

## **Fargo Marathon by David Holmen** **May 21, 2011**

On May 21, 2011, I ran the Fargo Marathon in Fargo, ND. I chose this race because it was a reunion for the 50 States Marathon Club. It was also an inexpensive trip, since Fargo is only a four hour drive from where I live.

I ran this race in 2005, but they've changed the course since then. The new course starts and finishes at the FargoDome, which was also the location of the expo, pre-race dinner and the 50 States reunion meeting. This made it very convenient to get to pre-race and post-race activities.

The highlight of a 50 States reunion is always seeing the runners who have recently finished running marathons in all 50 states. Two of the runners being honored were a couple from Canada who each finished their journey through the 50 states. Ironically, they haven't done marathons in all the Canadian provinces yet. Travel costs are so high in Canada, that they found it more affordable to travel throughout the U.S. first.

After the reunion, I went to the pre-race pasta and lefsa feed. Lefsa is a Norwegian flatbread, made from potatoes. One of my grandfathers was Norwegian, so having lefsa with dinner was reminiscent of dinners at my grandparents' house.

Because the race starts at the FargoDome, we had the opportunity to use real bathrooms. They also had numerous porta-potties next to the starting line. Because many runners opted to use the indoor facilities, the lines to use the porta-potties were very short. That's unusual for a race of this size.

Over 2,000 runners from Canada traveled to Fargo for either the marathon or one of the shorter races. In recognition of this large Canadian contingent, both the U.S. and Canadian national anthems were played before the start of each race.

The weather was unseasonably warm for this part of the country. The morning of the race, it was 63 degrees, with high humidity. There was rain in the forecast for the whole weekend, but we were fortunate that after a thunderstorm during the night, the rain stopped before the race.

Knowing that rain during the race was still a strong possibility, I opted to wear a short-sleeved tech T-shirt, so I would be warm enough if it rained. Since it didn't rain, I was overdressed, and regretted my decision after only two miles.

A little over three miles into the race, the course crosses the Red River into Moorhead, MN. The river level had receded several feet since the recent flooding, but was still above its banks. The city of Moorhead did an excellent job of cleaning the streets near the river, which were covered with silt just a week earlier. After about five miles in Moorhead, we returned to Fargo for the rest of the race. The race finishes inside the FargoDome, where spectators can sit in the bleachers to watch the finish.

Most of the course is unremarkable, winding back and forth through residential neighborhoods. The support and enthusiasm of the spectators more than made up for it. Fargo isn't a very large city, but they hosted 23,000 runners for the 5K, 10K, half marathon, marathon and relay. In just seven years, this race has grown into one of the premier races in the Midwest.

My primary time goal was to beat 3:15. Because this was my first race in the 50-54 age group, I greedily went out at a faster pace, with the hope of possibly winning my age group. About halfway through the race, the fast pace started to take a toll on me, and I gradually slowed down for the rest of

the race. My last two miles were about a minute per mile slower than my earlier pace. Fortunately, I was still able to beat my goal, finishing in 3:11:13. I was third in my age group.

I was pleased with the post-race refreshments. Besides the usual (water, PowerAde, bananas, etc.), they also had snacks with protein, including yogurt, chocolate milk and cheese pizza. Another tasty treat was chocolate chip cookie dough.