

How's you like to finish a marathon in 50 degree weather? Ideal isn't it? Well, it was... sort of.

The race began and ended at the RFK memorial Stadium on the East side of Washington DC. They got going at 7am. In order to get the runners there and because of minimal parking and because 8 000 signed up to run the city had the Metro run at 5am instead of commencing at the usual 7am. My free, courtesy of the Church of the Nazarene, accommodation was on the South side and a brisk 5 minute walk from the Metro rail Station. The ride was only 30 minutes so I made sure I would only have a 30 minute wait before the race started. Er, I should have considered that they'd only have a few trains running that early. One good thing, the station ticket guy was a kindly soul who even showed me how to get my return ticket out of the machine. Why can't these be standardized? Oh, wait - socialism's coming to America. All these choices will soon go away. I got on at Congress Heights and had to change trains at L'Enfant Plaza. By this time it was standing room only on the train.

The platform at Stadium - Armory was full of those bold, bright-eyed, briskly striding folks you always see before a big race. They go away during the morning and are replaced with a greatly-humbled, hollow-eyed bunch of trudgers who don't know if they want to sit or stand on the return trip. So it was that me and a hoard of runners arrived 15 minutes before race time. It was 30 degrees and runners don't wear much! The bathroom ritual was going to be tricky. I and 500 others weren't even near it (there are always long lines outside the porta-johns) when we heard the national anthem and heard the gun. Ah well, I'm an old campaigner so I jogged over to the tents where they take care of your kit bags. Got into my trusty garbage bag and trotted over to the start to join the 500 back markers. The thousands ahead of us would begin the disrobing process whereby a large truck load of gloves, hats, sweaters and odd-looking things like old socks and sleeves cut from sweaters would pile up along the early miles. This gets donated to charity. Its when some of these things just drop into the road that a careful running style has to be adopted by us at the back. I saw two men take very heavy falls after tripping at two places. One's head makes an awful sound when striking the blacktop.

A marathon around DC. is an unusual experience. Its a city of Pomp and Poverty! You pass boarded up homes, august monuments, government buildings trying to look like Greek temples, squat security huts, huge grass lawns, the architectless 1960's office blocks and more. I got to see some of my memorials I remembered from wandering about the city in previous visits. General McClellan needs a bit of a clean-up and Mr. Webster is as studious-looking as ever. Oh, the one to the 2nd Division looks recently refurbished. The Second Division Memorial was originally constructed to memorialize the United States Army Second Division's dead from World War I. Since its construction, two additions have been made to honor the dead of World War II and the Korean conflict. The flaming sword is a symbolic impediment to the German advance on Paris. Anyway, back to the story...

Starting in the last 500 means a great deal of nimble stepping, weaving and dancing as you get into your pace. I'd done enough training to manage a 9 minute pace, but in those early miles I felt stronger than I was. Sigh, it never changes. After all these marathons I STILL don't do what I tell the novice to do. You start out below your projected pace, warm up for 2

miles and then build for 2 miles into your race pace ... and then just hold it there. Or you just run like you feel and around 20 miles later the wheels fall off. Here's the bad news: if you do the latter it's almost a sure thing that you'll finish at or worse than the pace you originally set yourself. Ugh!

Near mile 4, I had a wry smile as we passed the Bolivar Memorial - a gift from the people of Venezuela. The way this race was laid out we climbed away from the mall up into the poorer neighborhoods. That's a rise over about 3 miles. After about 2 miles we wound back down to the stadium where the half marathoners left us. This means running in a thick pack right up to just before the 13 mile marker and then suddenly you're on your own going down behind the stadium while the others are being met with roars of festive welcomes. Then comes a repeat of the early part of the route and, just after mile 17, it's left and in the subway (9th street) that goes beneath the Smithsonian. I was still feeling great and began to increase my speed. I began flying and then came mile 20. No kidding, my right foot went to sleep on me. This is a new one to me. The trouble is that by then the distance down to my shoe laces is SO far that any thought of bending down to check on that foot was just out of the question. The next 3 miles were along the Anacosta River. Maybe one day the area will be pretty, but at present it's drab. The little breeze was chilly and my spirits were low. At about mile marker 22 a long 3/4 mile "out and back" happened. I looked into the faces of those on their way back towards me. Two thoughts rushed to mind: "Why do they all look so fresh and strong?" and: "how I wish I was where you guys are now!" When I did get there I gazed into the faces of those coming up towards me. I almost apologized for where I was because I never did see a more haggard, depressed, beat-up looking bunch of athletes.

Two miles on Minnesota Ave followed. It's a drab neighborhood and I was so pleased to see the 25 mile marker as we turned East towards the finish. There's a war movie called *a Bridge too Far*. That's how this felt. The stadium is in view for a mile. The bridge is almost a 3rd of a mile long. Trudge, trudge, shuffle shuffle, groan, pant, sigh and some odd coughing that felt like hernias happening. Well, these last 6 miles are all about courage. I finished at a 9 minute mile pace - 03H 57 mins 37 secs. If I keep working at it like this, it's just a matter of time before I break into my first 4 hour marathon (if you don't count the nightmare up in Boston one year)

The most meaningful moment was when I arrived back at Congress Heights station and limped towards the gate. The Metro worker I'd met early that morning came out of his ticket office, met my eye and grunted: "Y'made it back, huh?" I felt like saying "No, I fell asleep on the tracks and a train went over me here's your sign!"