

## Sarasota 12-12-12 by David Holmen

On December 12, 2012, I ran the 12-12-12 Marathon of Sarasota. This race celebrated a unique date that occurs only once a century. It was directed by Greg Goebel, who also directed last year's 11-11-11 Marathon. December 12 fell on a Wednesday. It felt a bit weird traveling to a race in the middle of the week.

The course was a 0.44 mile loop in Whitaker Gateway Park. To complete a marathon, we needed to run 58.72 laps. This format was inspired by the Zoom Yah Yah Indoor Marathon, which is one of Greg's favorite races. When you run so many laps, you inevitably see all of the other runners throughout the race, whether they're faster or slower. If you're not passing them, they're passing you. At most races, you only see other runners who are running at the same pace.

I wasn't at the 11-11-11 Marathon, but when I saw the photos and video, I wished I was. It wasn't just a race – it was a 26.2 mile party, and the guest list included a lot of my favorite Marathon Maniacs. When I found out Greg was going to have a 12-12-12 Marathon, I had to be there. By the time registration for the race started, I knew I would be aiming to reach the Titanium (10 stars) level of Marathon Maniacs this year. I was going to do it by running marathons in 30 different states or countries in one year. As I planned my race schedule for the rest of the year, I arranged to finish at 12-12-12, with Florida being my 30th different state or country.

To keep the course from getting too crowded, the field was limited to 36 men and 36 women. Age groups were a bit unorthodox. They were set up so there were three runners in each age group. There were awards for the top three in each age group, so everyone won an age group award. Bib numbers were also a bit unorthodox. They all ended in 12. Greg's number was 1212.

A week before the race, I came down with a cold. Initially, I was hopeful that I could recover before the race, but on Tuesday, I was still congested. I had to take a daytime decongestant so my ears could adjust to the pressure changes during my flights. I know from past experience that if your ears can't adjust, it can be very painful. The decongestant did its job, but it made me feel dehydrated. I drank fluids at every opportunity, but I still felt bone dry.

Packet pickup and the pre-race dinner were both at Marina Jack, a restaurant on the waterfront. Most of the volunteers were runners from the Sarasota area. I met some of them last January at Zoom Yah Yah. It was nice to see everyone again.

At the dinner, Greg introduced each runner. He identified which runners were 50 States Marathon Club members and which were Marathon Maniacs. He also told us about the individual accomplishments of each runner. The average number of marathons completed was 65. The group included one first-time marathoner. At the other extreme was Larry Macon, who's getting close to 1000.

We each received two race bibs. One had our race numbers and timing chips. The other had our names. We wore these bibs on our backs, so we could get to know each other and encourage each other by name throughout the race.

I stayed at La Quinta, which was located just a few blocks from the park. That gave me the option of walking to the start. Several other runners also stayed there. It was a convenient location, but I had trouble sleeping. The air conditioner was no noisy that even with ear plugs, I couldn't get to sleep. I also regretted all the fluids I drank during the day. During the night, they caused me to make a few trips to the bathroom. At 2:30, I got up and turned off the air conditioner. I have trouble sleeping when I'm hot, but I clearly wasn't going to sleep with the noise. At 4:35, I was still awake. I nodded

off briefly, but woke up again at 4:50. After that, I never got back to sleep. On the bright side, I wasn't noticing as much congestion. It seemed like my cold might finally be breaking up.

In the days leading up to the race, the forecast looked ominous. It seemed increasingly likely that we might have thunderstorms. At the very least, rain was likely. With temperatures in the 70s, some light rain during the race would feel comfortable. A violent storm, on the other hand, would spoil the party. When I got up, it still wasn't raining. I was glad we wouldn't be standing around in the rain before the race, but it still looked like there was good chance of rain during the race.

About 30 minutes before the race, we started to gather for photos. We had a big group photo in front of the bay. We also had several smaller group photos. There were several runners named Dave, so we had a Dave group photo.

At the start of the race it was 70 degrees with 97 percent humidity. It would have been very easy to say, "I'm sick, I didn't sleep well, and it's hot. I'm going to struggle today." That attitude can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. I chose instead to get excited, start fast and see how I felt. I wasn't too worried about the heat because I assumed it would start raining in an hour or two.

In addition to the marathon, there was a half marathon with about a dozen runners. Each race started with a partial lap to make the distance come out even. The races shared the same finish line, so we had two different starting lines. As the rest of us were lining up about to start the marathon, Dave Mari dashed across the park to take a picture of the half marathon start. Then he dashed back to the marathon start. I don't know how many pictures he took during the race, but I'm sure they number in the hundreds.

I started the race on pace for a 3:15 marathon, even though I knew it probably wasn't sustainable. I was constantly passing most of the other runners. One notable exception was Justin Gillette, who was constantly passing me. After a few miles, I knew my pace was unsustainable, so I gradually throttled it back. I settled on a goal of 3:30.

Every lap we passed an aid station. At first I took a drink every two or three laps. As I got hotter, I eventually started drinking almost every lap. It seemed excessive, but I was always thirsty. Sometimes I also poured a cup of water over my head. The forecast rain never materialized. Worse yet, it got sunny. I regretted my fast start.

In the second half of the race, my pace continued to deteriorate. I couldn't maintain the pace I would need to beat 3:30. When I realized I wouldn't break 3:30, I succumbed to the temptation to start taking walking breaks each time I passed the aid station. While it was demoralizing to give up completely on time goals, it gave me a chance to visit with other runners. At different times, I walked or ran with Denis McCarthy, Diane Bolton and Stephanie Arango. Stephanie helped me pick up my pace during some of the difficult late laps.

Late in the race, I was too fatigued to remember how many laps I had run. When we passed the DJ, he would usually announce our lap counts. By the end of the lap, I would forget. A few other runners asked me how many laps I had left. More than once, I said, "I don't know, but I think it's less than ten."

I finished the race in 3:51:07, although I didn't know it at the time. I thought I still had a lap to go, so I kept running. Greg wasn't able to get my attention in time to let me know. When I finished the next lap, I asked Greg if I was done, and he confirmed that I was. I discovered later that I had run a bonus lap.

After a brief rest, I gradually worked my way over to the pavilion where there was post-race food. I had blisters that made walking painful, but I knew there was pizza, and I don't pass up post-race pizza.

I had planned to hurry back to the hotel, get cleaned up, and come back to watch the rest of the race. It didn't work out that way. Whenever I thought about leaving, I noticed one of my friends was getting close to finishing so I waited. I got to see almost everyone finish.

At one point Dave Mari was about to finish a lap when he suddenly sprinted off the course. He wanted to say goodbye to two friends who were leaving. Then he sprinted back and finished his lap. I still wonder how many bonus miles Dave ran.

Everyone struggled with the heat, but we still had fun. Some runners had to catch flights after the race, but about half of us were able to get together in the evening for a party at Marina Jack. It was good time. Greg knows how to throw a party.

I got to bed late that night, but I slept well. Total exhaustion and a few beers will do that. I flew home Thursday afternoon, but about a dozen runners were able to join Greg for an outing on his yacht.

Next year, Greg plans to keep the tradition going with an 11-12-13 marathon. Hopefully it won't be as hot. Regardless, I recommend signing up.