

Minneapolis by David Holmen
June 2, 2013

On June 2, I ran the Minneapolis Marathon in Minneapolis, MN. This is the first time I've done this race. For years I kept meeting friends who traveled from other parts of the country to do this race. They all rave about it. I'd like to eventually run most, if not all, of the Minnesota marathons, but this one is on the same weekend as the FANS 12/24 hour runs, and I'm almost always at FANS this weekend.

This year, I wasn't running FANS. I was crewing for John Greene, but he was doing the 12-hour race. That meant I could be at FANS while John was competing, and I could also do the Minneapolis Marathon. I just had to miss the FANS post-race breakfast and award ceremony. I had reservations about missing the award ceremony, since I expected John to win the walking division, but it didn't seem like there would ever be a better year for me to do this marathon.

A few weeks before the race, I checked out the website and discovered they were going to have a new course this year. In the past, the race started and finished downtown. This year, the start was moved to Theodore Wirth Park, on the west side of the city. The early miles of the new course all went through neighborhoods where I used to run. I was excited about the prospect of running through all these same neighborhoods as part of a marathon.

Theodore Wirth Park isn't far from where I grew up. I used to go sledding on a steep hill there during the winter. The first few miles of the race follow Theodore Wirth Parkway. When I was training for my first marathon, a couple of my long training runs included this parkway. Next the course continues north on Victory Memorial Drive. There's a brief excursion into Robbinsdale that includes a few blocks alongside Crystal Lake. I'm not sure why this was included in the course, but Crystal Lake is where I did most of my training when I was in college. It's like they went out of their way to include one of my favorite neighborhoods in the marathon course, even though it wasn't in Minneapolis. Next the course returns to Victory Memorial Drive and follows it north and east until it meets Webber Parkway. I've done several 5K and 10K races that follow these same two parkways. The first six miles were going to be a nostalgia trip.

After six miles, the course crosses the Mississippi River into northeast Minneapolis. From there, it follows the east bank of the Mississippi into the St. Anthony Main neighborhood across the river from downtown Minneapolis. After a brief visit to Nicollet Island, the course continues south along the east bank to the famous Stone Arch Bridge just south of St. Anthony Falls. This part of the course would give me views of downtown Minneapolis that I had never seen.

The rest of the course follows the West River Road south to Minnehaha Park and then returns to downtown Minneapolis along the same road. Most of this was familiar to me from the Twin Cities Marathon and other races I've done in this area.

On Wednesday, I started having the early symptoms of a cold. I ran in the morning that day, so I was able to rest in the afternoon. I didn't sleep well that night. On Thursday I still had post-nasal drip, and the upper throat irritation that goes with it. Usually when I have a cold, I keep training normally. I felt like this one could still go either way, so I did something I rarely do. I took three straight days off from training to rest, in the hopes that my cold would go away before the weekend. For the next two days, my cold was in a holding pattern. It wasn't going away completely, but it also wasn't developing any new symptoms.

Between FANS and the marathon, it was a busy weekend. Friday after work, I packed all the gear I would need for FANS. Then I went to the FANS pre-race dinner at the Nokomis Community Center.

On Saturday, I got up early to set up our campsite for FANS at Snelling Lake. The 12-hour race ran from 8 AM to 8 PM. I had to leave in the middle of the race to drive downtown and pick up my race packet for Sunday and then drive back to Snelling Lake. After the race, I packed up our campsite, drove home, unloaded the car, and organized my clothes for Sunday morning. It was a successful day for John. He walked roughly 55 miles to win the 12-hour walk. I saw several other friends at the race. Besides the regulars, I saw a few Marathon Maniacs, 50 Staters and Darksidiers.

Saturday afternoon we had a passing rain shower, which included about 20 minutes of heavy rain. Although I had a rain poncho, I couldn't completely avoid getting wet. After the rain stopped, there was still a cold breeze. I felt chilly for the rest of the day. In the morning, my cold symptoms seemed to be clearing up, but by the time I got home, the post-nasal drip had returned. After I got home, I unloaded the car, but didn't take the time to unpack everything. I wanted to get as much sleep as I could.

The Minneapolis Marathon started at 6:30, but I had to drive to the start. I woke up at 4:00 so I could be ready to leave the house by 5:05. The parking lot at the start opened up at 5:30 and I wanted to get there right when they opened. I only got 6 hours sleep, but that's more sleep than I had before my last two races combined. During the night, I had some congestion, but by morning it seemed to clear up. It seemed plausible that I was over my cold, but I wouldn't know for sure if it would affect my race until I started running. After three days without running, I didn't know how I would feel.

Although this was the first time the race started at Wirth Park, the parking arrangements seemed well-organized, there were plenty of port-o-potties, and the gear check was quick. I saw a few friends at the start who I didn't know were doing this race. There was no rain in the forecast, but it was windy. I waited as long as possible before taking off my warm-ups and checking my gear bag.

Not knowing how I would feel, I didn't really have a time goal. The first mile started with a short downhill section, which made it easy to start fast. By the end of the first mile, I felt like I had started way too fast. When I hit the one mile mark in 7:30, I was disappointed. It felt much faster. At the time, I thought the cold was affecting me. In retrospect, I think it felt more tiring because the first few miles were into the wind.

I thoroughly enjoyed the early miles of the course. I especially enjoyed running by Crystal Lake. Where Victory Memorial Drive turns east, we had some relief from the wind, and it got easier. When we crossed the river and turned south, it got even easier. We had a tailwind for most of the middle miles.

As we crossed the Stone Arch Bridge, I took in the views of the river and downtown Minneapolis. Although this bridge is featured in several local races, I had never run across it before. I enjoyed the view of St. Anthony Falls from the bridge.

I hit the halfway mark on pace for 3:15, but there's an uphill stretch at 14 miles, and it took something out of me. In the second half of the race, I moderated my pace. I finally settled on a goal. 3:15 was out of reach, but I was confident I could beat 3:20.

When we reached the end of the long out-and-back, we turned into the wind. I knew the last six miles were going to be difficult, but I also knew I could beat 3:20 by keeping my average pace for the remaining miles under eight minutes. I ended up keeping every mile under eight minutes, and I finished in 3:17:52.

There was some good finish line food, and the spacing of the finish area made it possible to eat most of the food while I was still moving through the finish area. The gear bag retrieval was quick and

efficient, which is important when it's 54 degrees with a strong wind. There were also enough port-potties that I didn't have to wait in line.

It's worth noting that the post-race party includes an option to buy a 25 minute Mississippi River cruise for a very reasonable \$4.99. I would recommend this to anyone traveling to this race.

I was impressed by this race. I see why so many of my friends like it. If I don't return next year, it's only because I'll probably be doing FANS instead. I was also impressed with the new FANS race venue. This was the first year the race was held at Snelling Lake instead of Lake Nokomis. While Lake Nokomis is like an old friend, Snelling Lake has excellent facilities, and it's not as crowded. I'm looking forward to racing on the new course.