

# **GO! St. Louis Marathon**

## **St. Louis, Missouri**

### **April 11, 2010**

This was my eighth consecutive GO! St. Louis Marathon. It's the only stand-alone marathon I've ever done. I really don't like to run marathons. I do it mostly because it forces me to stay in shape over the winter, and gives me a good aerobic base before starting triathlon training in the spring. The GO! St. Louis Marathon is convenient (I stay with family when in town) and comes at the right time of year for me, so I choose to do this one over any others.

This event has grown tremendously. In the first year I did the race (2003), there were probably around 5,000 runners. This year there was a record field of about 15,000 runners (including half marathoners and marathon relays) competing. It's great to see that the event is increasing in popularity, but a large field also has its negatives, which I'll discuss later.

After a very slow finish last year (finish time 4:53:16), and harsh weather this past winter that hurt my training, I had very low expectations for this year's marathon. I wanted to finish faster than last year, but I didn't have much confidence that I could.

#### **Saturday, April 10th**

I woke up a bit light-headed the day before the marathon. This was definitely not encouraging. I figured it might be from my allergies. Spring weather had finally arrived in Missouri, and brought with it tons of pollen, causing the worst allergy season in decades according to one local allergist. I took two Tylenol Sinus tablets and soon felt better, thankfully. I drove downtown to Chaifetz Arena to pick up my packet at the race expo.

I was tired from a busy week, and wanted to get some rest on Saturday afternoon. I laid down and slept for 2-1/2 hours. It felt good, but I worried about not being able to sleep that night. As has been my custom for years before every big race, about an hour before bedtime, I took a Tylenol Sinus Nighttime tablet. This has always helped me sleep pretty well the night before a race without making me too drowsy on race morning. It worked well again this time.

#### **Sunday, April 11th – Race Day**

##### **Wake-Up**

I woke up at 4:45 a.m. and ate some cereal, a banana, strawberries and Gatorade for breakfast. I also took my usual cocktail of nutritional supplements. Because of the high

pollen levels, I took a Tylenol Sinus tablet as well. I didn't want to suffer allergy problems during the race or afterward. I recognize, though, that this medication can also enhance athletic performance. At least it has for me. Finally, I took two Aleve tablets. It's been my wonder drug. It helps ward off knee and hip pain, and inflammation in long races. Outside of races, though, I never take it unless I'm in serious pain.

## **Off to the Race**

I left for the race at 5:45 a.m. I've had a nice routine the last seven years of taking the very same highway exit and parking in the same parking garage at the Scottrade Center, which is just a few hundred yards away from the race start. This year, I passed up ridiculously long lines of cars at several earlier eastbound exit ramps, and was thankful that the exit I normally take came later. However, minutes later, I discovered that my exit was closed due to construction. I knew that there was still one more exit—the last Missouri exit—farther ahead. To my shock, that exit was also closed, and now I was crossing the bridge over the Mississippi River into Illinois. East St. Louis is a dangerous place, so I drove a few more miles to find a safer place to turn around. After crossing back over the bridge into Missouri, I discovered all of the westbound exits for about five miles to be closed. I still saw the long lines of traffic at the eastbound exits, and, since it was now 6:25 a.m. and the race was to start at 7:00, I knew that I might not make the start if I turned around and got in those lines. So, I took a chance and took a westbound exit, then started taking turns in the direction of the race start. Somehow, some way, I found my way to a parking lot about three-quarters of a mile away from the race start where other runners were parked and that had lots of spaces available. I ignored the tow warnings that were posted, figuring that the chance of being towed on a Sunday morning on a nearly empty parking lot was low. It was now about 6:35 a.m. I grabbed what little I needed from the truck and walked to the starting line area. I got there around 6:45 a.m. My little travel nightmare was over. I could easily have done without the stress. There were a few moments on the detour where I was considering bagging the race, but thankfully didn't.

## **Starting Line**

There were so many people at the starting line that it was pointless to try to work my way through the crowd to join the 9:00 per-mile group that would match my early pace. I stood behind the 11:00 per-mile pace group. As a result, I ended up passing literally thousands of slower runners and walkers. I was passing people for nine miles, where the half marathoners finally split off and headed back toward the finish line. It was very annoying to have to run between other runners, around walkers, and even on sidewalks to get around so many people. Going up and down street curbs, and facing all kinds of obstacles on the sidewalks, made it risky, as well. All the while, I was thinking that this race may have become too big for me. (The hassle in trying to get to the race only added to the frustration.) Maybe I was just looking for an excuse to make this my last GO! St. Louis Marathon.

## The Race

As I've learned from experience, I brought a bottle of Gatorade to the race start. I added about 200–300 calories of CarboPro to it as well. I kept the bottle with me the entire race so that I could bypass the crowded aid stations in the early miles, and add Gatorade to it later on so that I could drink between aid stations as needed. (The aid stations are two miles apart the first 10 miles, and roughly a mile apart thereafter.) Because gels were only going to be available at miles 8, 14 and 22, I decided to tape three gels to my Gatorade bottle. It was the first time I've ever done that. (Normally, I put them in a jacket pocket, but it was too warm to wear a jacket.) It added to the weight I was carrying, but it worked out well. I consumed a total of five gels during the race, at miles 4, 8, 12, 15 and 19. I also took two Endurolyte tablets each hour up until the fourth hour.

