

## **Illinois Marathon by D. Holmen** **April 2012**

On April 28, 2012, I ran the Illinois Marathon in Champaign-Urbana. This race was a recent addition to my racing schedule. I had three weeks between the Boston and New Jersey marathons and wanted to add a race in between. I had three or four races in mind as possible candidates. When I found out my friends Carl and Krista were doing this race and it was going to be Krista's first marathon, it made the decision easy.

The Illinois Marathon has a loop course that starts and finishes on the campus of the University of Illinois. The expo was held in the Activities and Recreation Center. There were numerous parking lots nearby for both the expo and the race. We had indoor facilities available before and after the race, and the race finished in Memorial Stadium at the 50 yard line of the football field. I was reminded of the Fargo Marathon, which also uses university facilities for their race.

Champaign-Urbana is within a day's drive of home, so I was able to save money by driving. There aren't many races in the Midwest during the winter months, so it was nice to be able to drive for a change.

Because I booked this trip at the last minute, all the hotels affiliated with the race were full, but I was able to get a room at the Wingate Hotel, which was about two miles from campus. It's not a large city, so all the hotels are within a reasonable drive of campus.

After checking into my hotel and making a last-minute stop at Wal-Mart to replace a dead watch battery, I met Carl and Krista at the expo and we had dinner.

The overnight low was 46, with temperatures forecast to climb into the 50s. That would be ideal, if not for the threat of rain. When I woke up, I was overjoyed to see that it was dry. As I was getting dressed, I heard rain, so I changed clothes. By the time I arrived at the start, the rain had stopped, and I changed clothes again. I was in line to check my gear bag when I felt a few rain drops, so I made a last minute decision to add arm warmers. I'm glad I did, because there was enough wind that I was cold even with the arm warmers.

The course is mostly flat and took us all around the twin communities of Champaign and Urbana. In addition to running through the university, the course visited parks and residential neighborhoods. The only thing I didn't like about it is that, somehow, it always seemed like we were running into the wind.

My only goal for this race was to beat 3:30, since I had never run a Boston qualifier in Illinois. I started with the 3:25 pace group, but within a few miles I was getting ahead of them. My mile splits were all over the board, as I alternately sped up and then slowed down again each time I realized I was going too fast. Finally, with about 6 miles to go, I thought I might be in contention for an age group award, so I stopped holding back. I finished in 3:22:51. I got my Boston qualifier, but just missed placing in my age group.

Post-race food included pizza, warm pasta and King's Hawaiian rolls. After returning to my car to change into dry shoes and socks, I went back to the stadium to watch for Carl and Krista. I somehow got distracted and missed seeing them finish, but we got together later for drinks and dinner. Several hours later, Krista was still enthusiastic. There are few things as exciting as finishing your first marathon. It changes you.