

ID: 8812  
DATE: 2007-05-28 12:05:24  
FROM: Simon Ellis <se@skellis.net>  
TO:  
SUBJECT: marathon  
MAILBOX:

Hi all

Many apologies for taking so long in writing an account of my London marathon running efforts. I'd would like to say that this is b/c I have been so busy since then that it just slipped under the radar. I think the truth is that I am only just starting to recover (5 weeks later). Although the following week I did have a film shoot, and then Elizabeth arrived, and then we spent two weeks in Paris, and then last week the weather was nice ...

So what follows is wonderfully sweetened with hindsight ...

Sunday 22 April was 'hot'. Well, 23 degrees. But this was the 'hottest' London marathon ever. Organisers installed extra showers (funny little things you ran through on course that felt little more than someone flicking a wet umbrella at you), and there was considerable anxiety about the impact the heat would have on participants. Indeed, very early in the race the footpaths were littered with heat exhausted runners, looking pretty crook indeed (my memory is of first seeing someone at mile 5 and thinking "shit, that's not good" (yes, oh so eloquent)). At the same time, when passing such people, it's hard not to think "at least I'm not that bad" - forget about sports bringing the best out of people, it's dog eat dog (sorry Frida), and indeed this attitude would come back to haunt me towards the end. The worst of this was a young fellow (22) from Milton Keynes who died post race from a heart attack.

Actually, I was outrageously confident about the heat (indeed, I was ignorantly overconfident) - in January in Melbourne I had had two long run weekends running in 40 degree heat - what I had conveniently forgotten was that in both of those runs I had fallen apart after two hours.

My goal was to run the race in 3hr 45min. This would mean running 8.37 min/mile (5.2min/k) (11.2kph or 7mph) over the course (42.2km, 26.2 miles). The early part of the race was fantastic. It's quite extraordinary to be part of such a huge event -- more than 35000 participants, and it's daunting, exciting, and like a huge street

party. Bands playing, and people lining the streets the entire way. The crowd hand out food and drinks all along the way and call out your name (I had scrawled my name on my vest at the very last minute thinking it was a bit twee, but VERY early on I found myself really helped along by people yelling out "come on Simon" (this changed a bit towards the end but more of that later)). Again, the scale of the event was amazing. There were drinks stations every mile each containing 37000 opened bottles of water -- an outrageous mess.

My support crew consisted of Rebecca Ellis-Pedersen (neice) and Helen Exler (old PE friend). We had arranged for them to be somewhere along the course at 8, 15, 18 and maybe 22 miles. They would appear somewhere, jump on the tube (or walk) to next location, and then reappear. Leading up the 8 mile mark I was VERY excited about seeing them, and Helen had had the very good idea of taking a big silver fern flag (which I had turned up my eyes at) ... but it was a superb idea as I could see them from about 100-200m away, and our first 'encounter' was just wonderful - they were yelling, Helen took some photos, and it just felt extraordinary to be in the middle of this massive group of people, and then for that meeting to 'zoom in' on just the three of us ... fantastic. I was also wearing a terrible pink (Refuge) vest which helped them spot me ...

Actually, the support from Helen and Bex, before, during and after the race was bloody fantastic. They were inspiring, fun, and it made a massive difference at the end to know that I'd see them (soon).

The first 13.1 miles were mostly uneventful. I teamed up with a guy (whose name I forget!) also running for Refuge - and we were pretty much on track timewise ... a little behind but I knew not to be stressed by this, and nor did it matter a great deal. Turning the corner onto Tower Bridge (the half way mark) was fantastic - exhilarating, but at about this time my legs felt OK, but I knew I wasn't as good as I thought I might feel. I ran the first half in 1.54. Fine fine fine. (weeks earlier I had run a half marathon in 1.44, so 1.54 was spot on given that I still had 13.1 miles to go!)

At mile 15 I knew something was wrong. I was still going along at about 11kph, but my running partner was slowly moving ahead, and I couldn't muster leg strength to keep up. Within a mile (16) my legs were shot. (actually, this feeling might have been a bit earlier than this, ie pre the half way mark, but it's hard to know for sure ...

It was an interesting moment really. Actually, I think it was profoundly stressful - I was a bit scared of the coming 10 miles,

pissed off that that was all my body could handle, and also confused about why it was happening. In an email a wee while ago Andy Tse (who ran the London marathon some time ago) asked me if I "welcomed the pain". Well ... I didn't. Not one bit. I wrote of each stride feeling like someone was striking each quadricep with a hammer. Yes, other body parts hurt, my L foot, my R ankle, both hips, but it was my thighs that felt everything so so acutely.

It's not an exaggeration to say that it was the most painful experience of my life. Part of the pain was in the knowing that I still had so far to go.

