

## **Burlington VT by David Holmen**

### **May 2013**

On May 26, 2013, I ran the Vermont City Marathon in Burlington. It was the third time I did this race. In 2010, I had my 50 states finish at this race. I returned a year later to run my 100th marathon at the same race. This year, two of my friends were reaching big milestones at this race. For Maricar Korff, it was her 100th marathon. For Hideki Kinoshita, it was his 50sub4 finish. I didn't realize it until two days before the race but it was another milestone for me as well. Earlier in the week, Kino compiled a list of runners who have finished at least 100 marathons in less than four hours. That got me wondering how marathons I had run with times under 3:30. On Friday I added them up. It turns out I had 99, so this race would be number 100 if I ran it fast enough.

There aren't any direct flights from Minneapolis to Burlington, so I had to get up early on Saturday to catch a flight to New York. I was a little nervous because I only had 43 minutes between flights and I didn't know how far apart my gates would be. If I missed my connection, I would have to wait several hours for the next flight to Burlington. If necessary, I could pick up my race packet the morning of the race, but I didn't want to miss Maricar's pre-race party. My flight to New York arrived a few minutes early, so I had no trouble making my connection. While I was waiting, I found out the flight was overbooked, and Delta was looking for volunteers to get bumped to a later flight. They were offering a \$450 voucher, but didn't have enough volunteers. I knew the next flight didn't leave until 6:00 and wouldn't arrive in Burlington until 7:30. Ordinarily I might have been tempted, but I wasn't going to miss Maricar's party! Eventually, they found a volunteer willing to accept a \$500 voucher.

My friend Laura, who lives in New York and does this race every year, was on the same flight to Burlington. After the flight we had a chance to talk for a few minutes. It's always nice to see Laura, because she's the runner who inspired me to join Marathon Maniacs and start setting more ambitious goals.

I had a good omen when I picked up my rental car. Although I always make a reservation for the most inexpensive class of car, they gave me a Mustang convertible with New Jersey plates. Maricar and Kino both live in New Jersey, as do many of their friends.

The last time I did this race, I stayed at the Hilton. It was expensive, but very convenient, since it's within two blocks of both the start and finish. They didn't have any rooms available, so I stayed at Doubletree this year. They were almost as convenient. Doubletree was one of the hotels that had shuttles to and from the race.

After checking in at Doubletree and dropping off my bags, I headed to the expo at the Sheraton. I had plenty of time, so instead of rushing through, I took the time to check out each booth. That's something I rarely do. It rained all day, so it wasn't the best day for sightseeing. I had a sample of Cabot cheddar and bought a reflective vest that will come in handy later this year when I do the Extra Terrestrial Midnight Marathon in Nevada.

Later in the day, I met Maricar and about 30 of her friends at Junior's Italian for the pre-race party. Whenever I thought everyone was there, someone else notable would arrive. To give you an idea of what a crazy world I inhabit, many of them were runners I saw at the Fargo Marathon a week earlier. We wore hand-made hats that said "Maricar's 100th" and had pictures of cupcakes made with glitter. Maricar has a passion for cupcakes like I have a passion for pizza. During the party, we all got a preview of the costumes Maricar, Charlotte and Peggy would be wearing during the race. They were all going to run as unique favors of Ben & Jerry's ice cream. Charlotte created the costumes, and they were very detailed. For example, Maricar's had small hand-painted symbols representing each of her 100 marathons.

For the fourth time in five weeks, rain was in the forecast. It wasn't raining very hard after dinner, but the rain was supposed to pick up during the night and continue through most of the morning. With temperatures in the low 40s, rain would be cold. At the same time, if I dressed warm and the rain stopped halfway through the race (which seemed likely), I could get too hot. The race didn't start until 8:00, so I decided to wait until morning before deciding what to wear.

Although I didn't stress about the weather, I still had trouble getting to sleep. After lying awake for several hours, I finally fell asleep for about an hour. More often than not, you can have a good race in spite of not sleeping well, as long as you slept well during the week. Knowing that, I didn't worry about the lack of sleep.

As I started getting dressed, it was raining lightly. According to the weather app on my phone, the rain would most likely continue for most of the race, but might taper off at the end. Temperatures would stay in the low 40s all morning. I didn't check how strong the wind would be. That was a mistake.

Although I packed a long sleeve polypro shirt that's good for wet conditions, I thought it would be too warm if the rain stopped. Instead I wore a tech T-shirt with arm warmers and polypro gloves. When I went outside to catch the bus to the start, I saw the rain had picked up. I briefly considered going back for the polypro shirt, but after hesitating for a minute, I boarded the bus.

When I got to the start, I realized how cold the wind was going to be. I wanted to keep my warm-ups on until the last minute, but I took them off and checked my gear bag in time to join other Marathon Maniacs for a group photo in Battery Park at 7:30. Every time there was a gust of wind, there was a collective groan. We were all cold. I had to hope I would be warm enough when I started running.

