

I have to admit, I was a bit disappointed to find that it took me 3 hours, 51 minutes and 33 seconds to run the Paris Marathon. This was my second marathon, and one could say, I did prepare seriously for this one. I didn't like the way my first marathon went, I finished it in 4 hours 13 minutes and the man with the hammer already came at kilometer 29 on that one. A miracle that I finished it at all. After arriving, I couldn't walk anymore and in the car back home, I had the most horrible cramps in my legs. This one was going to be different.

I started seriously working on a training schedule two months before M-day and I didn't miss one single training. So I've done my intervals, my long slow runs and everything else that one has to do to be well prepared for the Marathon. I even had the food a marathon runner has to eat to prepare well for the marathon, which is pasta at lunch and dinner on Saturday, and lots of carbo-hydrates in the entire week before the Marathon. With the result that I have gained no less than two kilograms in one single week!

So at Sunday April 11th, day M had arrived. The start was at 8.45, and there were 40,000 registered runners on the Avenue des Champs Elysées. An impressive sight, seeing all those people standing in the cold wind to run the 42.185 kilometers. I arrived with Florence, my wife at 8.00, when it still was rather quiet. The entrances for the runners were too narrow, so when seeing desperate runners who didn't want to miss anything climbing over the fences already at 8.30 (impossible otherwise to get through the crowd), well, I was just glad that I got in early. As I aimed at running the marathon in 3 hours 45, my position was somewhere in the middle of the crowd.

The start was at 8.45 sharp, and I think I passed the start line at 8.45. How different it is to run such an event with so many people! Most of the runners had been wearing plastic ponchos that were provided by the organization, so that they wouldn't get cold, and you can guess what they did with these when they started to run. They were all lying on the road, which made it quite difficult to avoid falling over them.

The first kilometer wasn't the fastest also, with all these people it's like running a hurdle race. For some reason, there was always running someone in front of me, just a bit too slow, like 6.9 miles an hour instead of the 7.0 miles an hour that I wanted to run, so I had to get past them. And if it weren't my fellow runners, it was people, stupid enough to try to cross the road through this stampede of mad running people. At least two of these became my victim, but heck, what can you do when someone just appears 30 centimeters in front of you? Push him away was my choice, because the alternative would be to fall both, which could be the end of my marathon.

The most interesting of all were the refreshment areas, where volunteers handed out small bottles of water (excellent idea by the way, much better than the stupid cups they hand out on events in the Netherlands), bananas and oranges. Imagine one of those broad Paris boulevards, where you are happily running on the left side of the road, and suddenly you see that you have almost mist the refreshments which of course are always on the other side of the road. That gives about the same impression as traffic on the Arc de Triomphe roundabout, just go where you want to go and hope it turns out right. Well, on a marathon it doesn't. One brute asshole pushed away this lovely French lady (this doesn't sound familiar right, my situation was completely different!), fortunately my strong Viking arms were there to catch her and put her back on her feet, after which I could continue my run, as well as she.

If ever you are planning to run an event like this, and people are coming to watch you, make sure they wear or carry something very visible. Florence has done her marathon in the metro of Paris, to try to see me at no less than five different locations, including the finish, guess what, I haven't seen her once. Just forget it, you can't run a marathon and try to find someone in the crowd at the same time. All I told her was "try to get on the left side of the road, I'll try to find you there". Easy said, not so easily done because she fortunately was wise enough not to cross the road to see me. But she did make herself useful, by becoming a volunteer at the refreshment points and hand out bananas to the other runners. I just love her for that.

The first ten kilometers were easy, just a few small climbs with a difference in height of no more than like 70 meters, which brought us on top of a hill with an excellent view in Bois de Vincennes, just at the east side of Paris. Beautiful spot by the way, excellent view on the city, and a marvelous old castle which I sure will visit the next time that I am in Paris. Running in the woods was relaxing, with air, enough place for everyone, not too much crowd at the road sides, it was just good.

Getting back in the city was harder, with cars parked on the road sides, and stupid people standing there were the runners just wanted to run. Fortunately I had just one collision with an about fifty year old who stepped forward just in front of me, for the rest of it it went all right. Running in a crowd is difficult though. I continuously had to be careful not to bump into someone, with the result that I was zig-zagging all the time around fellow runners and didn't see too much of the city, or gorgeous fellow female runners.

Just after kilometer 22 the run started to get more difficult, we were led over the shores of the Seine river, through the tunnels on the main road. To get into the tunnel we had to descend about ten meters, to get up the road ascended with the same height and that has been a problem for many of the runners. The longest of all of these tunnels was about a kilometer, with no air and smog of the cars that passed by yesterday still hanging in there. But it was a fun experience, one guy started cheering, something like one of those songs that you can hear in a filled up football stadium, and in reaction the entire tunnel cheered back. One of the best moments of the entire run.

Then there was kilometer 30, where Vincent and his friend Joop should be waiting for me with my special secret refreshments. Shit, I didn't see them at kilometer 30 and started to worry, as I had counted on receiving some energy gels. Fortunately, they were there there, just after kilometer 31, I took the first gel and just felt good, where more and more people around me started to walk, sit, stretch, and look extremely unhappy. That just motivated me, as I was feeling good, and very happy with my thorough preparation.

But still, with every new kilometer I was wondering, where is this hammer guy, after which corner is he hiding? It turned out he wasn't and I happily continued zig-zagging around the walk of the zombies (yes, there were indeed many many runners that had abandoned running completely and tried to walk their way to the finish line - like zombies). That made me feel proud, that even on my first Marathon from Hell I hadn't done that, so I accelerated at kilometer 40 and changed my pace from 7.0 miles to 7.5 miles per hour.

Then, at kilometer 40.5, there she was again, Sylvie, the most beautiful female runner that I had seen in the tunnels, whose view had inspired me for at least five kilometers, who was trying to outrun me. I was kind of glad to enjoy her sight some more, so I let her the illusion for one kilometer, after which the macho in me took over and I started my final sprint. So I passed Sylvie in a speed that was impossible to catch up with, and proudly finished, after a time of 3 hours, 51 minutes and 33 seconds.

What?! 51 minutes? I was planning to do it in 3 hours 45 minutes. But heck, it still is 22 minutes faster than my first Marathon, so who cares.

Getting out of the arrival area wasn't that easy by the way. Try getting out of an area where over 11,000 runners had already arrived and at least a 100,000 people were waiting for their runner, it was the worst Paris traffic jam I've ever seen, and here also it was impossible to find Florence. Fortunately, she had already concluded the same thing and we found each other on the way back to the hotel.

Once arrived, the first thing I did was to hook my Garmin Forerunner to the computer, to see how well I did. Huh? That is weird indeed, an average speed of 11.2, a pace of 5.21/km and still 3 hours 51? I looked again and saw that the GPS was indicating a distance of 43.19 kilometers. FOURTYTHREE??? My first reaction was to accuse the French, who apparently can't even count kilometers, they probably have used one of their crappy Renault cars to measure it!

It was only when I got back home that I realized what possibly has happened. I've been zig-zagging all the time, and that has probably added another kilometer to my Marathon! But

hey, that's cool, because that means that I've run it in 3h46.12 and that is a time that I'm indeed proud of! Next mission Amsterdam, mid October!