

Jiffy Pop, Pacing, Pee and Salvation

Somewhere along the line, I became determined to run fifty marathons in fifty states. I can't tell you exactly when it was. It may have been when I ran the Las Vegas Marathon only weeks after I ran Harrisburg, (only weeks after I swore off marathons) deciding to run shorter distances at faster paces or just my never ending pursuit of a goal.

Last year I was in a funk after watching the NYC Marathon. I was bummed that I wasn't there and wouldn't be running any more marathons. I knew being a spectator was not my lot in life. It was shortly after the Marathon that Steve Brookman informed me that he would be running Harrisburg and suggested I come out and run it for kicks.

Steve is one of my favorite guys to run with. I crack jokes about old he is and he cracks jokes about just how slow I am for a youngin'. That being said, with my 17 mile long run behind me, I set off for Harrisburg. To make a long story short, I chewed Steve's ear off for 23 miles, and I ran a PR.

After I returned home from the marathon, I decided it might be cool for my father to see me run a marathon. I signed up for the Las Vegas Marathon. It was only five weeks later, and another PR, 3:42:31! It occurred to me that I've run a marathon in NY, PA, and now Nevada. The groundwork is set and the goal is formulated. Next stop, South Carolina- except I injured myself weeks prior to the race on the waffle run and got snowed out. Enough said!

With my new goal of 50 in 50, I was anxious to sign up for any marathon that would take me to a new place. Heading up to Boston to watch so many of our fellow HRHers run the Marathon had me thinking that without a doubt, the ONLY race to run in Massachusetts could be the Boston Marathon. How in the hell could I shave 22 minutes off of my PR?

There was chatter among several members of the club about running the St George Marathon in Utah. Utah??? Note to self, Utah is NOT a state I've run. As luck would have it, the team I signed up for was selected in the lottery. I never win anything. I've never run NYC by getting in by the lottery! I'm one of those pathetic folks who needs to raise money and run for a charity.

With my golden ticket in hand, I promptly (that evening) make my hotel and flight arrangements. I was not going to wait for the last minute. I wanted a decent hotel in the right spot. As fate would have it, I was the only one from our club that actually committed to a hotel and airfare. With everyone backing out, I was the last man standing. I had to make a choice: run with my friends at wineglass or go solo to Utah. I figured I could cancel the hotel and re-use my ticket to go to Vegas some other time and visit my parents. I signed up for wineglass. It was another race in NY, but what the hell, I would have fun and maybe I would BQ.

My parents were supposed to be going to Israel while St George was being run. They were nice enough to let me use their house for the night when I would arrive in Vegas. My parents decided they would not be going to Israel and they wanted to go to St George with me and be there when I crossed the finish. The die is set. St George here I come.

Building back after my ankle injury was no fun (as Joe Galioto can attest to). Getting injured and losing a month of training is no fun either. Determined to run a BQ, I

resorted to a month of bike riding. Throw in a the “Run of the Mill”, R2C and I’m feeling pretty good. Any other marathon I’ve run was without a strict training schedule. I spent lots of time on my feet, but never the right time. This time around would be different. I’d follow a schedule (provided by John Weidner). Hell, I’d even cross train and weight lift! I need a good time in Utah. It’s my path to Boston.

The drive from Vegas to St George is very much like driving through any other cat box with clumping cat litter. Lots of brown with little clumps of scrub brush and rocks. One mountain range looks like the next. The highlight of the drive is when you drive through a small piece of Arizona that acts as a gateway to Utah. You drive through a partially man made ravine that is spectacular. The strata of the mountains have you feel like you are driving through a funhouse. It’s unsettling and spectacular all at the same time.

Waking up at 3:30 in the morning to catch the early bus was a piece of cake. I had slept like a baby (I was awake about every 20 minutes). The Hilton Hotel had shuttles running to the buses that would take me and my fellow runners to the start. The first thing you notice heading to the start is that you are mainly heading up hill. You hit a few rollers in the middle but oh yes, you are heading uphill.....until... Hey wait a second, Why is the bus going down hill?? I had noticed on the elevation map that there was a hill. It was a lot bigger than I thought!

With starting up in the mountains the weather is cold at the start and warmer at the finish. You get off the bus and they hand you one of the space blankets we usually get at the end of a marathon. It wasn’t quite that cold. I brought my Beauty and the Beast blanket with me as a throw away. Along the roadside they had Bonfires set to keep warm and people were sitting in the dirt surrounding the bonfires. With everybody wrapped in their shiny blankets it looked like a bunch of Jiffy Pop Popcorn just waiting to be popped!

The one thing I’ve learned about myself over my last few years of running is that I lack discipline. I have a hard time holding back and taking it easy. For shorter distances I can usually gut out a decent time. I always surprise myself just how fast I run at R2C. If I was going to BQ, I’d need to remove my testosterone from the equation. I decided to run with a pace group. I would leave my Garmin at home. I wouldn’t even pay too close attention to the mile markers. No looking for clocks, No mental gymnastics. My plan was to stick with the pace group and keep “balloon guy” in my sights.

