

## Titanium Journey by David Holmen

In June of 2010, I joined Marathon Maniacs. Marathon Maniacs is club for runners who not only run marathons, but run them frequently. To qualify for membership, you need to finish two marathons within 16 days or three marathons within 90 days. These are the criteria for the Bronze (one star) level. There are eight higher levels.

When I joined, I had already run marathons on two consecutive days. This qualified me for four stars. After joining, I immediately began working on reaching a higher level. From July of 2010 through June of 2011, I ran marathons in 23 different states or countries. This lifted me to the Platinum (eight stars) level. I eventually realized, however, that I wouldn't be satisfied until I reached the Titanium (ten stars) level.

I reached the Titanium level in 2012 by finishing marathons (or ultramarathons) in 30 different states or countries in one year. It didn't need to be a calendar year, but it worked out that way. It was a year with a lot of ups and downs. This is a summary of my journey to Titanium.

When the year began, earning 10 stars was a long term goal, but I didn't think it would happen in 2012. For a variety of reasons, I thought I would have to put this goal off to a future year.

In December of 2011, I learned that my entry was accepted for the 2012 Western States Endurance Run, a rugged 100 mile trail run through the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Ideally, I should have spent the first half of the year training exclusively for this race. By the time I learned my name had been drawn in the lottery, I had already entered several other races. Most of these races were road marathons on relatively flat courses. This wasn't the ideal way to train for Western States, but I tried to balance my training with the races I had already entered.

My race schedule early in the year consisted of races that sounded like fun and races that gave me opportunities to run Boston qualifiers in new states. (Running BQs in every state is one of my long term goals.) Although I didn't expect to reach Titanium in 2012, most of the races on my schedule were in different states. Here's how the year unfolded.

On January 1, I ran the New Year's Day Marathon in Allen, TX. This was the second day of the New Year's Double. Having run the New Year's Eve Marathon the day before, I had sore legs. I didn't run as fast as I had hoped, but I still placed.

Time: 3:42:41  
Races finished: 1  
States: 1  
Place: 3rd male

On January 8, I ran the Zoom Yah Yah Indoor Marathon in Northfield, MN. Originally, I was on a waiting list for this race. One week before the race, I got an email from race director Dick Daymont informing me he had expanded the field to accommodate the last three runners on the waiting list. The good news: I would get to do the race. The bad news: I had only one week to recover from a double where I went all out on both days. Zoom Yah Yah consists of 150 laps on an indoor track. I started at a somewhat brisk pace and got caught up in the excitement. I actually ran a bit faster in the second half, finishing second overall.

Time: 3:22:29  
Races finished: 2  
States: 2  
Place: 2nd overall

On January 14, I ran the Charleston Marathon in Charleston, SC. This race was an opportunity to get a Boston qualifier in South Carolina. When I entered it, I didn't know I would be doing Zoom Yah Yah. Even though it was my fourth race in 15 days, I ran a strong race, placing in the Grand Master (over 50) division.

Time: 3:12:58 (BQ)

Races finished: 3

States: 3

Place: 2nd Grand Master

On February 5, I ran the Surf City USA Marathon in Huntington Beach, CA. At this point, I still didn't expect to be pursuing 10 stars in 2012. If I had, I wouldn't have scheduled another California race when I already had Western States on my schedule. I strained my left hamstring about a week before this race. After taking it easy for a week, I decided to see how I felt in the early miles. I started at a brisk pace. The hamstring was tight but didn't hurt, so I maintained the same brisk pace all the way to the finish.

Time: 3:09:32 (BQ)

Races finished: 4

States: 4

Place: 5th in age group

On February 19, I ran the Lost Dutchman Marathon in Apache Junction, AZ. A week before the race, I slipped on some ice, aggravating the left hamstring that was already bothering me. I took several days off before the race. When the race started, I didn't know how my leg would feel. It was a downhill start, which led me to go out fast. As with Surf City, the hamstring felt tight, but it didn't hurt. Five miles into the race, I suffered a severe pull. At first I thought I could keep running at a slower pace. Eventually, the pain forced me to walk. I was determined to finish, but it wasn't pretty.

Time: 5:20:20

Races finished: 5

States: 5

I was already scheduled to race every two weeks for the foreseeable future, and each race had nonrefundable travel costs. It was more than a week before I could run at all. Two days before my next race, I could barely manage five miles on a treadmill at a very slow pace. I couldn't imagine finishing a marathon in two days, much less doing so without making the injury worse. Even so, I took a leap of faith and traveled to New Orleans.

