

## Mohawk-Hudson River Marathon 2007 – Steve Brookman

Boston Bound! I must be a runner now. For 30 years I was a jogger, and a smug one at that. I didn't need races, clubs or events to get me out the door. Cotton shirts and well worn New Balances suited me fine. Lots of solo miles (at unknown and unimportant speeds) were covered during those decades, and over some interesting turf: through the noisy streets of Atsugi, Japan to the quiet hedgerowed lanes of Crowley, England, over the crushed coral paths of tropical islands dotting several oceans and over many trails and streets in between. Uncounted but memorable miles.

The conversion started just over 5 years ago with the big 5-0 looming and the thought of getting a life event checked off while it still might be possible: a *marathon!* (It got checked on the Yukon Trail, but that is another story.) In the process I discovered a new level of fitness and enjoyed the accomplishment, if not the actually running of the event. I was hooked. I became a long distance jogger. (I still could not consider myself a runner.)

Six marathons later, some better than others, all very painful at the end, brings us to the banks of the Hudson River in Albany. Bruce got a BQ here and the website says it is the *preferred course* of Boston Qualifiers. John, my injured running friend from Florida, came to see me through and to vicariously run it while waiting for his body to get its act together. We arrived Saturday afternoon in the record heat of a late Indian summer. I just about wore out the keyboard of my laptop trying to coax a weak cold front towards us. Crashes of thunder and heavy rain pelting the hotel's windows, announced its arrival early that evening.

Sunday morning John drove Bruce and me to the start under a gray autumn sky. The temperature began to drop and a cold breeze picked up out of the north while we shuffled and small talked. It actually got chilly as Bruce donned a long sleeve shirt and his signature garbage bag for the start. A bank signed flashed 51° as we ran out of the park and we worked our way through residential streets towards the bike path. We got lucky, what a great day for a run!

I was right behind George Hirsch for the first few miles and thought for a moment about running with him, (how fast can a 73 y/o Hall of Famer be?) but eventually just settled into my own pace. I had followed Pfitzinger's plan and was going to see it through to the end. I was ignoring those McMillan calculators this time that say how fast you *should* be able to run. I was going to run 8:30's and qualify, or really be hanging my head.

I settled in with a nice group for the first 11 miles keeping just a tad under pace, letting many others scoot past us, while chatting about goals and past races. It was a near perfect day and venue: overcast, cool on a mostly flat paved path with the fresh smell of last night's rain mixing with the newly fallen leaves.

By the half way mark we were on our own and I clicked in at just over 1:49. That was about the same as my past few, but I was feeling strong and was betting that those quality miles running the hills with the club would keep the “old man shuffle” at bay this time.

The middle miles weren't so nice, along the shoulder of a busy highway and by now the runners had thinned out so that I was into my “Zen running mode,” thinking pace, glancing at the runner ahead, watching asphalt, checking the runner ahead...Around 17 there is a short downhill and we worked our way back to the bike path. The last 5 miles are on a beautiful path that follows the Hudson to the finish. Runners were well spread out, several were walking, hands on hips, others off to the side grabbing cramped muscles. Been there, done that. I never know what to say when passing, always hated getting that “looking good” call when you're really dying and you know it.

Passing the “wall” around 2:48, I knew that Boston was in my sights. Legs were more than ready for it to be over, but there would be no death march today. A runner in a Day-Glo green outfit got to my shoulder twice in the final miles and it felt great to keep him at bay as I didn't want to follow that to the finish! At miles 23 and 24 the pace crept up to 9:01 but the last 1.2 was a happy sprint to the end. Official time 3:43, for an 8:31 pace. (My GPS measured it 26.3, maybe that's why I was a second off pace!)

I barely got my medal and Mylar blanket wrapped around me when I turned and saw arguably the world's happiest runner come through the chute, our *Presidente*, grinning to put a Cheshire cat to shame. Guess who's going to Boston!

Chowdah in April. Has a nice ring to it.

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