

**Springfield MO RFTR and Kingwood TX by David Holmen
December 30 and 31, 2012**

On December 30, 2012, I ran the Run for the Ranch Marathon in Springfield, MO. Two days later, I ran the Texas Marathon in Kingwood, TX. The Texas Marathon is a race I planned several months ago. Run for the Ranch was a late addition to my schedule.

The Texas Marathon is always held on New Year's Day. I did this race two years ago, and it began a tradition of starting the year with a marathon. Last year I went to Allen, TX to run marathons on both New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. This year, I returned to Kingwood for the Texas Marathon. This is a popular race which fills quickly, so if you want to run it, you have to enter early in the year.

In early November, I discovered my employer was going to have a plant shutdown between Christmas and New Year's Day. Since I was taking so many days off anyway, I decided to add another race. As I looked for races in the last few days of December, I discovered the Run for the Ranch Marathon. Missouri is one of the states in which I had not yet run a Boston qualifier, so it was the natural choice.

I had already booked my flight to Houston for the Texas Marathon. Ordinarily, this would have been a problem, but I got lucky. Flights are always expensive around New Year's, so I booked this trip as an "award trip" using Delta SkyMiles. I recently reached the platinum level of Delta's SkyMiles program. One of the benefits of platinum is being able to cancel or change an award trip without any penalty. Normally, changing a trip would cost a \$150 fee. I was able to rebook my trip as a multi-city trip. It cost an additional 32,500 SkyMiles, but I was able to change my trip to fly to Springfield on Saturday, race on Sunday, fly from Springfield to Houston on Monday, race again on Tuesday and fly home on Wednesday.

Run for the Ranch is the second marathon I've run in Springfield. In 2003, I ran the Springfield Marathon. That race had an out-and-back course through the countryside with lots of big hills. The course for this race couldn't have been more different. It was eight laps of a flat figure eight course on streets near the Missouri State University campus. Pre-race and post-race activities were in campus buildings. Both races were held in late December, so temperatures were on the chilly side.

An unusual feature of Run for the Ranch is the late start. The race doesn't start until 1:00 PM. I assume that's so we can run during the warmest part of the day. That gives people with late flights the option of waiting until Sunday to pick up their race packets. I arrived Saturday afternoon, so I had plenty of time to pick up my race packet on Saturday.

I had dinner with other Marathon Maniacs at Zio's, an Italian restaurant on the south side of town. Because of the late start, a few of us were also able to get together for breakfast the morning of the race. We had breakfast at Brown Egg, which is on the edge of the MSU campus.

I was unsure how fast I should run. My principal goal was to qualify for Boston by running a time under 3:30. Since I had another race on Tuesday, common sense suggested I shouldn't expend any more energy than necessary. On the other hand, I was finally doing regular speed workouts and wanted to see how fast I could race. I knew from past experience that it was pointless to make a decision ahead of time. I almost always make an impulsive decision during the first mile or two of the race.

The temperature at the start of the race was about 40 degrees. There was enough wind to make it feel colder. Without realizing it, I started a bit fast. My first mile was 7:03. I knew that was much too fast, so I backed off a little. By the end of the first lap, I settled into a pace of 7:30 per mile. That was

faster than I needed to run to beat 3:30, but it wasn't quite fast enough to beat 3:15. I decided I was content with that.

By the end of the first lap, I started seeing other runners I knew. There was one street that we ran in both directions, so you could see the runners going the other way. Eventually, I started lapping other runners, so I had lots of chances to see my friends.

During the third lap, I started talking to two other runners, and the three of us ran together for about three laps. I assumed as we were talking we would slow down, but we didn't. Ironically, I thought they were pulling me along on a fast pace, but they thought I was causing them to run faster. Somewhere during the sixth lap, they both decided the pace was too fast, and I had to run the rest of the way by myself. The pace was wearing on me, but I didn't want to slow down because I was getting cold.

Toward the end of my sixth lap, my fingers started to get numb. I realized the wind was at my back, so I knew I would be even colder going into the wind when I started the next lap. For the last two laps, I was getting colder and struggling to continue. I tried to maintain my pace, but I was slowing to almost nine minutes per mile. In the last lap, I felt like it was a race to finish before hypothermia set in.

I finished in 3:25:48. That was good enough to get my Boston qualifier, but I felt like I had to work way too hard for it.

