

USATF Adirondack Association Members:

I recently ran the 2009 New York City marathon, and happily agreed to write about my experience for the members of our association. For those of you that don't know me, I am a 26 year old graduate student at the University at Albany and a former member of the UAlbany XC and T&F Teams. Since graduating 4 years ago I have been an USATF Adirondack member, running many local and regional races. My long term goal is to qualify for the 2012 Olympic Trials in the marathon. I had run two marathons previously, with a PR of 2:25:16.

My NYC marathon experience began last fall when I learned that it had been selected as the 2009 USATF national marathon championships. The Olympic Trials qualifying time is 2:19, but for the national championships each year the time standard is lowered to 2:22. I thought that this was a great opportunity to run the famous NYC marathon and get a crack at the qualifying standard.

Training

For much of this summer, I was only able to run every other day due to a foot injury. I finally got it under control at the end of August, and realized that I only had two months until the marathon! At this point I was not sure if I would be fit enough to race by November 1st. I decided to train as I could manage and make a final judgment after racing the Marine Corps half marathon 3 weeks before NYC.

Since the injury had significantly reduced my training over the summer, I was not starting off in great shape. However, over the next few weeks my 5k times dropped to where they usually are this time of year. After running a PR at the half-marathon, I was confident and gave the marathon a go.

Final (lack of) Preparation

To this point I had not invested much time in reading all the material that the marathon had sent me. After checking it out, I realized I had missed a deadline to register for a sub-elite program I qualified for. In this program I would have had guaranteed transportation to the start line, a place to stay, and the opportunity to start *on* the start line. Whoops.

More importantly, I had also missed the general deadline to register for transportation to the start line. Since the race begins on Staten Island, and they close the Verrazano Bridge early in the morning for the race, getting there can be tricky. I had no idea how I was going to do it, especially since I am not particularly familiar with New York.

At the race expo, I found out that I was still able to register for transportation, just no longer online. Unfortunately the only openings remaining were for shuttle buses that would drop me off at the start line over *3 hours* before the race! I chose to risk it and take the ferry to Staten Island, with the hopes that they would let me on the shuttle buses there without a pass. This way I would only stand in the cold for an hour before the race.

Getting to the Start

After a night tossing and turning worrying about getting to the start line (and the Yankees playoff game I had been watching), I woke up at 5am to get ready to go. Fortunately daylight savings time ended that night, so I got an extra hour of sleep.

I took the subway to the ferry, and as we headed across the bay the sun began to rise. I sat on the wrong side of the boat, so I could only see the base of the Statue of Liberty (sit on the west side!). I was still very worried about the shuttle buses waiting at the other end, but tried to relax and enjoy the trip. After getting off the ferry, I hopped on one of the buses cycling through with no problem. This was a huge relief, and I began to actually think about the race itself. I had plenty of time for that as I stood on the overcrowded bus for 30 minutes, waiting for them to let us off.

At the Start

I still had a crowded half mile walk to my start area (there are three start areas, I was in the blue start), where I sat around for a while and tried to stay warm. When the announcement came that the first wave should head to their corrals, I turned in my extra clothes to the baggage collection volunteers and headed in that direction. I was in the first corral for my start line and the race organizers were nice enough to leave us a little space to jog around. The other corrals were packed like sardines.

A half hour before the start, they began to walk us the ¼ mile from our corrals to the start line. There was a line of security officers walking in front of us to make sure we went slowly and orderly. Unfortunately, there were no security officers for the other corrals, so they came pushing up behind us to get as close to the front as they could. While I can't blame them for this, I *also* wanted to be close to the front. Luckily the crowd seemed to be mostly populated by foreign men with an average height around 5'6", perfect for throwing elbows. I did alright keeping my spot, but that was my first angry mob experience.

When we stopped our march, we were about 50 meters back from the start line. Ahead of us were the elites and the local New York charity runners in separate areas. We stood for a while to listen to the national anthem and various dignitaries speak. All of a sudden, we started moving forward! I guess the race had started and I hadn't heard it. After 10 seconds stumbling over the same people I had just spent a half hour elbowing, I made it to the start line and my NYC marathon finally began.

