

Okoboji IA by David Holmen July 2013

On July 20, 2013, I ran the University of Okoboji Marathon in Okoboji, IA. I did this same race in 2010, so I had a good idea what to expect. I was pleased to see that the organizers improved the course. I was also pleased to see that we got lucky on the weather this year.

When one thinks of Iowa, usually vast acres of farmland come to mind. Okoboji is an oasis in the desert of corn fields. It's in the heart of a resort area surrounded by lakes. It reminds me of the Brainerd lakes area in central Minnesota. I'm trying to save travel costs by doing more local races. Okoboji is a three hour drive from home, so it definitely fits the bill.

There aren't many midsummer races in the upper Midwest, because it gets too hot. When I did this race in 2010, it was already hot when the race started, and may have reached 90 by the time I finished. This year, the overnight low was in the mid 60s, and the forecast high was in the low 80s. I was optimistic that the temperature wouldn't climb out of the 70s until after the race. That's about the best you can expect for this race.

For the second time, I stayed at the Shamrock Inn, a budget motel in Spirit Lake. Like most hotels in this region, they normally require a two night minimum during the summer, which is their tourist season. I was checking in on a Friday, and the type of room I wanted was available Friday night, but not Saturday. They asked if I would be OK with just staying one night. I said I could make do with one night if I could get a late checkout. That was a win-win situation. They filled a room that might otherwise have remained vacant. I had a room for the night I needed and was able to drive home after the race. That gave me a chance to do other things on Sunday.

After arriving at Shamrock Inn to check in and drop off my bags, I continued to Milford to pick up my race packet at The Three Sons, a local sporting goods store. Since they carry running shoes and apparel, it substitutes for an expo. Some of their clothing carries the University of Okoboji logo. The funny thing about that is that there isn't actually a university here.

The last time I did this race, it started and finished in different places. Now, the first five miles is an out-and-back that brings you back to where you started. After that, you do a 21 mile loop around West Lake Okoboji, bringing you back to where you started. Not having to take a shuttle from the finish to the start simplified the logistics and made it easier to get back to my motel in time to check out.

One week before the race, I strained my right hamstring running a 10K race. I'm getting too old to do those short races. They're dangerous. I took a few days off and iced it regularly. I only ran once during the week. I was willing to risk losing a bit of conditioning, but I wanted to heal as much as possible before racing again.

My leg felt better, but not perfect. Not having tried to run at race pace, I didn't know how it would feel. I considered playing it safe by running with a compression wrap, but I knew this would force me to run at a slow pace. It wasn't until the morning of the race that I made a last minute decision to run without the wrap. I was hoping I could run just fast enough to have a good race, but not so fast that I would make my leg worse.

I started the race at a pace that felt conservative, and my leg felt OK. When I finished the first mile, I was pleasantly surprised to see that I ran it in 7:43. I would have been happy with 8:00. I felt OK, so I kept running at the same pace. By the halfway mark, I was beginning to pass other runners. As my confidence grew, I worked harder to catch and pass the runners ahead of me. I wasn't actually

speeding up, but I had to work harder to maintain the same pace as the temperature climbed into the 70s. I must have passed at least a dozen runners in the second half.

There's a stretch from 16 to 18 miles, where we crossed under to the west side of the highway. There aren't any aid stations on this side. In 2010, I got dehydrated during this section and never recovered. This year, we enjoyed cloud cover, so it didn't feel as hot.

The last five miles were tough. There were more hills than I remembered, but I held on and finished in 3:23:48. That was good for 2nd place in my age group. I stayed long enough to find out my official result, but I couldn't stay for the award ceremony because I needed to get back to my hotel in time to check out. I wanted to allow time to take an ice bath before taking a warm bath and stretching.

I found out I could pick up my award at The Three Sons any time after 1:00. After checking out, I drove to Milford to pick up my award. After a drive-through lunch at Dairy Queen, I began the three hour drive home.

I need to continue to rehab my hamstring, but getting through this race without a problem was a good start. I'm glad I returned to Okoboji. Having a good race this year makes up for cracking in the heat in 2010.