On March 4, I ran the Rock N Roll New Orleans Marathon in New Orleans, LA. When I entered this race, I thought it would be an opportunity to get a Boston qualifier in Louisiana. When I arrived in New Orleans, I couldn't even walk without a slight limp. I needed a miracle. I found one at the expo. I bought a hamstring compression wrap that could be adjusted easily with Velcro attachments. By wearing the wrap and running at a very conservative pace, I was able to finish the race without making my hamstring worse.

Time: 5:12:44

Races finished: 6

States: 6

On March 18, I ran the Georgia Marathon in Atlanta, GA. When I entered this race, I thought it would be an opportunity to get a Boston qualifier in Georgia. Although my injury was healing, I still wasn't ready to run that fast. I wore the compression wrap again. I ran somewhat faster, breaking four hours, but it was still well short of my pre-injury pace.

Time: 3:44:37

Races finished: 7

States: 7

On March 31, I ran the Yakima River Canyon Marathon in Yakima, WA. For the first time since my hamstring injury, I was ready to race without wearing a compression wrap. The downhill course scared me a little, but I was able to race without holding back very much.

Time: 3:28:37 (BQ)

Races finished: 8

States: 8

Place: 4th in age group

On April 14, I ran the Gansett Marathon in Narragansett, RI. My intention was to run just fast enough to get a Boston qualifier in Rhode Island. I didn't want to go all out, since I was running the Boston Marathon two days later. I got a little carried away, beating my BQ time by over nine minutes.

Time: 3:20:54 (BQ)

Races finished: 9

States: 9

On April 16, I ran the Boston Marathon in Boston, MA. The weather was crazy hot. It was 84 degrees and sunny with a 10 AM start. I needed a Boston qualifier in Massachusetts, so despite the heat, I didn't hold back. I increased my fluid intake and doused myself with water at every opportunity. With a lot of help from the spectators, I was able to beat the heat and get my BQ with five minutes to spare.

Time: 3:24:49 (BQ)

Races finished: 10

States: 10

At this point I started thinking seriously about going for 10 stars in 2012. I already had five races scheduled from April 28 through June 2. Four of them would give me new states. If I could squeeze two more races into my schedule, I would have 16 different states before the Western States 100. It was ambitious, but I decided to juggle two different goals. My plan was to use races as long training runs every weekend and focus on trail running during the week. My last weekend without a race was April 21. I used that day to meet my service requirement for Western States by volunteering at a local ultra. A week later I embarked on seven races on seven consecutive weekends.

On April 28, I ran the Illinois Marathon in Champaign-Urbana, IL. This was an opportunity to get a Boston qualifier in Illinois. I got carried away and ran much faster than I needed to. I was falling off the pace in the late miles, which is a sure sign that I ran too fast.

Time: 3:22:51 (BQ)

Races finished: 11

States: 11

On May 6, I ran the New Jersey Marathon in Long Branch, NJ. This was an opportunity to get a Boston qualifier in New Jersey. Once again, I got carried away, beating my BQ time by over nine minutes.

Time: 3:20:36 (BQ)

Races finished: 12

States: 12

On May 12, I ran the Ice Age Trail 50K in La Grange, WI. I viewed this as part of my training for Western States. It was an opportunity to do a long run entirely on trails

Time: 5:10:57

Races finished: 13

States: 13

Place: 2nd in age group

On May 19, I ran the Fargo Marathon in Fargo, ND. I already had a BQ in North Dakota, so I didn't really need to run fast. I ran all out anyway.

Time: 3:22:01 (BQ)

Races finished: 14

States: 14

On May 27, I ran the Wyoming Marathon in Laramie, WY. This is a high elevation race with long hills. This was another race that looked like it would help prepare me for Western States. I came down with a cold a few days before the race, so I had to battle the 8000 foot elevation when I already had trouble breathing because of nasal congestion.

Time: 4:17:12

Races finished: 15

States: 15

On June 2, I ran the FANS 12 Hour in Minneapolis, MN. This race didn't give me a new state, since I had already run the Zoom Yah Yah Indoor Marathon. I used this race as a long training run for Western States.

Distance: 63.7 miles

Races finished: 16

States: 15

On June 9, I ran the Marathon to Marathon in Marathon, IA. It was ambitious to squeeze in another race just two weeks before Western States, but it gave me practice running in hot weather. It was also an opportunity to get a Boston qualifier in Iowa. The heat took a toll on me, but I got my BQ.

