

GO! St. Louis Marathon
St. Louis, Missouri
April 7, 2013

In April 2012, I completed my tenth consecutive GO! St. Louis Marathon. That made it an easy decision to return in 2013 to try to extend my streak by one more. However, I wasn't sure it was ever going to happen.

After a truly miserable experience at the Redman Triathlon in September 2012, I told myself that I wasn't going to commit myself to doing another long-distance race far in advance. I wanted to have the option to either not do the race--if I didn't have the interest in doing so--or to sign up for it at the last moment, in case I did. I became a commitment-phobe.

Winter 2012-2013

There's no reason to register for the GO! St. Louis Marathon far in advance unless you want to take advantage of the discount for early registration. The marathon has never sold out, so you can wait up until the day before the race to register if you wish.

I run year-round, so it's not like I'd have to begin training for the marathon months in advance, just in case I decided to do it. I normally run 15-25 miles a week, which I've proved is sufficient to get you to the finish line of a marathon. That's not nearly enough to enable me to finish as quickly as in years past, but, with the speed and endurance I've lost over the years, I'm not sure that any amount of training would enable me to do that. (At age 58, I accept that I'm not going to be able to run a 3:46 marathon like I did ten years earlier.) Finishing the marathon has always been my overriding goal, and that's even more true these days.

I rationalize my lack of training by saying that spending dozens of additional hours training just to finish the marathon an hour faster is a waste of time if your goal is to simply finish.

If I did eventually decide to do the marathon, it would be necessary to have done some long runs during training. This has always been an issue for

me. In the early years of doing this race, I would do some runs of 18-20 miles. They were punishing, and I dreaded doing them. In subsequent years, I cut the long runs back to 14-16 miles. In the past couple years, I cut that back even further, to 12-14 miles, although that wasn't necessarily by choice--injuries prevented me from going longer.

This winter, my longest run was 12 miles, which I did just twice. I actually planned to go farther on those runs, but my legs hurt a lot, and I ended up taking frequent breaks to walk. Even the slightest uphill killed me.

I would probably have done more long runs, but the weather this winter was rather unusual. The weather was relatively mild up until late February, when we started experiencing colder than normal temperatures and some late-season snowfalls. In recent years, we had plenty of warm (60° or higher), dry days in February and March to get out and do a long run lasting two or three hours. This year, we had very few of those days, and what days like that we did have were usually very windy, which is miserable in which to run. I avoid doing long runs in temperatures below 60 because, not only is it very unpleasant, but running for hours in cold weather when you're soaked in sweat puts you at greater risk of getting sick afterward.

Deep Doo-Doo

I've always been motivated to train by fear--the fear of being at the starting line of a long event and not being adequately trained.

I felt that, despite having only done a few relatively long runs, I had sufficient training and experience to finish the marathon. But, I had a few real concerns that made me reluctant to press my luck by attempting it. The first was that, on each of those long runs, I had episodes of sharp pain extending from my lower back to the top of my right leg. It would typically happen late in the run as I was climbing a hill. Since the St. Louis course was nothing but hills, it would be very likely to happen during the race, and I'd have a slow, painful jog or walk to the finish line.

The second concern was my lack of endurance. During those 12-mile training runs, I took lots of walking breaks, especially during or just after

climbing a hill. If a 12-mile run is that taxing, a 26.2-mile marathon is going to be far worse.

Still, I thought I could finish the marathon, but signing up for it could be simultaneously the bravest and dumbest thing I've done in many years.

Half marathon

In addition to doing the marathon or doing nothing, I did have a third option: doing just the half marathon. I had no doubt that I could finish a half marathon, but I had no interest in it.

The first long race I ever did was the Second Baptist Church Half Marathon in Springfield, Missouri, in December 2002. They also offered a full marathon distance. I distinctly remember watching the full marathoners continue heading straight while us half marathoners turned around, and I felt guilty for taking the easier race option. Ever since then, I have always opted for the longest distance offered at any race I've done. And I wasn't going to change that now. It was either the GO! St. Louis Marathon, or nothing.

Decision day

It was the Thursday before the Sunday race when I finally decided to enter it. I was already in St. Louis for a Friday morning dental appointment. On Friday afternoon, I drove down to Chaifetz Arena to register for the marathon. I received my race bib, t-shirt and goody bag (it seems to get skimpier by the year), then walked around the expo. There was no turning back now.

