

Wisconsin Dells by David Holmen

October 2011

On October 23, 2011, I ran the Wisconsin Dells Marathon. I made a last minute decision to add this race to my schedule. I didn't plan to "race" it. I needed a long training run before the New York City Marathon, and I figured it would be easier (and more fun) to run 26.2 miles with 300 other runners than to run 20+ miles by myself. It was an easy race to add at the last minute because the race wasn't full, hotels had vacancies, and it was only a four hour drive from home.

In the weeks leading up to this race, I was recovering from two pulled hamstrings. I felt like I was finally ready to run 26 miles, but I didn't know if I was 100 percent, so I wanted to play it safe, and run a pace that felt comfortable, rather than going all out.

Apparently, something happens to me when I pin on a bib number. In my previous few training runs, I never went much faster than 9 minute miles, and it seemed like that pace was tiring. I started doing this race at an 8 minute pace, and it didn't seem any more difficult than the 9 minute miles I was doing in training. I kept running 8 minute miles or faster for the first half of the race, and it felt OK.

This race has an out-and-back course. When I reached the turnaround, I only counted 17 runners ahead of me. This pushed my competitive nature into high gear, and I spent the second half of the race trying to reel in runners ahead of me. I started to struggle in the last few miles, but still passed two runners in the last mile to move into 9th place overall.

Wisconsin Dells is known for water parks and other family-oriented fun, but the water parks aren't open this late in the season, so I wouldn't really describe this as a destination marathon. I would describe it a small race with a scenic course through the Wisconsin countryside. Most of the course was wooded, and we had some nice views of fall colors. We also had a few nice views of the Wisconsin River. In the early miles, there was no wind, and water was so tranquil it had a postcard quality.

In 2010, this race had an entirely different course. One of the local communities wouldn't allow the race to go through town, so they had a course that was completely out in the country. This year, the course went right through downtown Wisconsin Dells, and one lane of the busiest street was blocked off for us. We also had police support where we needed to cross a highway. It was nice to see the local communities embracing the race this year. Hopefully, they derived a noticeably economic benefit from runners traveling to the area and staying in local hotels.