was in the clear in that I could walk the rest of the race if I had to. However, my quads were hurting more and more, and every time I stopped at an aid station, I had trouble getting my legs to run again. I was getting more miserable as time went on. At this point, I was desperately looking forward to getting to mile 16, where I had planned to walk the toughest hill on the course on Delmar.

<u>Mile</u>	<u>Split</u>	<u>Cumulative</u>
14		
15	21:12 (10:36)	2:19:06
16	11:03	2:30:09
17	11:18	2:41:28

The remaining miles were just a struggle to put one foot in front of the other. I ran the rest of the course, except for a slight hill on mile 20 in Forest Park and a tougher hill at the start of mile 21.

At mile 21, I figured that, at an average of 12 minutes per mile, I could finish in 4:30. That immediately became my goal, and it was the only motivation I had left. I was hurting so badly, the spectators noticed it.

<u>Mile</u>	<u>Split</u>	<u>Cumulative</u>
18		
19	22:28 (11:14 avg)	3:03:56
20	11:33	3:15:30
21	11:52	3:27:22
22	11:40	3:39:02
23	12:32	3:51:35

<u>Mile</u>	<u>Split</u>	<u>Cumulative</u>
24		
25	23:28 (11:44 avg.)	4:15:04
26.2	12:54 (10:45 avg.)	4:27:58

The last 1.2 miles were mental hell. The first half was uphill. The second half was partly downhill, then uphill to the finish line. But the worst part was trying to push myself through the pain to finish in under 4:30. When you're hundreds of yards from the finish line, you can't really tell how long it will take to get there. It's not until you get within 100-200 yards, and see a few minutes to spare on your watch that can you finally relax. I didn't reach that point until the next to last turn toward the finish line. I was hurting badly, as you can tell by the look on my face in these photos.



This photo was taken at the next-to-last turn on the course, about 100 yards from the finish line.



The effects of adrenaline are nothing short of remarkable. When I made the very last turn toward the finish line, I put my arms up in the air and hollered, "I did it!" I went over to the crowd along the barricades to my left and asked for (and received) a bunch of high-fives. For those 50 or so yards, I don't recall feeling any pain. Just before reaching the finish line, I raised my right hand up and, looking to the sky, gave a thumbs-up.

Pretty quickly, though, the suffering resumed. But at least I was done running.



I finished in 4:27:58. (The race clock reads 4:32 because it took four minutes for me to reach the starting line in the huge crowd of runners.) In my 50-54 male age group, there were 118 runners, and I finished 65th. I think it was the first time that I've finished a running race behind more than half of those in my age group. But, I was happy with it. I pushed myself through more agony than I've ever done before, and I met a goal in the process. With the weather and training problems, the hamstring pull, the weight gain over last year, and the difficulty during the race, it's kind of surprising that I still finished within 19 minutes of last year's finish time.

I was very, very sore on Monday and Tuesday. I did a little bit of stretching on Tuesday night. I recovered a lot by Wednesday morning, and had just a little bit of soreness on Thursday. By Friday, I was ready to run another marathon. But I thought I'd wait a while. ☺