The Race (splits at the end)

The race begins up the Verrazano Bridge. You don't realize it driving, but these bridges are big hills! I spent the first mile trying to get through the local runners who had started ahead of me. At one point, I jumped up on the curb on the edge of the bridge to get around people. I looked down the side of the bridge to see exactly how high up we were, and was impressed enough that I decided I'd rather be stuck behind someone than run up there again.

I hit the mile at 6:00 (gun time, not chip time) and headed down the other side of the bridge to Brooklyn. At this point I stopped passing slower local runners and caught up to my friend and fellow upstate NY runner Fred Joslyn. He said that he was trying to settle into 5:20 pace after the bridge, which was my plan as well. I guess we had different ideas of how to do it though, as we never really ended up running together.

The main reason that I wanted to run the NYC marathon is that I thought there would be many people running at my pace, allowing me to sit on the back of a pack and relax. I thought that since I had started behind, I needed to run a little faster than 5:20 pace at first to catch such a pack. For the first few miles, every group I caught immediately broke apart. Finally, I settled in with 3 guys who were running exactly what I wanted, at the price of running two or three sub 5:10 miles to catch them.

I stayed with this group though a 48:57 15k split (5:15 pace, still too fast!) but then we clicked off a few 5:30 miles before I realized it. The intelligent thing to do would have been to stay with them since I was already ahead of pace, but I am not known for being smart in races. At 12 miles, I sped back up to 5:20 pace and pulled away from them.

At the half marathon split (on the way into Queens) I hit 1:09:29, exactly on pace to break 2:19. I was already feeling my legs a little bit, but wasn't too worried. That changed when the Queensborough Bridge came into sight. It was huge.

Heading up the bridge I slowed considerably. Coming down the bridge and up the east side of Manhattan, I kept a decent pace but could feel that I was going to crash in the next few miles. As I headed into the Bronx at mile 20, I died. I went from racing to finishing.

The next 6 miles back through Manhattan were painful, but at least I got to see some of my friends (as they passed by me). Occasionally I would try to run with a group of people going by, but couldn't keep up for long. As I headed up 5th Ave and into Central Park, I caught up to another struggling runner. I laughed when we made eye contact and I realized it was Fasil Bizuneh, an elite runner I have met in the past. He probably didn't remember me, and may have been offended that I laughed when I saw him, but it did cheer me up to see someone else having a worse day than I was. That cheer was short lived, as my calves cramped up with about a mile to go, and I ran my first 7 minute mile of my marathon career heading into the finish. Fasil passed me back with about 400m to go.

After the race, they had the audacity to make you walk to get your bags! They start with the highest numbers near the finish and the lowest numbers at the end. The last thing I wanted to do was walk a mile (no exaggeration!). I made some friends along the way whining about the walk, picked up my bags, and caught the nearest subway out of there.

Thrilling Conclusion

After a shower, lunch, and some tequila, I started to feel better about my race. My 2:30:33 clearly was not the time I was looking for, but not terrible for a challenging course.

I think that there were two main factors that led me to fade so early in the race.

First, while I may have hit my split for the half, I did it very unevenly. Some miles were under 5:10 pace, some where over 5:30 pace. It would have been easier to run the same time if I just ran even 5:20's.

Second, due to my shortened training period, I did not get in all of the long runs that I wanted to. I think that this is why I was able to run through the half marathon relatively easily, but died after a few more miles. If I negatively split my next marathon (like everyone recommends) maybe it will take care of these problems. But...like I said, I've never been accused of being a brilliant runner. I run aggressively and sometimes it comes back to haunt me.

The main thing I realized after this race is how spoiled I usually am. I have never had trouble getting to a race, and rarely start one without my toes touching the start line. This experience made me much more grateful for the special treatment I receive!

I'd like to thank all my friends that were there to support me on race day, my training partners, and the USATF Adirondack Association and Willow Street Athletic Club for their support.

See you soon!

Andy Allstadt
11/20/09

Excellent article about the 2009 NYC marathon by my teammate Emory Mort:
<http://www.letsrun.com/2009/ingnycreport1101.php>

Splits

Finish Time	2:30:33
5km	0:16:35
10km	0:32:37
15km	0:48:57
20km	1:05:48
13.1 mi	1:09:29
25km	1:23:24
30km	1:40:55
35km	2:00:27
40km	2:21:06
Mile Pace	5:45

Hurting with a mile to go!