Weight

I was hoping to shed some pounds and be lighter for this year's marathon than last. It didn't happen. Last year, I weighed 210 pounds. This year, 213. That is way too heavy for a marathon runner.

Weather forecast

I had been keeping an eye on the weather forecast for Sunday all week. The forecast kept calling for cloudy or mostly cloudy skies with a chance of showers, and highs in the mid 60s. I was happy with that. The weather for the last three GO! St. Louis Marathons was way too warm. Finally, there would be a break from warm weather. Or so I thought.

Friday night and Saturday

In the spring of 2010, ultramarathon runner Dean Karnazes ran across the United States in a joint effort with the *Live with Regis and Kelly* television show to encourage people--especially kids--to exercise. He ran through the Lake of the Ozarks, and I had an opportunity to actually meet him. It was a great experience that I'll always remember.

Early in 2011, I bought one of Dean's books, *Ultramarathon Man*, using a gift card a neighbor gave me for helping dig her stranded car out of the snow. I put the book on my coffee table, and it sat there--unread--for two years. I brought it along with me on this trip to St. Louis just in case I ran out of other things to read. I started reading it Friday night, and finished it Saturday afternoon. I could kick myself for waiting two years to read the book. It was outstanding. His story is unlike any I've ever read. I wish I had read the book before meeting him to tell him in person how inspiring it was. If there's any book worth reading the day before a marathon, it's that one. There were many occasions during the marathon that stories contained in his book came to mind.

On the day before a long race, I like to lie around with my feet elevated, and relax. Reading Dean's book gave me a great chance to do just that.

Sunday (race day)

There's always some nervousness before a long race, but I had very, very little this day. When you've done a race ten years in a row, you pretty much know what to do and what to expect. The absence of any self-imposed pressure to do well made it even less stressful. I was going to do my best, but not push myself so hard as to jeopardize finishing.

I couldn't help noticing that the starting line area was a lot less crowded than the past couple years. Two years ago, there were approximately 14,000 runners in the starting corral; this year, about 10,000. This was also noticeable on the course as well. Two years ago, I was having to dodge a lot more people during the first six miles, at which point the field started to spread out and the streets were plenty wide to accommodate all of us.

Weather

The weather was perfect for spectators, but not so much for the runners--especially the marathoners who would be out on the course for four or more hours. At the 7:00 a.m. start, the temperature was 56° and there was a slight breeze. The skies were mostly clear, and there was no chance of rain. Until the sun rose up higher in the sky, it would be very pleasant for running.

The early hours

The first eight miles of the marathon went very well. I wasn't running fast, but I felt good and was running steadily. I drank Gatorade from the bottle I was carrying with me, and supplemented that with cups of Gatorade and water from the aid stations. I ate gels at miles 2 and 6, and took my electrolyte supplements at miles 4 and 8. It was getting warm, so I'd dump water on my head to keep cool.

The first half of this year's race went much like last year's for me. In fact, I was kind of expecting it to be much the same. The big question at the start was when my legs would start getting heavy, forcing me to start walking at times. Last year, it was at around the 11-12 mile mark. It happened again this year at about that point. I wasn't discouraged. I ran as much as I could, but walked when necessary, particularly on the uphill.

Fly in the ointment

At around the 10-mile mark, my stomach started feeling bloated. In an effort to stay fueled, I took a gel from a volunteer at the 8-mile mark and promptly ate it. That turned out to be a mistake. I had already eaten one two miles earlier, and wasn't expecting to eat another one until mile 12.

The combination of too many carbohydrates (from the gels and Gatorade), a good running effort, and rising temperatures (which slows digestion) caused me to get bloated. There's no quick cure for bloating, unless you want to stop and let digestion proceed, but I wasn't about to do that. You can stop drinking and eating for an extended period, but that's only going to bring on dehydration and bonking. The best approach, in my experience, is to slow down and hope that digestion speeds up. In the meantime, it feels like you're running or walking with a bowling ball in your stomach.

The bloating continued to be uncomfortable for about the next seven miles. I did a lot of walking (which was also necessitated by my trashed legs), and was careful not to drink too much Gatorade. I did take another gel at mile 15. That would be the last one I'd eat during the race. Gatorade would be the only source of calories after that.

The heat

Temperatures rose steadily throughout the race and, while they were milder than the previous three years, they still presented a challenge. By 10:00 a.m., the temperature reached 66°, and the bright sun was making it feel warmer. I was dumping cups of water on my head at every aid station to try to cool off. By noon, the temperature hit 73°. That may feel perfect to a spectator, but to a marathon runner, it's too warm. What makes it worse is that the last six miles of the course offer no shade at all, and the heat radiating off the city streets is inescapable. For the fourth year in a row, battling the heat was a part of finishing this marathon.

