

## **Charleston Marathon by D. Holmen** **January 2012**

On January 14, 2012, I ran the Charleston Marathon in Charleston, SC. I chose this race because I've set a goal of running Boston qualifiers in all 50 states, and in my only previous South Carolina marathon, I missed qualifying by 32 seconds.

The Charleston Marathon is a (mostly) point to point course. It starts in downtown Charleston, and finishes in North Charleston, near the navy yard. Since the expo and pre-race dinner were also in North Charleston, I decided to stay at a hotel in that area, which was also near the airport.

My flight didn't arrive until late afternoon. By the time I got my luggage, picked up my rental car and checked into my room, it was already after 5:00. After picking up my race packet, I decided to stay for the pre-race dinner. I figured I was more likely to see someone I know at the dinner than at a restaurant. I didn't see anyone I knew, so I ate with some of the race volunteers. We were entertained by a blues band.

The morning of the race, I got up early, parked by the finish area and took a bus to the start. For people staying downtown, it was also possible to take a bus after the race to get back downtown from the finish area.

When we were dropped off near the start, I could see the number of port-o-potty's was woefully inadequate for the number of runners. Fortunately, we got there before the lines formed. Unfortunately, my digestive system wasn't awake yet.

It was about 32 degrees with a cold wind, so I ducked into a Starbuck's to stay warm. About 30 minutes before the start, my digestive system suddenly woke up, and I felt my intestines rumbling. I checked the port-o-potty lines again, but by then, each one had a long line. My only hope was to look for one during the race.

I dropped off my warm-up bag and went to the starting line. While I was waiting for the start, I saw a few runners I knew, including Fran and Tom from New Jersey. I met Fran and Tom a week earlier at Zoom! Yah! Yah!

My fastest recent time was 3:22, but I felt good all week, so I decided to pace myself for 3:20. I lined up between the 3:15 and 3:30 pace groups.

I was told that the most attractive part of the course was the downtown area, so I wanted to check out the sights during the early miles. I was freezing cold, and I was trying to start at a pace that was somewhat fast, but not so fast that I couldn't control my bowels. With all that on my mind, I was too distracted to do much sightseeing. The one thing that did catch my eye was running around Battery Park, lined with cannons than probably last saw use during the Civil War.

I missed the first two mile markers, so I didn't know my pace until the three mile mark. I was averaging 7:30. That was a little faster than I planned, but felt surprisingly comfortable. Before we left downtown, I had an opportunity to make a bathroom stop, but I was so cold that I didn't want to stop.

Despite running into the wind, I sped up over the next few miles. By the nine mile mark, I caught up to the 3:15 pace group. I stayed with them for a few miles, but eventually found myself getting ahead of them.

The section from 12 to 17 miles was a maze of turns. The turns were marked, and there were course marshals, but it was still a bit confusing. It was nice to occasionally have the wind at our backs, though. It was on this section of the course that I started to appreciate how many great volunteers there were at the turns and the aid stations. They were always enthusiastic, in spite of the cold conditions. (We were keeping warm by running, but they had to stand around in the wind.)

Between 18 and 21 miles, we merged into runners who were completing the half marathon. I worked hard to keep up with a fast runner in front of me, so I wouldn't inadvertently slow down.

At 21 miles, we separated from the half marathoners to start the final out-and-back section. I felt good while the wind was at our back. When we turned around, I realized it would be a struggle the rest of the way, because we were going straight into the wind again.

As I rounded the final turn at 26 miles, I could hear the finish line announcers calling out the names of runners who were finishing. I heard them say Dale Heinen of Shoreview, MN was crossing the line. Although I didn't know Dale, I sprinted to the finish and kept walking briskly, so I could greet a fellow Minnesotan. I finished in 3:12:58, which was by far my fastest time in months.

After finishing, I quickly drank a cup of water and then headed for the port-o-potty's. They didn't have lines, but they also didn't have TP. I would have to wait until I got back to the hotel.

After picking up my bag and putting on my warm-ups, I warmed up with some shrimp & grits. It sounded like an odd combination, but it really hit the spot. I also had a cup of peanuts and my two free beers. I'm not sure if the peanuts were boiled or deep fried, but they were warm. While I was eating, I enjoyed being inside a heated tent. Again, we were entertained by a local band.

I waited for the awards ceremony, where I found out I took second place in the Grand Masters division. Dale was first, and another Minnesota runner took third. Maybe the cold weather worked to our favor. My award was a framed print of a painting called "These Old Houses," which depicted some of Charleston's handsome historic homes. The same design was on the front of our long-sleeved tech shirts.

By the time I got back to the hotel and got cleaned up (including a long overdue bathroom stop), it was mid-afternoon. This was my only time for sightseeing, but I couldn't resist staying at the hotel to watch tape delay coverage of the men's and women's Olympic Trials. Had I stayed downtown, I would have seen more of town, but I have no regrets. The Olympic Trials were exhilarating.

From Charlotte – Look who David ran with! One of Charlotte's more elaborate costumes.

