

DC National Marathon 2007
Andrew Paton

A great event in about as perfect (for me) weather conditions as you could want. I'd been feeling the effects of winter training - y'know too many excuses why not to put in the miles, so I settled on a goal of around 3hrs 45min.

I felt like I did the first 3 hours just before Baltimore - sitting in a huge traffic back up after a car wreck nearly closed the 95 South just after exit 67. No kidding - 3 hours of going no place between 2 exits. Ah well - its not all bad, because one of those hours was spent having lunch at a roadside Denny's.

Bruce's daughter, Dr. Marshall, (you didn't know there was that much brains in the family did you?) gave us some floor space for blow up mattresses and after Patricia had fed us well the conversation tapered off to an early night. It was a 4am wake up call and we headed down rt 66 into DC.

A little daunting for me at the start: it was pouring with rain - I think I felt at least 7 or 8 drops! So I hid under a doorway roof until a few minutes before the start. Clad in the compulsory black garbage bag I slunk over to the start with about 15 minutes to go. A guy from the US Navy did a flawless rendition of the National Anthem. (Boy, does it irritate me when fellow runners talk through that!!) and the mayor of DC - who was also running the marathon gave us a pep talk. I passed him along the way.

Bruce & I were together at the start. Laurie Hood was further back with the half marathoners. I was looking at about 8 and a half minutes per mile and felt great. The course was excellent. The tables were well stocked. So I got off to a comfortable start. Around mile 6 I heard a black runner say something in an accent I recognised - sure enough he was from Pretoria in South Africa. He'd done one Comrades and 3 of the Cape races they call 4 Oceans. We had a great time speaking of what it was like to run here in the USA. At the 8 mile mark I felt so good that I purposed to be at the 19 mile mark in 2hrs 41 mins and then make an attempt at the 3H 35min Boston Qualifier. C'mon - it was all downhill from there to the end.

Soon after that the pacer and his squad caught up to me. To join that "bus" you had to give your name and say where you're from. I did and said I was from South Africa and they all cheered. Then I added "But now living in New Jersey" and they booed. One asked what part and I said in the North West and that that was a secret that I wasn't telling because their attitude had just disqualified them from hearing about it. It was a lot of fun running with those guys and since they were aiming at 3hrs 40 mins I figured I'd tag along with them until mile 19.

Patricia & Bruce's son were waiting at mile 15. What great supporters! About there you pass the White House and not a soul was out on the balcony to cheer.

I said "that's it, the president has blown his chance of me voting for him!" Plenty of laughter in the pack. We had a girl from Italy and a guy who lived near where my son now resides in England.

There's a little hill just after mile 19 so I bided my time, got to the top and then made my break. "Good bye South Africa" they all yelled. The next 2 miles were spent zipping past the other runners. Always a great feeling to encourage someone as you pass by them - but over the years I've learned you should do it very humbly! - Because by mile 23 I wasn't passing them quite as easily as before! Running is one thing - but running out of steam is something most of you know about. Desperation sets in - gulp down some goo, drink gator-aid, breath more rapidly, grunt louder, flail your arms, think positive stuff and even get reduced to childhood rymes like "I think I can, I think I can" - but the little red engine was all puff and no traction yesterday.

Just before 25 the pack yelled "Hello South Africa" and then passed me! Ouch. Note to self: "humble pie is a part of marathoning - eat up boy - it'll do yuh good!" Ah well, I still got to the finish 3 minutes ahead of the time I'd set. It felt great. As Bruce said before then race: "Marathon athletes need at least 2 things - strong legs and a short memory." I'll go do this again in Hartford next October. Coming with me?

Regards
Andrew.