It’s just about 6:40, I’ve met up with the pace group and I’ve sized everyone up. They play the Star Spangled Banner, the wheel chairs are off..... No bang, no nothing, WE’RE OFF. I’m making small talk with a few of the other pace group runners and our balloon guy. The plan is made. He tells me that we’ll take it easy the first half and then we’ll run a negative split. This plan completely disturbs me. I never run a negative split. What will I do at mile 24 when the wheels fall off? We get about 8 miles in, balloon guy says we are seconds from where we are supposed to be. Of course I have no idea just how “easy” we are taking it. I realize, Holy crap, I’ve run eight miles, I feel fresh like I hadn’t even run yet. I was feeling so good I hadn’t had any of my power bar yet.

We hit the 1/2 way mark. 1 hour 40 minutes on the nose. Granted our chip time would be about 40 seconds faster. Balloon guy has us right on track. Balloon guy is my hero. I’ve run a perfect race so far. It’s *his* race I’m running, but it’s perfect. I’ve made it up the big hill around mile eight, I’ve cruised the rolling hills with relative ease,

AND I'm still running right at marathon pace! We crest the top of the last hill and here it is, "The Kingtowns" right here in Utah! Balloon guy ducks to the side to grab gatorade. I see the hill, Spread my elbows and lift my legs and let the hill carry me. I'm running past people and my breathing is easy. I come to find out one of my fellow pace groupers did the same thing. He was wearing a watch. He was running a 7:15 when I disappeared. After I got to the bottom of the major hill I decided I needed to dial it back a bit. I would use the time I picked up to eat and drink and wait for balloon guy.

I look behind me, no balloon guy! I look into the distance and as far as I can see, NO BALLOON GUY! Crap. Had I run so fast that I lost him? Had I slowed down to the point while I was resting that he blew by me? After all, we were going to run a negative split. With no watch, no clock and no balloon guy I was on my own for the the last 10 miles. At this point I've determined that my balloon guy is still behind me. If I had slowed down that much, I would have been caught by the 3:30 pace group. OK I'm still feeling pretty good. I'd continue to run at a pace that feels good. Granted by now I'm running past people walking, I'm running past people who are running as well. Just how fast did these wing nuts go out to have the wheels fall off so early?

At mile 16 I tell myself I'm at Bundt Park for a run with my friends. To occupy my the last nine, I decide I need to click the miles off. On the right side of the course the miles are marked off with silver Mylar balloons. At this point the course is either downhill or flat. The weather is clear so you can see the markers pretty far in advance. Some of the views at this point are pretty amazing. There is one spot where the mountains come together to form a breathtaking view. Aside from that, I saw a lot of brown dirt and sneakers!

Eight miles, seven miles, six miles. Now the race starts. I'm beginning to feel it. I keep telling myself its a 10K. Five miles, four miles. Where the hell is balloon guy? I don't have the energy to even turn around to look for him. Three miles- Its a 5K, a piece of cake. Did I mention its the warmest St George Marathon EVER. Yes, the cake is in the oven. 2.2 miles to go. I ask someone with a watch how long he's been out. 3 Hours FLAT. I've got 20 minutes to run 2.2 miles!! I'm 2.2 miles from Boston. The next mile is hell. I'm certain balloon guy is going to power past me. Still no balloon guy. 1.2 miles to go. How the hell can I do it? More Gatorade, the last aid station. Where the hell is the last balloon. I'm exhausted, I can't see it. The course takes a sharp left turn. No balloon, just cheering in the distance. I can see the finish!!! I can see it!!! Is it close enough that I can walk it and still BQ? No watch, no clock that I can make out, NO WALKING. I need a goal, I'll run to the group of spectators only 50 yards away. Chin down, I make my way to the finish. I look up at the clock before I pass under it. 3:19!!! I did it!!

Just feet past the finish, exhausted, on the verge of collapse, I see my Mom. She saw me cross and she heard my name being called as I crossed. Mission accomplished. My mother witnessed me accomplish a goal I had set, so I could relax. I was overcome with a warm feeling. Yes- I peed my pants. I made my way to the cooling showers only feet passed the finished and hung onto the shower and cooled off. I had done it. I shaved 24 minutes off my marathon PR in one year for a BQ.

I motioned to my mother I was going to get some water. After I received my finishers medal I was handed an ice pop and a moist towel. Where was the water??? I had to walk a few hundred yards to get to the water. I pretty much collapsed to the ground after drinking my water and laid there for a good fifteen minutes.

In order to run as light as possible, I ran with a pouch with a few necessities such as energy bar, gummy bears and just my mothers phone number. I walked back towards the finish looking for my mother but she wasn't there. I borrowed someones phone to call her and I got her voicemail. After wandering around where I would have come out of the runners recovery area, we found each other. We called the hotel with someone else's phone because she forgot hers at the hotel to find out where the shuttle would pick us up. As fate would have it, we were waiting at the wrong corner for almost an hour. We struck up a conversation with a few people that were spectating the race. When they realized that we were waiting such a long time and that I had run the race, they graciously gave us a ride back to the hotel. I was "saved" by a few Mormons!

I'll never run another marathon in Utah. Hell, I may never run another sub 3:20 marathon. I will however remember this race for a long time. Off to North Carolina in December! Does anybody know if the OBX Marathon has a 3:15 pace group?