

## Sioux Falls by David Holmen September 2013

On September 8, 2013, I ran the Sioux Falls Marathon. This was the first time I did this race. I didn't know much about it before, but the drive time to Sioux Falls is less than four hours, so this was another opportunity to experience a new race without having to spend much on travel expenses.

I left right after lunch on Saturday and arrived in the late afternoon. I stayed at Hilton Garden Inn, which is on the south side of Sioux Falls. I didn't feel the need to stay at a hotel next to the start because it seemed like there was plenty of parking near the start. I checked in first and then went to the Sioux Falls Arena to pick up my race packet. The arena is right next to the football stadium where the race would start, so it gave me a chance to survey the parking. When I saw how much construction there was in the area, I decided to allow extra time in the morning.

Later, I had dinner with several other members of Marathon Maniacs and the 50 States Marathon Club. Many were here so they could run a marathon in South Dakota. For Ed Broadnax, South Dakota was his 50th state. Ed ran marathons in all 50 states while on active duty. I first met Ed at the Fargo Marathon, earlier this year. Coincidentally, a few of the other runners at dinner were also at Fargo.

The course is point-to-point, starting at Howard Wood Field and finishing at the Family Wellness Center next to Sertoma Park. The course is a combination of streets and paved bike paths that are part of a greenway system. From the elevation profile, it looked reasonably flat, but it would turn out to be a bit hillier than I thought.

My goal for this race was to finish under 3:30, which is the Boston qualifying time for my age group. I haven't done much training at that pace recently, so I didn't know how fast the pace would feel. My last two races were ultras and the one before that was a marathon that took me almost four hours. I've been training at a slow pace while working through some issues with my right hamstring, so races have been my only speed work. Without any fast races in the last few weeks, I was a little worried that I would have trouble with the pace.

The forecast called for an overnight low in the upper 60s with a high in the 80s, but it looked like it would still be in the mid 70s when I finished. Since I've done other recent marathons with similar temperatures, I didn't think it would bother me too much. I didn't realize how humid it would be.

The race started at 6:45. It usually takes me about an hour to get ready, so I set my alarm for 4:45. I woke up at 4:30 and decided to get an early start. As I was leaving the hotel, I stopped in the lobby to make a cup of hot cocoa for a light breakfast. Because of the construction, I wanted to get to the start at least an hour early. As it turned out, I had no trouble getting there and the parking lot on the west side of the stadium was almost empty. The bathrooms in the stadium were open, and I was able to use them before there were any lines. At 6:20, I met about a dozen other Marathon Maniacs for a group photo.

Before the race, I was getting uncomfortably warm in my warm-up clothes and had to leave them in the car. I realized the humidity was going to make this race feel much warmer than I anticipated. I knew it would be warm at the finish, so I didn't bother to check a gear back for the finish.

The race started on the track. I've done some races that finish on a track or a football field, but you don't see too many that start on one. There wasn't a 3:30 pace group, so I lined up right behind the 3:25 group. The pace didn't seem unreasonably fast, so I decided to stay with them. By the second mile, I was getting really sweaty. The humidity was going to be a big factor.

In the early miles, there were some gentle rolling hills. At first, I had to work hard to keep up with the pace group. Then we hit a downhill and I got ahead of the group. On another downhill, I left them behind for good. I started looking for other runners around me who were running strong, and I challenged myself to stay with them.

Although the race started in the middle of town, within four or five miles we were on the outskirts of town, and it seemed more like open prairie. While this part of the course wasn't too exciting, we got a nice breeze that helped with the heat. Early in the race, the aid stations were spare, and they cups weren't very full, so I worried about getting enough to drink. Later in the race, I would start drinking two cups at each aid station. At nine miles, we moved from streets to the first section of greenway trail. We were still on the outer edge of town, so the scenery wasn't that exciting.

In the second half of the race, the course was more varied. At times we were on bike paths through city parks. Other times we were on busier streets with more spectators. At about 15 miles, I saw a spectator handing out small zip-lock bags filled with ice cubes. I put one under my hat. By this point in the race, the heat was wearing on me, and I knew this could get me through a few more miles without overheating.