The Vermont City Marathon also has 2-person and 5-person marathon relay events. I've done other marathons with relays, but I've never seen one where the relay is such an integral part of the race. The course is laid out with the relay in mind. It starts with a loop through the downtown area that brings us very close to where we started. That's the first relay exchange point. Next there's an out-and-back segment that takes us through a heavily forested area on the north side of town. Again we come right back to where we started. That's the second relay exchange point. There's another loop on the south side of town that also brings us back to the start. That's the third relay exchange point. The remainder of the course is a longer loop taking us north through residential neighborhoods and then back along the shore of Lake Champlain. This longer loop includes the only relay exchange point that isn't within a few blocks of the start. This layout not only simplifies the logistics of transporting runners to and from relay exchange points, but also makes it easy for spectators to see runners several times without have to move very far.

I didn't know how fast I wanted to start, so I just went by feel. By the end of the first mile, Kino and Cade Remsburg, who both started behind me, caught up to me. I sped up to stay with them. In the third mile, one of my shoes came untied, and I stopped to tie it. By the end of the first loop, I was able to catch up to Kino. Cade pulled away from both of us.

The out-and-back section starts out downhill, but it was also into the wind. Kino optimistically observed that we could look forward to having a tailwind coming back. From three to six miles, it was mostly downhill. We were starting on pace for 3:10, but the fast pace felt easy. The wind was cold, so I looked forward to the return trip, even though it would be uphill. At the 10K mark, Kino commented that he set a 10K PR!

There's a tiring hill in the ninth mile. We slowed down, but I've learned the hard way not to push too hard on the hills in this race. There are plenty of easy miles where you can make up the time. The next few miles included some downhill segments, and we sped up again. Somewhere between 11 and 12 miles, I lost Kino. We were both beginning to slow down, but I think the fast start hit him harder.

The next mile took us right by the lake. The wind was strong. There were huge whitecaps on the lake, and I was freezing on this stretch. After the halfway mark, I was slowing noticeably. I was no longer maintaining the pace I would need for 3:15. That didn't bother me too much. I would be happy with anything under 3:20.

As I reached the 15 mile mark and the start of "Battery Hill," I was passed by the 3:15 pace group. I was determined to conserve my energy on the hill, so I had no temptation to try to stay with them. I also let most of the other runners pass me. I wasn't going to wear myself out on this hill. I've made that mistake before.

After the hill, I picked up my pace, but I soon realized I was still slowing down. With six miles to go, I slowed to eight minutes per mile, and that was exactly the pace I would need to maintain to break 3:20. I worked hard to keep from slowing down any more. The wind was cold, and my hands were getting numb. I wondered what the last four miles alongside the lake would be like. I was pleasantly surprised.

Shortly after I turned onto the paved trail that would take us to Waterfront Park, the rain stopped and I noticed occasional rays of sunshine. I also noticed the wind was dying down. I held my pace over the next two miles. Then I sped up a bit. With about a mile to go, I saw Cade. He was wearing the "Maricar's 100th" hat from the pre-race party, so he was easy to recognize. I caught up to him and did my best to lead him through a strong final mile. I finished with an official time of 3:18:51, and Cade was right with me.

The first three things you get when you finish are a finisher medal, a Mylar blanket and a water bottle. I skipped the water, because I could see they also had chocolate milk. We made our way through the crowd to get to the bag check tent. The volunteers retrieving gear bags were outnumbered by the runners, so it took a while to get our bags. Next we made our way to the food tent. In addition to routine post-race food like bananas, oranges, apples and granola bars, they also had pizza, Cabot cheddar samples, and Ben & Jerry's ice cream.

After a quick stop to check our results, we made our way to the beer tent, where there were tables and chairs. I needed to sit down, so I could put on another layer of warm clothes. Although I could have had a free beer, I didn't want to walk to the other end of the tent to get it. Instead, I ate my food and finished my second carton of chocolate milk. All the rich food after a hard race took a toll on my digestive system. As much as I wanted to stay and watch for other runners, I realized I needed to get back to the hotel before everything went through me.

As I left the beer tent, I saw Kino with Brian Wright. Although I never doubted that Kino would finish in less than four hours, seeing him with Brian confirmed it. They both finished under 3:30. Kino had joined the small fraternity of runners who are 50sub4 finishers. After congratulating Kino, I quickly made my way to the pick-up point for the busses. I didn't have to wait long for a bus, and within 10 minutes I was back at Doubletree.

After taking a hot bath, stretching and changing into warm dry clothes, I eventually drove downtown for Maricar's post-race party at Sweetwater's. As I suspected, it became a celebration for Kino and myself as well. We were there for hours and the afternoon was full of surprises. The biggest surprise

was a two-tiered cake, decorated in Marathon Maniac colors in honor of Maricar's 100th marathon. The top tier was chocolate and the bottom tier was red velvet. During the afternoon, about 30 different friends stopped by. Many stayed for an after party at a nearby brewery. I couldn't stay to the end, but I had a great time.

Every time I've traveled to Vermont, I've reached a marathon milestone, and I've been to at least one great party. I don't know what will happen at the next one, but I'm sure I'll be back. I also know I'll have company.