

Fargo Marathon by David Holmen May 2012

On May 19, 2012, I ran the Fargo Marathon. It's the second straight year I've done this race and the third time overall. I couldn't resist adding this race to my schedule, since it's only a four drive from where I live. I'm doing a lot of races this year, so I need to save on travel costs by driving to some of them.

This is a well-organized race that I like for several reasons. Last year, I only had one complaint. Late in the race, marathon runners merged with the half marathon runners and the course got congested. This year, the half marathon started 45 minutes earlier and the course was adjusted to make every effort to keep the two races in separate lanes near the finish. I'm not sure about the fastest runners, but I didn't see anyone from the half marathon while I was running, so the change in start times made a big difference.

Before leaving for Fargo, I brought my car in to get some new tires. I replaced the one that punctured the previous weekend, and I also got a durable tire with a standard size rim to replace my worn out "utility" spare.

When I arrived at the AmericInn, they couldn't find my reservation. I gave them my confirmation number and discovered that I had a reservation, but it was for the wrong date. Oops. I guess that's a hazard of making reservations for several trips in a short span of time. My reservation was for the date of a different race.

The Fargo Marathon is a large enough event that almost every hotel room in the city gets booked. The AmericInn didn't have any vacant rooms, but the staff was very helpful in finding another hotel with rooms available. I was lucky and got a room at Hilton Garden Inn. They were a little more expensive, but it's a very nice hotel, and the staff really rolled out the red carpet for people doing the race. I also prefer staying at hotels within the Hilton family whenever it works out, because I get a few perks as an HHonors gold member, and I've been very happy with their service.

When I got to the Hilton Garden Inn, they had bottles of water and other beverages on ice in the lobby. I also found out they were going to put out some pre-race snacks in the morning and had shuttles to a local mall where we could then catch a shuttle to the start of the race.

After settling into my room, I drove to the Fargodome to pick up my race packet. While I was there, I did some shopping at the expo. Usually, I'm in a hurry to get somewhere, so I get in and out of the expo quickly. This time, I made a point of stocking up on Gu packets, so I'll have enough for the Western States 100.

After the expo, I stayed for the pasta & lefsa dinner. I often skip pre-race pasta dinners in favor of dinner at a restaurant, but I like getting lefsa with dinner. It takes me back to when my grandparents would serve lefsa when I was growing up.

The day before the race was unseasonably warm. I think the high was 94 degrees. The forecast for race day, however, was for temperatures to drop to the upper 60s and stay there. There was a chance of thunderstorms and a strong likelihood that it would rain for at least part of the morning.

I had a rough night. About halfway through the night, I woke up and went to the bathroom. On the way, I lost my balance and fell. As I fell, my ankle struck the corner of the dresser, and I scraped the back of my ankle. It hurt, but I didn't think it was a big deal. When I got back to bed, I felt the back of my ankle and realized it was bleeding.

I walked back to the bathroom and turned on a light. I used a damp washcloth to wipe my ankle and I noticed there were drops of blood on the bathroom rug. I didn't have any spare Band-Aids, so I fashioned a home-made bandage by cutting a strip of athletic tape and using a tiny square of toilet paper as a pad.

With my ankle bandaged, I returned to bed, but now I was wide awake. I was also a bit concerned about my ankle. I didn't know if it was a superficial wound or if it was deep enough to affect my Achilles tendon. I was awake for hours. Eventually, I looked at my alarm clock and saw that it was due to wake me up in 30 minutes. At that point, I resigned myself to the fact that I wouldn't get any more sleep, but I figured I could at least rest until I had to get up. Ironically, I then quickly fell asleep.

The next 30 minutes were frightening. I had a strange nightmare. It started out as a very realistic dream in which I was lying awake in my hotel room, but I couldn't get out of bed. I seemed to be hopelessly tangled up in the blankets.

As my dream progressed, it became more and more bizarre. I was in a panic about oversleeping, and didn't know what time it was. I was eventually able to get out of bed, but the room was strangely reconfigured. There were no clocks and no exits. By this time, I was aware that I was having a nightmare. I knew I was sleeping, yet I couldn't wake up.

After what seemed like an eternity, I woke up to the sound of my alarm clock. I had allowed enough time to take a warm bath, stretch, and get dressed, but I also had to make a new bandage for my ankle, since it started bleeding again after stretching my Achilles tendons. I knew that would happen, but I'm trying to be very diligent about stretching.

It wasn't raining, but I could see that it had rained during the night. I decided to drive to the start rather than use the shuttles. I knew from past experience that I could park close to the Fargodome, as long as I left early. Before grabbing a quick breakfast, I brought my gear out to the car. It was cloudy and I could hear thunder in the distance.

It rained while I was driving to the Fargodome, but the rain stopped as soon as I got there. I didn't have any trouble finding parking. I dressed for a dry race, but brought a trash bag with me just in case. After a visit to the bathroom, I sat down in one of the stadium seats and relaxed. I love the conveniences of an indoor stadium as a race venue.

After all the half marathon runners left the building to start their race, I checked my gear bag and found the group of Marathon Maniacs gathering for a pre-race photo. I saw several people I knew.

I lined up with the 3:25 pace group. When I started running, I didn't have any discomfort in my Achilles tendon. For the first time, I was reasonably confident that the cut on my ankle was superficial.

Midway through the first mile, fellow Maniac Jeff Bollman found me. We ran together for most of the race. Jeff's goal was 3:20. This was a little faster than I planned to run, but I stayed with him anyway. After a few miles, we were joined by Steven "Thunder" Lee, and the three of us ran together as an informal 3:20 pace group. Eventually "Thunder" sped up a bit, and Jeff and I remained on pace for 3:20.

It never rained during the race, and there was enough wind to keep us from getting hot, even though it was 67 degrees and humid. Unfortunately, we were running into the wind for most of the last ten miles, and it got increasingly difficult to fight the wind. We both slowed down in the late miles and

finished in about 3:22. A few minutes later, fellow Maniac Kim Gray finished. The wind couldn't stop her from setting a PR.

As usual, the post-race snacks were wonderful. I didn't see everything they had, but I had a carton of chocolate milk, a Great Harvest honey wheat roll and a slice of pizza. I should have looked more carefully. I later found out they had cookie dough!

When I got back to the hotel, I was impressed to see that the lobby not only was stocked with snacks and beverages, but also had Advil packets and ice packs.

After getting cleaned up and eating lunch, I met some other runners in the hotel lobby and we talked for a long time. I bumped into some of the same runners at dinner and again the next morning at breakfast. At least one was a Marathon Maniac and another will qualify to join after her next race. One of the things I love about traveling to races is meeting other runners.

I continue to be impressed with how well the cities of Fargo and Moorhead support this race. Neither city is very large, but a lot of spectators come out to cheer the runners. I'm also impressed with the race organizers. This race is quickly becoming one of the best in the region and they continue to make improvements.