Time: 3:27:17 (BQ)

Races finished: 17

States: 16

Two weeks after Marathon to Marathon, I traveled to California and attempted the Western States 100. This race would not have given me a new state in my Titanium quest, but it was a bucket list race. I knew I wasn't as prepared as I should be, but I was still confident I could finish. I made several mistakes during this race. I could recover from some of them, but together they set the stage for my first DNF in an ultra. I dropped out at the Michigan Bluff aid station when I realized I couldn't make the cutoff times and it seemed dangerous to try. I had abused my quads so badly on the early downhills that I had no stability going downhill.

Result: DNF after 55.7 miles.

Races finished: 17

States: 16

After Western States, I was depressed. I was also so beat up that it took almost two weeks before I could do any quality training. Fortunately, I had the foresight to give myself four weeks to recover before my next race.

On July 21, I ran the Great Cranberry Island 50K in Cranberry Isles, ME. This race has a party atmosphere, which was just what I needed. The weather can be hot, but I had been training during the hottest July I've ever seen. Although my main goal was simply to finish, I still challenged myself to run as fast as I could. There was a certified marathon split, and I pushed for a Boston qualifier, just because it was a novelty to qualify for Boston in a 50K race. After that, my pace slowed, but I still managed a 50K PR. This race helped rebuild my confidence.

Marathon split: 3:28:36 (BQ)  
Time: 4:14:36 (PR)  
Races finished: 18  
States: 17

On August 5, I ran the Extra Terrestrial 51K in Rachel, NV. This race also has a party atmosphere. Again my main goal was simply to finish, but I went out pretty hard and held on for another competitive finish. This race also helped to restore my confidence. I don't know if anything can make up for the DNF at Western States, but these last two races were a good start.

Time: 4:34:59  
Races finished: 19  
States: 18  
Place: 1st male

To make up for doing only three new states in the previous three months, I scheduled eight races over the next seven weekends. Originally, I was going to have one weekend off during this stretch. When an unexpected opportunity fell in my lap, I ended up racing on that weekend too.

On September 2, I ran the Flatlanders 6 Hour in Fenton, MO. I do well in this type of race, and it occurred to me that I had a realistic chance of winning my age group. I was supposed to hold back a little in this race, but I get very competitive in ultras. When the dust settled, I didn't just win my age group. I won the race. In 1988, I had a DNF in the St. Louis Marathon. Before this year, it was my only DNF. I always wanted to return to St. Louis to make up for that race. My return was a triumphant one.

Distance: 37.41 miles  
Races finished: 20  
States: 19  
Place: 1st overall

On September 8, I ran the Salmon Marathon in Salmon, ID. This was the first of two marathons in the same weekend. Both races were threatened by smoke from nearby forest fires. Faced with the decision of whether to cancel the race, the race director chose to inform all runners of the situation and leave it up to us. I chose to travel and hope for the best. I got lucky. Air conditions on the day of the race were the best they had experienced in weeks. Two days later, there was ash falling in town. I needed a Boston qualifier in Idaho, but I tried to hold back a little bit, since I had another race the next day. I didn't hold back much.

Time: 3:24:35 (BQ)  
Races finished: 21  
States: 20

On September 9, I ran the Bozeman Marathon in Bozeman, MT. This race also came close to being cancelled because of smoke. Again the air quality improved by race day and turned out not to be a problem. Aside from being my second marathon in two days, it was also my second straight day racing at elevations above 5000 feet. The elevation took a toll on me, and I struggled in this race.

Time: 3:53:58  
Races finished: 22  
States: 21

On September 16, I ran the Einstein Marathon in Ulm, Germany. This race was a late addition to my schedule. I was traveling to Switzerland on business. One of the reasons I didn't do many races in July and August is because I was trying to keep my calendar open for this trip. It was originally scheduled for July. Then it got rescheduled for August. When it got pushed back to September, I

saw an opportunity to do a foreign race without having to pay for airfare. There weren't any marathons in Switzerland that weekend, but Ulm is only three hours away in southern Germany, and I already had a rental car. It meant doing eight races in 42 days, but I couldn't resist. I've done other foreign races that have an international flavor. This one was mostly a local race. I think I was the only there who didn't speak German. It was cool running along the banks of the Danube and finishing in front of Ulm Minster, the tallest church in the world.

Time: 3:27:16 (BQ)

Races finished: 23

States/countries: 22

When I planned my schedule for the second half of the year, I had it figured out so I would earn my 10th star in December at the 12-12-12 Marathon of Sarasota. Adding the Einstein Marathon put me ahead of schedule. I briefly considered cancelling a race. The logical choice would have been the Omaha Marathon, since my only nonrefundable expense was my entry fee. I decided to keep this race on my schedule as insurance. After all, races sometimes get cancelled and travel plans sometimes go awry.