Some aid stations had water first the first table and Powerade at a later table. Others had water on one side of the street and Powerade on the other side. At 16 miles, I grabbed a cup of water from the right, and then got a cup of Powerade from the left. I can't drink left-handed, so I had to grab the cup with my left hand and transfer it to my right hand before drinking. The cup was fairly full, and it was the red Powerade, so I was worried about spilling on my shirt. Just then, I felt my hat starting to slide off the back of my head. With the bag of ice under it, the hat didn't fit snugly.

I'm not usually very well coordinated, but somehow I reached my left hand behind me in time to catch my hat. Meanwhile I was still carrying a full cup of Powerade in my right hand. I never slowed down, and I didn't spill a drop. After a few miles, the ice cubes all melted, and I took the bag out of my hat. After that, I started pouring water over my head at the aid stations. The heat was wearing on me.

For most of the race, I maintained an average pace of about 7:45 by keeping up with the strongest runners around me. Later in the race, I was passing runners who previously looked strong. The heat was affecting everyone. I was on my own to set the pace, and it became more difficult. By the 22 mile mark, I was exactly five minutes ahead of a 3:30 pace. If I could just run eight minutes miles the rest of the way, I would break 3:25. Unfortunately, I couldn't. I was gradually slowing down.

With three miles to go, I saw my friend Cade about a block ahead of me. He was one of the few runners who were still maintaining a good pace. I lifted my effort to try to catch up to him, but it took over two miles. In the last mile, I finally caught up to him, but I was only alongside of him long enough to say hello. He was beginning to accelerate in anticipation of finishing, and I couldn't stay with him.

I crossed the line in 3:25:38. Surprisingly, I didn't get passed by the 3:25 group. It was so hot that even the pace leader couldn't maintain the pace. I was very happy with my time. The conditions were much tougher than I expected, but I still finished well ahead of my goal.

At almost any race, the first thing you get when you cross the finish line is a bottle of water. Usually, I'm more interested in food or beverages with flavor, but I eagerly drank the water and went back for another bottle. I was actually well hydrated by this time, but the water was ice cold and I drank it to cool down.

Before going to the food tent, I looked around for a results tent to find out if I placed in my age group. While looking, I found the massage tent. I don't get post-race massages as often as I should, because the lines are usually long. This time, there were only five people in line and there were six massage therapists, so I knew I wouldn't have to wait long. I was worried about my hamstrings tightening up, and I knew the massage would help.

While I was in line, I met a runner who did this race as his first marathon. He was only planning to run the first 20 miles, but he went on to finish and qualified for Boston in his first attempt. That's a pretty good result for such a hot day. I told him Boston registration about to begin and encouraged him to sign up when he can.

The massage helped, and the massage therapist taught me some hamstring stretches. Next, I stopped at the food tent. Although they a variety of food, I only had a carton of chocolate like and a cookie. Then I heard that there was a shortage of busses. Busses from the finish back to the start were supposed to run every 15 minutes, starting at 10:00. I needed to get back to my car quickly, because I needed to get back to my hotel so I could check out. There was a large crowd of people waiting for a bus. There were more than enough runners to fill the next bus, and it quickly became apparent that they had been waiting a while. I sat down to wait for a bus. While I waited, I did some hamstring stretches.

After waiting for a while, and not seeing any busses, I started looking for other options. The marathon and half marathon started and finished in different places, but the 5K race started and finished in the same place. I saw 5K runners who had their cars parked at the finish. When I saw a couple getting in their car, I asked them if they could give me a ride to the marathon start. They were very nice. They not only gave me a ride right to my car, but when I offered to pay them, they wouldn't accept any money.

When I got back to the hotel, I took a quick shower and then spent a few minutes in the hot tub to loosen up so I could do more stretching. Ideally, I should have taken an ice bath. I mistakenly booked a room that had a shower but no tub, so that wasn't an option.

The drive home was sufficiently long that I normally would have stayed a second night. My decision to only stay in Sioux Falls for one night was based, in part, on the race starting early enough that I could get on the road in time to get home by dinner time. My right hamstring still felt sore and tight, so I wore a compression wrap for most of the drive. That helped.

After so many hot races, I'm really looking forward to cooler weather. My next race is in southwestern Iowa, so there are no guarantees.