

## OBX Marathon

Being an “Elite Runner” has its perks. I can say this now that I’ve had the experience of being treated like one at the Outer Banks Marathon.

Normally elite runners like myself are treated to police escorts and helicopter rides but I decided that it made more sense to be more like the rest of the little people and battle my way through the Philly traffic on a Friday afternoon. Needless to say, my drive Friday night gave me the opportunity to take it easy and not waste too much time partying on an all night. After all, it’s the sleep you get two nights before a race that really matters. Being in bed by 1am didn’t quite allow for a great night’s sleep. Luckily I was lulled to sleep by the sounds of high winds and crashing waves only a short block away.

Thanks to my friend Susan, I had the luxury of a lovely home with all the trimmings, a pool, a hot tub and yes... my own private own masseuse (Louan). As we all know it’s very important the day before a race to get into the spirit of racing. A walk along the beach, a nice soak in the hot tub and a great meal. The paparazzi was nowhere to be found but my daughter Jessica and her friend Julia were there on the walk to protect me from the crowds just in case the photographers would pester me.

As an elite runner, we generally have our handlers with us to take care of all the little details. Course and elevation map, start location and time and where to pick up our race packets. After we had a late lunch at Dirty Dick’s, my handlers (Louan, Susan, Jessica and Julia) took me to the race expo. The expo was well organized and picking up my packet was a breeze. They were even kind enough to have my first name on my bib! Louan and Susan gathered everything they needed in the way of spectator maps and a few freebies that they could use as my support crew.

As part of my pre-race ritual (not that I’m OCD) I very carefully go through my wardrobe options. Will it be the HRH singlet with the yellow shoes and red pirate socks? Maybe the red Brooks with the Fischermen singlet? After discussing my options with my stylist (my daughter Jessica), she decides that if I’m going to run like a Kenyan (as we Elites do) I should wear several colors that are represented on many flags from Africa. Yellow shoes, Red Socks and my Green HRH singlet. As we all know it is just as important to look good as it is to run fast. Now that the wardrobe was picked out all that was left to do was get my gear loaded into my running belt. My personal assistant Susan had noticed on the race route sheets that Hammer Gels were available along the way. In theory, there wasn’t much that I would need in my running belt. I figured it’s always best to have the things I like the best. Gummy bears, a power bar, some chocolate covered espresso beans and one of the most important things to run a marathon with.... baby wipes!

I woke up the following morning, 5 am. I actually had a good night’s sleep. The house is quiet, I go up to the kitchen and turn on the pot of coffee Susan (my hostess with the mostess) was kind enough to set up for me. Susan heard me get up and Louan was still sleeping. As I obsessively check my pack I’m feeling better and better about the day. It doesn’t get much better than this! I’m staying in an amazing house, all of my needs are being attended to and I’m getting a ride to within a block of the start! I’m an elite runner!

Susan and I hop in the car and start heading over to the elementary school where runners are to be dropped off. Traffic was a bit heavy and I started to see runners hopping out of cars. I took their cue and did the same. Luckily I had my sunglasses with me so the Paparazzi wouldn’t recognize me. In my haste, I left my running belt in the car. No big deal, I borrowed a cell phone and called my support crew to inform them that I need my belt.

The weather at the start was in the low 50’s. Perfect weather. I arrived in my shorts and singlet and wasn’t too cold. It amazed me just how bundled up people were. Had they not run in the cold? I can only imagine what they would have dressed in last week at the NYC marathon! The corrals were

set up by pacing ranges. 5-7 minute, 7-9, and so on. Most people seemed realistic about where they put themselves. It's not a huge race but the staggered start seems to keep you from getting run over.

I was hoping I would be able to run with a pace group but they didn't have enough pacers to cover all of the time slots. Normally as an elite runner I have a motorcade with a clock to watch. This time I would need to rely on my Garmin.. I've never used it to help me run a certain pace so I was in uncharted territory. Normally when I wear my watch I just run like hell and then back my pace off as needed. This time around I would set the alarms for between 7:20 and 7:40 pace. I assumed that the watch would beep a certain way to tell me to run faster and another tone to tell me to slow down. Not running with prescription sunglasses essentially leaves me blind as a bat with exception to my long distance vision. If the light is right, I can read my watch. With sunglasses it's a bit dicey.

We get through the benediction that acknowledged all the hard work the volunteers did leading up to the race and all of the work they will do all day. The national anthem is sung and ..... BANG! The cannons fire- We're off!