On September 23, I ran the Omaha Marathon in Omaha, NE. I'm very glad I didn't cancel this one. I saw a lot of old friends at this race, and I also met some new friends. I had a good time, in more ways than one.

Time: 3:17:48 (BQ)

Races finished: 24

States/countries: 23

Place: 1st in age group

On September 30, I did the Run Crazy Horse Marathon in Hill City, SD. This race was a chance to get a Boston qualifier in South Dakota. It also gave me a chance to see a different section of the Mickelson Trail. After setting a fast pace on the mostly downhill first half, I had to manage my effort carefully on the more difficult second half. I was rewarded for my efforts with a top three finish and a very handsome award.

Time: 3:23:05 (BQ)

Races finished: 25

States/countries: 24

Place: 3rd overall

On October 7, I ran the Portland Marathon in Portland, OR. Scheduling races in so many different states gave me an excuse to do a few races that had been on my bucket list. This was one of them. I didn't need to run this one fast, since I already had a Boston qualifier in Oregon. I nevertheless ran my fastest race since the hamstring injury in February.

Time: 3:13:50 (BQ)

Races finished: 26

States/countries: 25

Place: 10th in age group (yes, they have that many AG awards)

On October 13, I ran the Baltimore Marathon in Baltimore, MD. I already had a Boston qualifier in Maryland, but I knew the next weekend would be a chance to recover, so I saw no reason to hold back. After running with the 3:10 pace group for more than half of the race, I started to run out of gas. I struggled through the last six miles, but finished under 3:20 for the second straight week.

Time: 3:18:25 (BQ)

Races finished: 27

States/countries: 26

After a much needed rest, Deb and I went on a trip to Venice, Italy. We timed this vacation so I could run the Venice Marathon on October 28. The race starts on the mainland for the first 20 miles, crosses a three mile bridge, and then finishes in the city. If you've ever seen Venice, it's hard to imagine running a marathon there. In the last two miles, we crossed 14 bridges, including a floating bridge over the Grand Canal. It was cold, rainy and windy. Strong headwinds wore me down, but I was on a mission. Every time I've raced in a foreign country, I've qualified for Boston. This was no exception.

Time: 3:22:27 (BQ)

Races finished: 28

States/countries: 27

My next scheduled race was the New York City Marathon. This race was supposed to take place only six days after Hurricane Sandy wreaked havoc on New York and New Jersey. Uncertainty about the race seemed to be resolved when Mayor Bloomberg boldly announced on Wednesday that the race was on. I traveled to New York on Friday and picked up my race packet, only to find out an hour later that the race had been cancelled. While I was disappointed about the cancellation, there was a silver lining. I was once again on track to earn my 10th star in Sarasota, as I had originally planned.

Result: race cancelled

Races finished: 28

States/countries: 27

On November 18, I ran the Philadelphia Marathon in Philadelphia, PA. This was another race that had always been on my bucket list. It was also a chance to get a Boston qualifier in Pennsylvania. After the cancellation of the New York City Marathon, it felt good to get another race under my belt.

Time: 3:17:00 (BQ)

Races finished: 29

States/countries: 28

On December 1, I ran the St. Jude Memphis Marathon in Memphis, TN. I did this race in 2011 and enjoyed it, so I came back for more. I set a time goal of 3:15, but my primary goal was simply to finish, setting up the big finish in Sarasota.

Time: 3:14:14 (BQ)

Races finished: 30

States/countries: 29

Place: 2nd in age group

On December 12, I ran the 12-12-12 Marathon of Sarasota. There's a reason I wanted to finish my Titanium journey here. When I saw the photos and video from Greg Goebel's 11-11-11 Marathon, it looked like the best race of all time. Imagine seeing dozens of your favorite runners all at the same race. It's a short loop that you run 58 times, so you keep seeing everyone else, whether they're fast or slow. It's a 26.2 mile party. I struggled with the heat and humidity and had to take walking breaks in the second half, but I finished.

Time: 3:51:07

Races finished: 31

States/countries: 30

Place: 1st in age group

The year isn't over yet. I still plan to do the Run for the Ranch Marathon in Springfield, MO. When the year is over, my final tally should be 32 marathons or ultras in 30 different states or countries.

When I joined Marathon Maniacs, there were roughly 50 members who had reached the Titanium level. By the time I got there, there were well over 100. Many of them have racing schedules and accomplishments I can barely imagine. I'm proud to be in their company.