The second half

I reached the halfway mark in 2:13:55, just seconds slower than last year. The second half of the race was simply a matter of staying on the move. I ran whenever my legs had the energy to do so, and walked when they didn't. I hate walking during a race, but sometimes my legs and/or aerobic conditioning give me no option. Perhaps I err on the side of caution and walk more than necessary, but I don't want to push myself so hard as to jeopardize finishing the race. Bad things--cramps, dehydration, stomach issues, injuries, etc.--tend to happen when you push beyond what you're capable of. I'd rather finish slower than not finish at all. As I've told many

other athletes over the years, your obituary will mention that you finished a marathon or Ironman triathlon, but it won't say that you could have finished it faster had you pushed yourself harder. No one, other than you, really cares.

The last mile

The last mile of this course is an almost magical experience. It begins after a long, sometimes steep climb from Forest Park Blvd. to Market Street--a hill that would be one of the toughest on the course regardless of when it occurred, but especially cruel being just a mile from the finish.

The last mile starts near the top of a hill on Market Street, near Jefferson Ave. The first half is a wonderful downhill, and gives you a distant glimpse of the finish line ahead. You can also start to hear the music and announcer in the distance, as the sound reverberates off the downtown buildings. The second half is a long, steady uphill that levels out just before the finish line. Had this uphill been anywhere in the previous 13 miles, I probably would have walked a good part of it. However, the adrenaline was pumping--thanks to seeing the finish line drawing closer and hearing the cheers of the spectators--and I ran all the way to the finish line. As usual, I made my usual noisy, jubilant run down the finish chute, detouring for a moment to collect some high-fives from the spectators. I finished in 5:20:57. It was my slowest stand-alone marathon, but I didn't care. I finished, and that's what matters.

Adrenaline

Adrenaline is an extraordinary chemical. You may have struggled for hours putting one foot in front of the other, but once the adrenaline kicks in, you can run--heck, you can even sprint--without feeling any pain or discomfort whatsoever. It's a shame the rush of adrenaline is beyond your control, and only lasts a short time. Once you cross the finish line, the rush quickly disappears, and the feelings of muscle soreness and burning feet take over.

Post race

I was sore the following day or two, but not very. The only post-race issues I had were a couple small blisters on my toes. There was no chafing whatsoever. All in all, I came out virtually unscathed.

I'm especially grateful and/or lucky that I never had during the marathon any lower back/upper leg problems that I had had during training. It's very strange. There have been many times when I would go into a race with a nagging pain that had been bothering me during training, but it turned out not to give me the slightest hint of a problem during the race. (I have a hunch that the two Aleve tablets I take before every long race is the reason. Aleve is my wonder drug that I only take in extreme circumstances.)

Will I be back in 2014 for a twelfth consecutive marathon?

Sorry, but I'm not making any commitment at this time. :)

Thanks for reading!

Jim Glickert
Osage Beach, Missouri
April 19, 2013

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RACE BIB #
2293

James Glickert
Osage Beach, MO
Age: 58
Gender: Male
Age Group: Male 55 To 59
Division: MARATHON

5:20:57

CHIP TIME: 5:20:57
CLOCK TIME: 5:27:54

OVERALL PLACE	MENS RANK	6 MI	HH TIME	HALF	17 MI	20.3 MI
1335 of 1593	865 of 989	58:57	20:49	2:16:50	3:12:10	3:57:26

Mile	Pace for this Mile	Cumulative Time	Comment
1			
2			
3	9:26	25:49	
4	10:36	36:25	
5	9:38	46:04	
6-11	1:02:42	1:48:47	
12-13	23:47	2:12:32	
13.1	1:20	2:13:55	
13.1-15	25:50	2:39:56	
16	15:00	2:54:46	
17	14:27	3:09:13	
18	12:49	3:22:03	
19	13:12	3:35:15	
20	14:00	3:49:16	
21	14:42	4:03:59	
22	13:26	4:17:25	
23	15:21	4:32:46	
24	14:20	4:47:07	
25	15:10	5:01:46	
26.2	18:39	5:20:57	



On mile 14, at Washington University on Forsyth Blvd.



Crossing the finish line



Modeling my eleventh GO! St. Louis Marathon finishers medal.