My training for this marathon was not reassuring. The cold, wet winter weather prevented me from getting in the mileage I really needed. My long runs consisted of just two 14-milers, one 12-miler and a couple 10-milers. That's simply not enough long runs to inspire confidence. I thought I was in for an especially long, hard day.

I ran at a nice, steady pace for the first nine miles. I was actually surprised at how well I was feeling. I kept thinking—rightly or wrongly, I'm not sure which—that the Tylenol Sinus tablets taken in the day leading up to the race were helping me. Nevertheless, I was gaining a huge amount of confidence, and that only helped encourage me to continue running without stopping, and push hard.

At last year's marathon, I stopped to walk for the first time at mile 8. I wanted to do better than that, and eventually made it to mile 16 (in the heart of Clayton) before my legs needed a walking break while climbing a couple hills. I was thrilled.

My legs felt fine up until around mile 12, when they started feeling heavy, and my knees were getting a bit sore. The situation continued to deteriorate until mile 17 when my legs hit bottom. They would pretty much stay that way for the rest of the race. I only walked when it was absolutely necessary, and resumed running as soon as I could.

The weather played a major role in this race, as it has just about every year, whether favorable or not. The weather was perfect at the start—58 degrees with just a light wind. By 9:00 a.m., the temperature had risen to 64 degrees. That's not too bad, but as the sun rose higher in the sky, it became more of an issue. There was little shade on the course, and the heat radiated off the asphalt pavement. By 10:00 a.m., with the temperature at 69 degrees, everyone seemed to be struggling with it. I remember an aid station volunteer at mile 17 warning us to stay hydrated because of the heat. That's when I knew that it wasn't just me feeling the heat. I tried to stay hydrated as best I could, but I knew I was falling behind. (You can never stay fully hydrated during a long race.) It slowed me down, but I kept pushing on.

It's usually around mile 16 that I start doing the math as to a projected finish time. I reached mile 16 in 2:29:45, so I figured that 12-minute miles would get me a finish time

of around 4:30:00. That then became my goal. I know from experience that I can do a little bit of walking and still complete a mile in 12 minutes. After reaching each mile marker after 16, I'd look at my watch and know what time I had to be at the next mile marker to maintain a 12:00 per-mile pace. These mile-by-mile goals help keep me focused and motivated.

## **The Finish**

Miles 20 to 25 seemed to take forever. The air temperature was in the mid 70s—way too warm for a marathon—and there was no shade whatsoever on the city streets. The last mile, however, seemed to fly by. As I headed up the final, gradual hill on Market Street in front of Union Station, the crowds gave me me newfound energy as the adrenaline started to flow. I thought I would probably have to walk a bit up this hill, but I was able to run the entire hill. As I made the left and right turns toward the finish line, I felt fantastic. As I was running—not just jogging, but RUNNING—down the finish chute, I reached out my hand to the spectators asking for high-fives, hollering “WOO-HOO!!!”, and pointed my right thumb up to the sky before crossing the finish line with a huge smile on my face. I finished in 4:30:54, lopping more than 20 minutes off of last year's finish time, and overcoming months of doubt about my readiness for the marathon. It was a tremendous relief.

Since my 55th birthday was only two weeks prior to the race, I was perhaps the youngest member of my 55–59 age group. In this group, I finished in the middle of the pack, 26th of the 58 competitors.

## **Post-Race Recovery**

This was the first marathon that I came away without any chafing, any injury, or even the tiniest blister. Even the soreness was minimal. It was mostly gone in two days, as was the joint stiffness. The quick recovery, though, shouldn't be mistaken as evidence that this race was easy. It wasn't. It was hard, and I suffered a lot. But I'm thrilled with the result.

## MILE SPLITS

End of mile	Elapsed time from start	Pace for last mile(s)	Comment
2	17:03	8:31	
4	35:11	9:04	
5	44:07	8:56	
9	1:20:47	9:10	
12	1:49:31	9:33	Short portable toilet break
13	1:59:00	9:29	
13.1	2:00:XX		Halfway mark
14	2:08:45	9:45	Legs are getting heavy
16	2:29:45	10:30	First walking break in Clayton
17	2:40:56	11:11	Hills in central Clayton
18	2:51:11	10:15	
19	3:03:12	12:01	Includes steep hill on Delmar
20	3:14:53	11:41	
21	3:27:39	12:46	More walking on Delmar
22	3:39:09	11:30	Forest Park Blvd.
23	3:51:46	12:37	
24	4:03:54	12:08	
25	4:17:16	13:22	Long uphill on Forest Park Blvd. and Market Street
26.2	4:30:54	11:20	<b>10:20 per-mile pace for full marathon</b>