

## Louisiana by David Holmen January 2013

On January, 20, 2013, I ran the Louisiana Marathon in Baton Rouge. Louisiana is one of the states where I had not yet qualified for Boston. Deb and I want to go back to New Orleans, but the Rock N Roll New Orleans Marathon was on a weekend that didn't fit into my schedule well. Maybe next year, we'll go back to that one.

This race caters to Marathon Maniacs and Half Fanatics. I was intrigued when the online entry form not only asked if I was a Marathon Maniac, but asked for my Maniac number. It turns out they use your Maniac (or Fanatic) number as your bib number. My bib number was MM2629.

The race starts and finishes near the state capitol, and all the pre-race and post-race activities were also downtown. When I was booking the trip, the downtown hotels were filling up, so I stayed at an Embassy Suites that was a few miles away, near the LSU campus. This was a fine location. Driving to and from downtown was quick, and it was easy to find parking.

The night before the race, I had dinner with about 25 other Marathon Maniacs at Capital City Grill. As expected, I caught up with old friends and met a few new ones. I also had two "it's a small world" experiences. One of the runners at dinner, Teal, wasn't a Maniac yet when I first met her. We met on an airplane in 2010 when we were both traveling to the Athens Marathon. Another runner, Tim, looked familiar, but I had to ask him where we met. It was two weeks earlier at the Zoom Yah Yah Indoor Marathon. I saw him on the track in his Maniac shirt, but didn't know him yet.

This race was the first of several that are spaced every other weekend, and I was hoping to start focusing on improving my times. Eight days before the race, I did an intense speed workout. I felt OK at the time, but the next day I noticed my right hamstring was tight and slightly inflamed. After two rest days, I felt OK again, but I was planning to go easy for the next few days. Three days before the race, I was in a bad mood, and took out my frustration by running faster than I should. The next day, I once again noticed my right hamstring was feeling tight.

I was still noticing the hamstring on Saturday, but I was hoping one more day of rest would make the difference. Sunday morning, I woke up feeling OK. The weather was nearly ideal. The temperature was 43 degrees with very little wind and was forecast to rise into the 50s during the race. Ordinarily, I would wear shorts, but I didn't want my hamstring to tighten up before the start, so I wore tights, knowing I would be slightly overdressed once I got warmed up.

When the gun went off, I eased into my pace slowly. As I gradually picked up my pace, I found myself keeping up with the 3:15 pace group and not noticing any discomfort. I gave myself the green light to shoot for 3:15.

The Louisiana Marathon has a fast course. It's relatively flat, but with just enough small hills for variety. A few miles after leaving the downtown area, we ran through the LSU campus and around two small lakes. This was the most scenic part of the course. Near the halfway mark, we start a long out-and-back section. This was my favorite part of the course. Going out, I started to see the faster runners coming back. On the return trip, I saw many of my friends who were outbound. Marathon Maniacs were well-represented at this race.

By this time, I had fallen behind the 3:15 group. Although I couldn't quite keep up with them, I worked hard to stay as close as I could. When I eventually lost sight of them, I focused on reeling in other runners who they had passed. I slowed more noticeably in the last few miles, but did my best to limit the damage. It helped when we returned to downtown, and I could recognize where I was in relation

to the finish line. I finished in 3:17:43. That's a Boston qualifying time with 12 minutes to spare and was also good for 3rd place in my age group.

The post-race festival featured a wide variety of food, supplied by local restaurants. My favorite was the jambalaya. Marathon Maniacs and Half Fanatics had access to the VIP tent, where they had more food as well as wine, mimosas and some local beers.

Over time, more and more Maniacs and Fanatics made their way to the VIP tent, and it became a Maniac/Fanatic party. There was a jazz band playing nearby. While I was there I learned that two fellow Maniacs, Shane and Julia, got engaged at the finish line. Julia is a Titanium (10 star) Maniac, and Shane got her an engagement ring made of Titanium. I stayed at the finish festival long enough for the awards ceremony. In addition to my age group award, I also won an award for being the first finisher from Minnesota.

Later that afternoon, I was sitting in the atrium of the hotel when I was approached by a boy with Down's syndrome. He saw my race T-shirt and asked me if I did the marathon. Then he introduced me to his parents. As it turns out, his mom also did the marathon. It was her first marathon. I chatted with them long enough to not only learn a little bit about Down's syndrome, but be very impressed with the extent to which this boy wasn't letting it hold him back. He has a black belt in taekwon-do, plays the drums, has competed in the Special Olympics and belongs to a dance company. Before I left, he asked me to ask my friends to learn more about Down's syndrome. It's a genetic condition caused by an extra copy of the 21st chromosome. I encourage anyone who reads this to learn more about it.