

## Return to the Bar A

"Twas the week before Christmas, when all through the state  
The Hill Runners of Hunterdon left their homes right at eight  
They were heading for South Belmar down at the shore  
In hopes of running a half marathon, or more.

The runners from Hunterdon rose from their beds  
While visions of PR's danced in their heads  
Having run this last year; they knew just the way  
And before you knew it, had arrived at the Bar A.

When out in the parking lot, there arose such a clatter  
I sprang from my bar stool to see what was the matter  
Away to the window I made a quick dash  
Tore open the shutters and looked for a crash.

It was sunny and cold and the wind started to blow  
But it was only 9:30, and too early to go.

When what to my wondering eyes should appear  
But a man on a bicycle, with a cart in the rear.  
Ridden by a big man who gave such an alert  
I knew in a moment it must be Dr T-Shirt.

More rapid than Kenyans his runners they came  
And he whistled and shouted, and called them by name.  
"Now Janet, now Bruce, now Dennis, & John  
On runners from New Jersey both far and yon.  
Out to the bus, right after last call  
Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!"

Up to Long Branch the runners would be driven  
Although getting back safely was hardly a given  
Driving through towns, making note of each street  
Not getting lost in this race is a remarkable feat.

Grabbing jackets and hats, we crammed on the bus  
Although Dr T-Shirt would not be riding with us  
He'd be at an Asbury Park intersection  
Bringing water and beer, and offering protection.

He sprang to his bike, said farewell to all of us  
And off we all went on the Bar A Trolley bus.  
But I heard him exclaim, ere he rode out of sight  
"Hope you find your way back here, and while it's still light".

Fool me once; shame on you. Fool me twice; shame on me!

Perhaps you will remember the exploits of the Hill Runners of Hunterdon when they ventured down to the Jersey shore in December 2003, expecting to compete in a conventional road race. Despite having realized that this event was anything but conventional and did not come with the usual

amenities such as goody bags, mile markers, race numbers, or even a marked course, a few of us decided that we just had to go back. A few weeks before the event, there were a few details that needed clarifying. For instance, the date mysteriously changed from Saturday Dec. 18th to Sunday Dec. 19th and the start time on Jersey Runner.com said 11:15 AM, whereas the on-line registration form indicated a 10:00 AM start. I wrote to Dr T-Shirt and the Jersey Shore Running club, acknowledging that we had lowered our expectations based on experience and didn't expect bib numbers, chips, mile markers, water stops or even a finish line, but we would like to actually be there on the correct date and time. Or perhaps it would be easier if we simply advised when we could be there! The well-oiled race-organization machinery immediately sprung into action, and the Sunday date was confirmed and 10:45 AM was selected as a compromise start time. And Dr T-Shirt advised that he was praying for rain, so that there would be water on the course.

Dennis S., John F., and myself were the only holdovers from HRH brave or crazy enough to do this two years running, although we somehow managed to convince Janet H. that she should join us. All we could promise her is that it would be an unforgettable race. The four of us were pre-registered and the on-line confirmation of the Bar A Half Marathon & Ten Miler acknowledged that the event was also known as the Bar A Somewhat Half Marathon. To give credit, the race registration said that they were going to try and arrange for an accurate course this year (see below), and that only those with a sense of humor should participate. Day-of-the-race registration forms clearly stated that checks were payable to Dr T-Shirt and should be given to Bartender!

Our hopes of having some more laughs and unforgettable memories were quickly realized. Upon arrival, we struck up a conversation with some of the Jersey Shore Running club members who were already fixtures in the bar, and immediately a discussion ensued concerning the course route, as very few people ran the identical course last year. Oh, and by the way, the route was reversed this year, as I suspect they were afraid that some participants might actually know the correct route having done it at least once. We would be driven up to the Celtic Cottage in Long Branch, and run back to the Bar Anticipation in South Belmar. Oh, and they also changed the name to Lake Como in case you thought you could look for recognizable road signs. Bar to bar was supposed to be an exact 10 miles (ha). Suggestions were made that instead of doing a loop north of Long Branch in the early going, one could just add on a 3 mile loop south of Belmar once you got there to make a half-marathon. You could run down and around some lake, or just along the boardwalk, or whatever. In other words, "design your own half-marathon". We had not disappointed Janet when we warned her that this was not your usual USATF race with a certified course.

But the real laughs came a few minutes later. Us seasoned pros were eagerly anticipating the arrival of Dr T-Shirt (Gio) in his multi-hued hearse, so that we could have a look at our race sweatshirts that justified the registration fee. The long sleeve wick able shirts from last year are treasured possessions. Without warning, the front doors of the Bar A burst open (think of a gunslinger entering a bar in a western movie) and driving into the bar on a bike was the infamous Dr T-Shirt, with a huge cart attached behind the bike. See attached link for photos. The cart bore boxes of sweatshirts, water for the course, and beer and chips (potato, not Champion). That's when we were laughing so hard, we had tears streaming down our face, and we knew we had already recouped our registration fee.

At any rate, we tumbled onto the bus and after we were all seated, someone finally agreed to drive the thing to the start. The Bar A Trolley bus or jitney had been used for a wedding just a few hours earlier, so it was still festooned with ribbons and there were champagne glasses still scattered throughout. We made quite a sight heading north. Along the way, we noted Harry's Roadhouse, where The Boss was due to play later that day. Yes; the other Bruce. Apparently, he might have joined us if he didn't already have a conflict. We arrived at the Celtic Cottage and immediately charged the door in order to use the bathrooms. Of course, it was locked. Someone made the mistake of opening the door and we all charged in. The poor guy was frantic that he was violating all kinds of liquor laws, but we assured him that we didn't want to drink (quite yet), but just use the john. It turns out that he hadn't been forewarned that we were coming.

Once we had all done our business; we headed outside and were all milling around on the street. Someone was talking about Emeril and said "Bam". That caused two of the contestants to start running, which meant that the race was now officially started and we all followed dutifully. After a couple of blocks and a few 90 degree turns, Janet remembered to turn on her watch. She's learning, but needn't have bothered. After the successful racing year that he's had, and even though he should have known better, John took off at 7:15/mile pace with the leaders. He mistakenly assumed that this would be an accurate course and wanted to test himself. Of course, he had cheated by bringing his own copy of MapQuest, so he was one of the few participants who had a chance of running the prescribed route. Janet, Dennis, and I stayed in the second pack for the entire race, and ran quite strong at an estimated 8:00-8:15 pace for at least 10 miles. We passed Santa about half-way and there were High Fives all around. We felt reasonably comfortable that we were on course when we ran through a building. Yes; part of the course goes through a building and we remembered from last year.

Once got to South Belmar, we didn't wimp out and head straight to the Bar A, which was the 10-mile course. The experienced Jersey Shore Running club members almost all did exactly that to get a head-start on the drinking. Instead, we headed south, hoping that we could add a fairly accurate 3 miles to the route. Almost immediately, we see John coming at us in the opposite direction, so that was encouraging. However, to make a long story short, he and one or two others turned fairly early and we unfortunately didn't turn around until we saw the neon lights of Atlantic City. According to his GPS, he ran only about 11 miles. We ran an additional 38 minutes, and according to the locals, apparently did at least 14 miles, perhaps 14 1/2. Who knows and I guess, who cares? They don't call this the Bar Approximate Half Marathon for nothing.

We had a lot of laughs, and will likely be tempted to try this again next year, if they'll have us. We're starting to loosen up more each year and not take this event too seriously. We're kind of straight-laced compared to the Jersey Shore Running club members. After all; this is the club that organizes the 12-bar 10 miler each August. Think about it.

You can't make this stuff up.

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