The first few miles of the race take us through a small residential area, people are out cheering and have tables of food and drink set up. Mimosas, Bloody Mary's. Not my idea of the way to hydrate but heck, this is a pirate theme marathon. As I'm running, I quickly start trying to figure my watch out. It beeps, I run faster, I look, I still need to go faster, It beeps, faster still. I'm dying already! At some point the watch stops beeping, I look and sure enough I'm in my target range. After the first few miles, I start running with a guy that had run NY last week after having two teeth extracted. We're talking, my watch beeps. Crap, I start running faster. Miles 4-6 had us running along the bay. I was grateful that the wind had died down from yesterday. We get to around 6 miles, I look at my watch, 6:50. Crap, too fast! At this point I'm starting to think that I'll just turn the damn watch off! I start running with another guy, I ask him what he's hoping to run... 3:05. Crap too fast! we run together for a little while and I tell him I forgot my belt and I have no energy bar, no gels, nothing. He was kind enough to share a few chomps with me. Would anyone deny Meb a gel?? Why should I be any different!

We turn out of the neighborhood and I hear my name being called. Luckily I was paying attention. My personal support staff had made it just in time to hand me my belt! Normally, the race would have special table set up for us elite runners but I guess with all of the pirates out running today nothing was safe. Now that I had the comfort of all my goodies I was feeling even better about the day. The next few miles had us cruising through another neighborhood. People were out cheering and calling out runners names. The race bibs had everybody's first name on them so it was a lot of fun to hear your peoples name being called out by the crowd.

Mile 8 had us running past the monument to the Wright Brothers. I was relieved that part of the race didn't have us running to the top of the mound that the monument sits on. We continue running around the monument and continue through another neighborhood. While the race was starting to stretch out at this point, I always had a fellow runner in site. It was comforting to also have race personnel at every turn. At this point I'm starting to get into a rhythm, The breathing feels good. Legs feel OK, I look at the watch, I'm still running a bit faster that I want to but I figured I would want some time in the bank for the Bridge at mile 22-23. Hey, no big deal, I'm a hill runner. I figure I'll bank a bit more time, and then at mile 10 the race turns into a trail run. Crap! I run up this hill that requires me to use muscles I didn't even know I had. For the most part the trail is rolling and we are running on a soft surface of pine needles. A trail runners dream. I'm no trail runner! At this point I've decided that what ever time I've "banked" is gone. We get out of the woods, I almost fall and about half mile later is the split mat. 1:34. I'm still running a bit fast, but I made it through the woods in one piece!

Miles 14-22 are a piece of cake. And yes, the cake is in the oven!! It was hot and no shade to be found. At mile 14 we started picking up half marathoners. Luckily the half marathon started a half hour before the full marathon so there weren't to many stragglers to get in the way. Even on the highway where many miles 14-22 took place there were plenty of people cheering. Granted some of

them were support staff and volunteers, but they were cheering! The only saving grace about the high stretches is that they are flat as a pancake.

At mile 22 the monster reared its ugly head. I can see ahead a very high bridge. As it gets closer I'm starting to freak out. Are they kidding?? A hill like this at mile 22-23? A cruel joke? Were my eyes playing tricks on me? Surely what looked like roadway was actually the structural members of the bridge and the roadway would be suspended from it. Wrong, wrong, wrong. The Washington-Baum Bridge is: 1.05 mi long, 82' high, with a 650' climb to the top at a 4% grade. This was no fun. I actually contemplated walking it. At this point I was slogging along at a 9:30 pace. Even my watch was tired of screaming at me. The only thing that keeps me from crying was the thought of a one mile down hill on the other side.

Hitting mile 24 I realized that although my legs were tired I felt pretty good. I always find the last 2.2 miles to be that hardest part of the race. We turn off the bridge and start to make the home stretch. At this point I'm running with Marathoners, 1/2 Marathoners and 8Kers. The 26 mile mark is within sight when you make the right turn into Monteo. The last 2/10ths are always a real battle for me. Even though I had just turned the corner I had to ask a spectator how far the finish was. As every good spectator would say "Its just around the corner, You can make it!" I make a left turn I can hear names being called.. I'm almost there! I make the final right turn. I muster up what ever little bit of legs I have left and drive towards the finish. A few runners pass me on the final stretch- Those pesky 8Kers, As I near the finish line I'm all alone, They call my name, I pass through the finish hands raised, 3:21:50.96th place overall,

There were lots of goodies to be had just past finish. Bagels, oranges, beer and ice cream. My entourage met me at the finish. I was whisked away. I was much too. tired to deal with people looking for my autograph so I was happy to get out of the crowd.

Hopping in the car a few hours after a marathon is no fun but all in all I was feeling OK. We arrived home at 11:30 PM. I was tired and a bit groggy. Had I actually run a marathon this morning? Am I really an elite runner or was this all just a dream... Well, I'm no elite runner and that doesn't really matter. What does matter is the sense of pride knowing that I belong to an elite segment of the population. A segment that is either foolish enough to push themselves to the edge of physical exhaustion by running 26.2 miles or a segment of the population that is just plain crazy!

Next stop Rehoboth Beach Delaware!