At the same time, I was having no problems in terms of being 'with it' - ie I was quite lucid, well hydrated, well-fed, and strangely able to observe what my legs were going through. By 17 miles my legs had gone utterly awol. I abandoned eating my carbohydrate gels a bit after that - maybe 21 miles in?), and just picked and chose things I felt like that people were handing out along the way. Jelly babies were a particular favourite, but also have fond memories of little chocolatey things that I'd never tried before. But I cursed the person who handed out sour snakes - I mean, what were they thinking? What was I thinking? Running along, spitting out sour snakes. Lovely.

Around the 18 mile mark I felt like I was being overtaken by this mass of people ... people just streaming past me. I remember thinking that there could not possibly be more people behind me, looking around, and being surprised to see an absolutely massive massive stream of runners.

But surely none of them felt as bad as me me me? (!!)

At about 20 miles I started to walk at drinks stations (although truth be told I was only running at walking pace). I was in a lot of pain from the weight bearing, and the psychological impact of the pain was, well, a little overwhelming.

I has having 'fun' with people watching the event, joking out loud about the food they were offering, asking why they hadn't brought food, and grimacing every time someone said "come on Simon". Yes, the same words as during first half of the race, but their tone had changed. Now I could hear the pleading in their voices. Or sometimes it was sorry (as in "come on Simon, it's going to be OK, you are going to be OK") Or sometimes it was mocking - as if to say "come on Simon, you sack of shit, you are not even trying" ... or maybe it was "come on Simon you've just been overtaken by a 82 year old woman, are

you serious?".

Actually, this did happen - it was quite close to the end - maybe 25 miles (they all start to get a bit the same), and a very elderly woman shuffled past me. I started to laugh as I thought, 'she's not running very fast' - what little was left of my outrageous ego even tried to keep up with her, but I was wonderfully and profoundly humbled by her (she was probably thinking "wow, that guy's running slowly") -- and others ... Spiderman beat me (but he is a superhero), also some guy wearing a flower pot on his head (there is a lot of dress up in the London marathon), and another guy with a foam sunflower around his head (but at least my tan lines weren't as silly as his after the race).

In fact, I think this is my most profound memory of the event - of being humbled. I like this. It surprised me. I knew it was going to be difficult (although I was so ridiculously confident pre-race) but I had just no inkling of the experience I was going to have. Not one. But I was completely and utterly humbled.

Actually, the confidence thing is strange - I never really think of myself as a confident person, and this was the first time (in a very long time) that I began something more confident than I should have been ...

In the last 5-6 miles I still did not think I was going to finish. I was very stressed, and with 2 miles to go I just started to cry (I think mostly from pain/relief).

When I saw the finish line, I didn't really feel anything. I didn't feel relief, joy, elation -- it was just numbing really. When I crossed it, it was just the same. I was crying a lot, and couldn't really stand up, but nor could I sit down b/c my legs wouldn't bend. I really wanted to just stop but you had to walk about 100-200m to collect gear (from a truck). I eventually sat down (kind of folded in half, and then allowed my backside to fall), and then started texting Elizabeth to tell her what had happened. I was still crying a lot. In fact, I was a bit of a wuss all round really. Clearly, I've been involved in far too much touchy feely namby pamby dancing for too long.

My finishing time was 4.25. I had done the first half in 1.54 and the second in 2 and a 1/2 hours.

I am not going to do it again (everyone says that, but I really mean it (and apparently everyone says that as well)), although I have

---

been going for a few runs lately just to see how it is.

Thank you everyone for all of your support, but especially thanks to Ian Edmond who coached me and was just bloody superb the entire time. He made the experience of preparing just so much easier, b/c I could always be certain I was being given accurate advice. But he was also patient with my injuries, and wonderfully quick to praise my (small) efforts. Thanks Ian - you are made of different stuff (Ian first ran a marathon at age 15 in 3 hrs and 20mins), and I would never have done this without you.

So, yes, I completed a marathon. But, there is a strong part of me that is more than a little disappointed with my effort (competitive bastard that I am). It's hard to describe this. I think I expected more from myself.

Oh ... I raised over £1800 for Refuge. Many many thanks to all of you who contributed ...

And now I can well and truly return my running (trainer) wheels, and put back on my well fitted, well conditioned, professionally trained dancing wheels. They feel good. Not so repetitive.

Attached are some photos that Helen took - the first is from mile 15. (second encounter with Bex and Helen) - I was still 'fresh' but it was about to get oh so ugly. And why is Mr J wearing gloves?

The other two are from around mile 18. I actually came over briefly to Helen and Bex to tell them I wasn't going too well - but I muddled up what I was saying so I think they thought I was ok! (the guy in front me there - runner who has a can in his hands - how I envy those chicken legs, and how little his hips have to do to make them swing through the air). In the second of these I am looking behind me in order to check that I don't knock into anyone while I ran over to B & H - now that's interesting.

Thanks again all, and much love

Simon (retired marathon runner)