

Marathon Notebook

The marathon is the ultimate endurance test. Oh, sure, people sometimes go longer than that. But 26 miles 385 yards is where racing ends and ludicrous extremes begin.

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By **BRIAN MCINNIS**

The 'wall' is the term used to describe the point in a marathon—usually between 15 and 21 miles—where running is done on instinct and the only thing going through the racer's mind is the finish and the relief it will bring.

No amount of training, physical or psychological, can prepare the first time marathoner for it as this reporter learned Sunday in the P.E.I. Roadrunners-CBCT-FM marathon from Cavendish to Charlottetown.

It could have been the heat (24 degrees C), state of mind, diet in the days before the race or a combination, but whatever the reason the wall came somewhere after 19 miles. By 21 miles it was an effort to run, but walking cramped the muscles. Talk about irony—too tired to run and too tired to walk.

What follows is a mile by mile account of the experience of running a first marathon.

Cavendish: 11:00-12:00 a.m.

Runners mill around the changing facilities at the main beach area of the national park. Some are talking with fellow runners, stretching, but all in their own way are preparing themselves for the race ahead. About 11:45 we all move to the start line about ½ mile away. Everyone is nervous.

1-3 miles

This part of the race is where the runner really gets warmed up and searches for a comfortable pace. Some runners talk and joke with others and some look for a partner running the same pace. This runner prefers to run alone so he shuns company. So far all is well.

3-6 miles

There are aid stations every three miles but by the time the 'back of the packers' the three mile station the front runners are so far ahead they are out of sight. The heat has not really begun to show, but we are all aware it will take its toll later in the race.

We are all looking forward to running through North Rustico despite the fact the first hill is just after the turn onto the road into the village. North Rustico harbors the best race fans on the Island and they were all out Sunday banging pots, pans and yelling encouragement to the runners. The six mile water station is in the village.

6-9 miles

By this time the heat and several fair size hills are beginning to take their toll and some runners are slowing. The hills, which begin just before North Rustico, are the main obstacle and trade mark of this marathon course. Anyone who says the Island is flat has not run this course.

The heat this day is insidious. Because there is a wind the sweat dries quickly and the runner who is not careful soon realizes the potential for disaster.

9-12 miles

So far no problems but everyone drinks everything in sight because of the heat. A water sponge is your constant companion in an attempt to keep body temperature down.

12-15 miles

Fatigue has not really begun to tell but heat is still the main enemy and it seems to be getting worse. In addition to the regular water stations, people along the route have put water buckets on their front lawns and driveways. But even with this the runner cannot begin to replace lost fluids. Exercise physiologists estimate only about one-tenth of body fluids can be replaced during the race.

The half-way point comes about ½ mile from Oyster Bed Bridge. Only a little over 13 miles to the finish.

15-18 miles

People are beginning to drop out. One runner passed said he pulled a muscle and another was barely moving. It sounds a bit sadistic but passing a slower runner or one who has dropped out gives a psychological lift to the struggling runner who is passed can be crushed. Just before the 19-mile water station, which is guarded by a hill that normally would not have been much of a problem, this runner's legs began to cramp.

18-21 miles



The dictionary gives one definition of hell as being "any condition or cause of great suffering" and a little piece of hell, could be the stretch of highway from North Rustico to Charlottetown.

By the time this runner got to the 20-mile point, where Highway 2 joins the Malpeque Road, serious doubts enter the mind and these doubts become serious thoughts of dropping out.

But on this particular day the will to finish is stronger than the desire to quit and by alternating walking and running, progress, however slow, is made. The last five miles was covered this way with cramps from the thighs to the ankles causing severe pain.

24 MILES TO FINISH

This last station is located at the entrance to the Charlottetown Mall from here you can smell the finish. There is just one hill left and from there it is all downhill. Downhill? Flat stretch or hills it is all too painful to run.

At this point running more than two blocks at a time cramps the legs and stopping to walk brings the fear of being unable to begin to run again, if the little faster than a walk movement could be called a run.

By the time this runner got to the last three blocks of the race he seriously doubted he could cross the line running, but somehow speed, ever so little, was actually increased and the finish line was crossed standing up.

The time? Well, it was a very slow 4:32.10, but in a marathon it is not the time that really counts for the back runners but surviving and finishing. In this respect every finisher is a winner.

THANKS EVERYONE

For helping us make the 4th Annual Island Marathon the most successful yet. The P.E.I. Roadrunners Club would like to thank the following firms and organizations who donated services, goods or awards to the Marathon.

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These Cavendish area businesses: New Glasgow Lobster Suppers, Fisherman's Wharf Restaurant, Idle Oars Restaurant, Cavendish Arms Restaurant, St. Anne's Lobster Suppers, St. Lawrence Motel, Royal Atlantic Wax Museum. We would also like to thank more than 100 volunteers who gave freely of their time and all those who came out to cheer on the runners. We appreciate every one of you!

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