Peachtree City 50K by David Holmen
November 2011

On November 13, 2011, I ran the Peachtree City 50K race in Peachtree City, GA. This race is sponsored by the Darkside Running Club. This is the third Darkside race I've done. I joined the club in 2009 and ran one of their marathons. Later that year, I did the Darkside 8 Hour race.

Last summer, Deb mentioned that she wanted to go on another trip to Atlanta. Since Peachtree City is only a 25 minute drive from the Atlanta airport, it sounded like a good excuse to return for another Darkside race.

The Peachtree City 50K and 25K both use the same loop course used for the various Darkside marathons. It's a 5.178 mile loop along paved golf cart paths. The 25K and 50K races are three and six laps, respectively. Darkside marathons do this loop 5 times, plus an extra segment that's about a third of a mile.

Although I've done longer ultras, this is the first time I've done a 50K race. Since this is a fairly fast course, I saw it as an opportunity to see what I can do on this distance.

When I entered the race, I was in peak shape, and I thought beating 4 hours was a very reasonable goal. Since then, I've lost some of my conditioning while recovering from injuries, so I decided 4 hours was probably unrealistic. Based on my most recent marathon times, I thought I might still be able to average 8 minute miles, which works out to about 4:08.

I always like to go into a race with three goals. My main goal was 4:08; my "shoot for the moon" goal was 4 hours; and my "if things don't go well" goal was 4:25.

I started a little fast, running the first lap in just over 40 minutes. That put me roughly on pace for 4 hours, but I knew that pace was unsustainable. I just wanted to test the waters and see how that pace would feel.

My second lap was about 41 minutes. At this point, I still thought 4:08 was a realistic goal.

The first sign of trouble came early in my third lap, when I started to notice a hint of stiffness in some of my muscles. I realized it would take more effort just to run the same pace, because my stride was becoming less efficient. It's the feeling you expect to have in the last 6 miles of a marathon. I hadn't even run a half marathon yet, so this was a very bad sign. I finished the first 25K in 2:04. I was on pace for my 4:08 goal, but the stiffness in my legs was getting worse, so I knew the second half would be much slower.

My fourth lap took 46 minutes – roughly nine minute miles. At that pace, I could still beat 4:25, but I was still deteriorating.

In my fifth lap, I continued to slow down. That lap took 51 minutes – roughly 10 minutes per mile. Surprisingly, there weren't very many runners passing me. For the first two laps I was in second place, and after five laps, I was still in fourth place.

Before starting my last lap, I stopped for about 20 seconds to drink a glass of Gatorade. That was enough time for my muscles to tighten up. When I tried to start running again my right quad and hip flexor seemed completely immobile. I forced myself to run anyway, hoping they would loosen up, but they never got much better. The last lap was very painful, and it was much slower. I was averaging

roughly 12 minutes per mile. My last lap took 50 percent longer than my first lap. Not surprisingly, five more runners passed me.

When Deb saw me approaching the finish, she commented to other volunteers that I was in a lot of pain. She's seen me finish a lot of races, so she could tell I didn't look normal.

I finished in 4:41:33. That's considerably slower than any of my goals, but I was pleasantly surprised to find out I finished second in my age group. I was ninth overall.

Although this was my first 50K, I don't consider my time a PR. I once ran 37.5 miles at an average pace of 8:32. By my way of thinking, so set a PR for 50K, I would need to run an average pace that was at least as fast as 8:32. That's why my third goal was 4:25.

I can only assume that because my training has dropped off in recent months, I can no longer run all-out efforts on back to back weekends. I only had one week to recover from the New York City Marathon. In the past, that would have been enough, but in my current condition, it's not.

After the race, Deb and I stayed in Atlanta for an extra day to do some sightseeing. On our previous trip to Atlanta, we never got to the Carter Museum, so that was our first stop. While we were there, we also got to see a temporary exhibit, called Read My Pins, which is a collection of the many pins that Madeleine Albright wore as Ambassador to the U.N. and Secretary of State.

We also got to see Bodies, The Exhibition. We missed this traveling exhibit when it was in our area, so it was convenient to see it in Atlanta while we were there.