

Grandma said there'd be days like this

When I was growing up I had a live in grandma, and as a plus, she happened to be Italian and a great cook. So I had the opportunity to do a marathon which conjured up great gastronomic memories. On the morning of my flight I actually had to take someone to the airport. However this was for a flight earlier than mine, and so it worked well by getting me there a little bit earlier. He was also going to Minneapolis, but via Northwest Air (how's that for a coincidence). Rather than take the flight with 2 stopovers to Duluth. I decided to fly into Minn/St Paul directly (I hate flying), and drive the 160 miles north (I luv driving) to Duluth. After driving almost 2-1/2 hours I came over the top of a hill and there was Duluth on the side of a steep sloped hill on the left, with Lake Superior on the right, and that famous lift bridge (see grandmas marathon website) right smack in the middle. This town seemed to be a throwback from the nineteen hundreds. It looks much like Easton, PA with the steep hills, many tall brick buildings, as well as a bricked main street, all reaching out towards the lake front.

After checking in, I decided to walk around town to check out restaurants, church, and a few other places. That's when I noticed that there are very few fast food eateries, bars and small restaurants here. I saw 1 Wendy's, 1 Burger King, and no Dunkin Donuts, 7 Eleven's, Krauszers or any convenience stores other than what gas stations would have, and they were small. Next thing I knew it was time to walk over to the EXPO which opened at 4 PM (only about 5 blocks away too). I checked in got my bib and scanned my chip, and saw the notice about not transferring bibs (what are they trying to tell me here ???). I walked through the EXPO. Not too much variety, but prices were decent. For instance a hat was only \$15, and sweatshirts were \$30 - \$35 (Boston & NY could learn from this non price gouging experience). A large assortment of cow bells, with pics of cows on them seemed to move well. Probably good for support at our HRH X'mas run. Other than free beer samples, and bottles of Lipton tea, there were literally no free bees. As I was walking out I realized I never picked up my shirt. I returned to find out and was told it will be waiting for me at the finish line. I said "the finish line is where I get my finishers medal, but I should get my shirt now". She said "NO" you'll get your finishers shirt with your medal. If you want one now you can go over there and buy one is what she said. That's a first for me. Did I mention that you get to keep the chip as a race souvenir (no need to return it, and no \$35 charge if you don't). Another first for me. When it came time to leave I saw it was raining hard, but was able to get back to the Radisson without ever going outside. There is a system of 2nd level walkways which let you go anywhere in the downtown area without stepping outside. I later found out that this was the way local business survives when there is 6 foot of snow on the ground. Minneapolis has the same system

After dinner at Figtgers (that is a converted brewery) I headed back to the Radisson, and noticed that on the desk, in my room, was a buy one get one coupon, for a cocktail, at the revolving restaurant on the 15th floor. A good way to meet some of the runners (NOT). I was there pretty much by myself, and after 1 hour I said it's time to get some sleep. BTW: 1 hour = 1 revolution. My head was also spinning from two martinis.

On Friday I took it easy, and tried to find a convenience store to get a small box of cereal, a few bananas, and small bottle of soy milk for the following morning. That ordeal took about 3 hours and about 6 different stops. I did make it to noon mass

(Remember, I need all the help I can get). Rather than spend \$12 for the all you can eat Grandmas pasta dinner at the EXPO which was 5 blocks away. I chose the Radisson's all you can eat pasta dinner for \$12 which was 5 stories down. I met 2 ladies from State College PA, and gent from Norfolk VA who was a 50-stater and 15 time Marine Corp Marathon finisher. All of them had been to Boston. We agreed to meet on the bus the next morning. Strange, but never saw any of them again. I spent part of the evening snacking on salty pretzels. Someone told me that it's good especially if it's gonna be a hot run. Went to bed about 9 PM. I slept about 20 mins for the entire night, and that was the 20 mins before the alarm went off. Oh man this is gonna be a long run.