I retrieved my warm-up clothes from my car and heading to the building where they had post-race food. It felt good to get indoors and pull on an extra layer. It also felt good to eat some barbeque. As other runners gradually trickled into the building, I learned that I won the Veterans (over 50) division.

By the time I got back to the hotel, it was already dinner time. After cleaning up and changing clothes, I met several other runners for dinner. We talked late into the evening. Because the race was so late in the day, my sense of time was distorted. I was surprised when I got back to the hotel that it was already after 11:00. I needed to set my alarm early to catch a morning flight.

I only got about five hours sleep that night. I set my alarm much too early. I misread my itinerary and thought my flight was an hour earlier than it really was. I also allowed way too much time to get through the airport. I'm used to flying out of larger airports. I probably could have slept for another two hours. Adding insult to injury, when I got to the airport, I learned that my flight was delayed because of weather. The same plane was late departing Atlanta because of icy runways. I arrived in Atlanta an hour late and missed my connection. I had to wait four hours for the next flight. I still got to Houston, but it was too late to go anywhere. I just wanted to get some sleep. Fortunately, the Texas Marathon has race morning packet pickup.

New Year's Day was the fourth straight day that I set my alarm early. I allowed extra time, since I still needed to pick up my race packet. When I left the hotel, it was still dark. Fortunately, I knew roughly where I was going, because I've done this race before.

The Texas Marathon has a 6.55 mile out-and-back course that you run four times. You get to see other runners a lot, which is great because it seems like everyone who's anyone does this race. As always, there were numerous 50 Staters and Marathon Maniacs. It was also Jim Simpson's 1000th marathon!

It was 55 degrees. Normally, that would be ideal, but there was a strong chance of rain. It wasn't raining when I got dressed, and I knew the risk of rain was supposed to decrease by late morning, so

I wore shorts and a singlet. I brought a Tyvek jacket and warm headband with me, just in case. I had a pair of polypro gloves that I was also planning to bring.

As I started driving to the start, it started drizzling. I was about halfway there when I realized I forgot the gloves. Ordinarily, I would have gone back for them, but I needed to get there early for packet pickup. By the time I got there, the drizzle stopped, but 30 minutes before the race, it started again.

About 20 minutes before the race, we had a Marathon Maniac group photo. During the group photo, Bryndis Svavarsdottir recognized me. Bryndis is a Marathon Maniac from Iceland. I met her at the Reykjavik Marathon in 2011. Later, when I mentioned that I was worried about my hands getting cold, she lent me a pair of gloves. I don't know if I could have finished the race without them.

I started the race on pace to beat 3:30. I didn't feel great, so I didn't know if I could maintain the pace, but I had to try. After a few miles, the drizzle stopped, and I started to get warm. I took off the Tyvek jacket and tied it around my waist.

At the halfway point, I was right on pace for 3:30, but it was taking an effort that seemed unsustainable. Midway through my third lap, it started raining again. I untied my jacket and put it back on. That slowed me down, and I fell behind my pace. By the end of my third lap, it was obvious that I was continuing to lose time and wouldn't make it up.

About halfway through my last lap, the wheels came off. My last three miles were very slow, and I finished in 3:42:03. While I normally would consider that to be a disappointing time, it was understandable after having only one day off between races. It didn't help that I wasn't getting enough sleep and spent all day Monday traveling.

One of the trademarks of the Texas Marathon is the huge finisher medal. The last time I did this race, it had a red, white and blue medal in the shape of the state of Texas. This year's medal included the Texas design, but it was inside a larger gold silhouette of the United States. It's 11 inches wide, 8 1/2 inches tall, and weighs 3.2 pounds. While it's possible to wear it, instead of putting in around your neck, they give it to you in a display box.

Each year, the race has a different theme. This year was the year of the squeezeie cheesy rat. Along with my finisher medal, I received a rubber rat holding a block of cheese with the number 23 written on it to signify that I finished in 23rd place.

The Texas Marathon always has post-race food that includes numerous boxes of pizza. New deliveries arrive each hour, so there's always hot pizza. Nobody goes hungry, even if they're the last runner to finish.

I had fun at both races, but I'm a bit concerned about my times. The 3:25 in Run for the Ranch met my goal, but my effort was similar to other recent races where I was under 3:20. I expected my time to suffer a bit in the Texas Marathon, but with a day off in between, I didn't expect to be that much slower. Perhaps I'm not in the same shape I thought I was, or perhaps it's the toll of too many nights without enough sleep. Only time will tell.