

The Richmond Marathon has been on my list since I got started running 4.5 years ago. I had thought seriously about running it this year until plantar fasciitis reared its ugly head a couple of weeks ago. I figured that this was a message to stay home and wait till next year. However, other than my right heel, the rest of my body felt fine and I was convinced that if the soreness dissipated I'd give it a try. The litmus test was a 5K that I ran on 11/4. My foot felt fine the entire race but was sore as heck for the next several days. Then finally, against my better judgment and after some coaxing from a coworker who was going to run the 8K in Richmond and was looking for a carpool mate, I decided to register late on Wednesday.

By Friday all was right with the world - my heel felt fine with none of the usual morning pain associated with plantar fasciitis and the weather forecast was excellent for running (low 40s at 8AM and 50F at noon). So on Friday morning at 5:30AM I made the final decision to go to Richmond and run the marathon.

After picking up my packet and checking into the hotel I decided to take a stroll to get my bearings and find the starting line that was approximately 1/2 mile from the hotel. One misplaced step off of the sidewalk gave me an unpleasant reminder that my right heel was still attached to my leg. After a few muffled obscenities I hobbled back to my room to ice and elevate my foot. As the pain dissipated I ate the home made pre-race meal that Carrie sent with me (one of the benefits of driving to a race and having an understanding spouse who is willing to put up with my idea of a wild bachelor weekend) and made my final plans for the race ahead. About 1 and 1/2 hours after falling asleep I was jolted out of bed by the wailing of the hotel fire alarm. I am pretty sure that whatever adrenaline stores that I had in my body were consumed in the next few minutes as I scurried around like a blind mouse in a maze looking for my pants, wallet, coat and room keys. So after going down 5 flights of stairs, waiting for the fire department's all-clear signal, and back up the 5 flights it dawned on me as I drifted off to sleep that this might have been the second message not to run. The third message was at 5:45AM when my backup alarm went off

because I had slept through the first alarm. 364 days a year I wake up somewhere between 5:00 and 5:30AM without an alarm clock. So the one day that I want to wake up at 5:30AM it takes 2 alarm clocks to wake me - if this isn't a message to stay in bed and bag the run then nothing is. Of course, being neither superstitious or religious, I ignored all the messages and prepared for the race and headed off to the start around 7:15.

The gun went off at 8:00, I hit the mat at 8:00:28 and the pain seared through my right heel at 8:00:29! I kept telling myself that it would calm down after my foot loosened up. It never did and I felt it every single step of the way. Somehow I was able to talk myself through it and ran fairly even splits for the first 18 miles or so before hitting a rough patch (some mild nausea and indigestion) that mysteriously went away between the 21 and 22 mile mark. With no wall in sight, my foot screaming at me to stop, and only about 4 miles to go I stubbornly put the hammer down and set my sights on the finish line with the goal of coming in below 3:30:59 to get a BQ in the bank for 2009. My chip time was 3:30:33! The course was a bit more challenging than I expected with more rolling hills and fewer flats than advertised. Not a complaint, just an observation. Also, the overall crowd support was very good considering the size of about 4000 runners. If you like the crowd support of a big city marathon then this is probably not the place for you because there are many lonely areas of the course. However, if you value affordable accommodations, proximity to start/finish lines, and not having to get up in the middle of the night to get on a shuttle bus, then this is definitely one to try.

So two days later my foot is still scolding me for my stupidity but I am still basking in the afterglow of running my 12th marathon in 4 years, my 5th one in 2007, my third consecutive Boston, and BQs for 2008 and 2009. That combined with running R2C12 and RTB with Wes' teams, the Lehigh valley 1/2 marathon, and a few other shorter races this year have made for a full year of running. I'm definitely going to take some time off from running now to completely recover and to focus on 2008.