Race morning rise was 4:30 AM. 3 cups of Cereal (that's because there were no bowls in the room) with soy milk and a banana was breakfast. 2 packs of pina colada shot blocks, one pack of icy hot, and my room card stuffed into my belt, and I was on my way to the bus downstairs at 6 AM. I did take an Advil with breakfast. Drank a 16 oz bottle of water on the way up. Temp was 59F as we left and also 59F when we pulled into Two Harbors (the start) 45 mins later. Lots of porta johns at the start and water, even baggage was good. The 1/2 marathon had gone off 1 hour earlier at 6:30 AM only because they started at the halfway point, and the general idea was for an all race finish in Duluth. All I know is that I could have used the 6:30 AM start. The anthem played on and at 7:25 we had a USAF fly by to get everyone's blood pumping. I had thought I would start just in front of the 4hr-15min pace group, and see how I would do. We started right on time at 7:30 AM. I figured the pace group would catch me around 10 miles, and that would be fine. The first few miles were uneventful, but very scenic which showed many private homes, and a few lodges along a 2 lane road (called Lake Drive) which opened up periodically for nice vistas of Superior on the left. It looked very much like an ocean run, with the sun over your left shoulder (as we headed south), but no waves on the lake and not a grain of sand to be had. Plenty of rocks going down to the waters edge. Many trees (though not deciduous) were very abundant. This area is basically for fisherman, campers, and do nothings. As I ran I wondered what a Saturday morning Jan 13th HRH run would be like on this road (COOOOOOOOLD). The only clock I saw was at the 10K mark. Otherwise mile markers were marked with two large yellow helium balloons on each side of the road (they used blue balloons for the 1/2 Marathon markers). The balloons were at least 75 feet up in the air and moving with the breeze so you could spot them from a long distance away. Large red balloons meant first aid stations, and green balloons showed water and sports drink stations. The temp was heading upward, but the cool lake breeze did its best to keep us comfortable. At the 10 mile mark the view opened up so that we could see downtown Duluth about 16 miles away, and the famous lift bridge way off in the distance. Still no 4:15 pace group around, so that's a plus. ALMOST THERE, ALMOST THERE I thought. I had taken a shot block at 7 miles and I would end up taking another at the 14 mile mark which, I'd hoped to keep my energy level going. I took water at each stop too. At 14 miles I used that icy hot for my calves, quads, and hamstrings. Between the Advil at the breakfast and the icy hot I didn't have the persistent aches which have showed up in so many of my training runs. Right about 17.5 miles was where the pace group passed me as I had started to slip into 10 min/mile paces. The course rolled the entire way, and headed into a residential neighborhood around 18 miles till about 22 miles. The numbered streets read W 92nd street (which decreased in the direction of downtown Duluth) thus if you didn't mind counting down,

then you had another reason to not drop out. So I had around 92 streets to go. New Yorkers know that 20 blocks = 1 mile, so that put me about 4-1/2 miles from the finish, and that comes out just about right. As I got to 20 miles the issue I worried about the most had surfaced N A U S E A. I found that any water I took, which I needed, got me very sick to my stomach. So I bit the bullet and opted for no water for the next 10K (that's 6.2 miles, and not the energy drink). Even passing thru a water stop, which had odors of plastic water bottles, Ultima, and water sprayed from hoses to cool the runners would get me sick. The slight hill, which was spoken about at mile 22, was more than a slight hill. Since the augmentation, between the yellow and blue balloons was 0.1 mile. I decided to walk between them for the last 5 miles as the sun was getting stronger. The last 4 miles were right on Superior Street in the downtown. Here the streets were packed with spectators cheering on the runners just like 1st Avenue. Mile 25 was right in front of my hotel. I tried to turn it on for the last 1.2 miles, and it seemed to go on forever. A runner behind me must have had his name on his shirt (LANCE). Everyone would yell go Lance go. I decide I had to stay in front of Lance. Though Lance passed me with 3/4 mile to go, and we jockeyed around a bit. Then I saw the lift bridge (the finish line), and just got by Lance. I think he may have actually been in my finishing picture. Done !!! 4 hrs 30 mins 06 secs. Jeez Louise I couldn't even break 4:30 gun time (my chip was 4:26:57) that's O.K. I still had a blast. The real time was about 12:01 PM. Received my medal, and made sure I got that shirt (FINISHERS SHIRT that is. Just like the lady said). Marathon # 15, State # 9 are now history.

I had to wait about 7 mins for baggage (which was my only problem with the race organization). I only wanted to find a garbage can to feel better (if ya know what I mean), and didn't want to do it at baggage claim. Got my bags, and found a garbage can (the rest is history). Felt better, and walked back to my hotel room. I looked for access to the lake as I thought I would wade into the 42F water to ice my legs. Alas I couldn't find a spot and didn't want to take a chance on the rocks. I figured if I really wanted to ice my legs I would do it the way Wes does. 4 inches of cold water in the tub, in ya go, and dump in 1 bucket of ice at a time up to a limit of 4. (s---- that) I'll just go back to the room for a hot shower and relaxation. I Couldn't drink or eat anything till about 5 PM, which is when my stomach returned to normal. Then all was fine, but I was really dehydrated. Three 16 oz bottles of Cherry coke did wonders (I never drink that crap). Then walked over to have a chicken club sandwich and a Sam Adams. It's the correct carb/protein ratio, for recovery, ya know !!

Didn't sleep again on Saturday night. Woke up at 6 AM and went down to the elliptical for about 30 mins. Legs feeling really good. I went outside because I saw a few runners go by the hotel, and figured I'd join them. When I got outside I saw no one, and no other runners around. So I went back inside and sat in the sauna for about 30 mins. Showered, packed up, did Sunday 9:00 AM mass (to give thanks for all the help I got). Grandmas Marathon was even mentioned in the Homily during mass as many runners went for the same reason. Checked out of the hotel and headed down to the airport when I found out I had a 4-1/2 hr departure delay (but that is the subject of another story).

Summing everything up. I give this course a 10 on scenery and running conditions. A 9 on organization (baggage return and, maybe starting the full marathon first or at least earlier). The shirt was a nice color combo, but thought it should have been a tech shirt. I guess they figure if cotton is good enough for the windy city then it is good

enough for Granny. This was my 4th Midwest marathon, and it joins Cincinnati, Columbus & Chicago. Three C's and perhaps Cleveland should be next. I guess I can safely say that Grandmas Marathon was just as good as my grandma's manicotti.

Cheers
Dennis