

## **America Discovers Columbus**

Much of this report was initially posted on the Running Times on-line forum, where I have a number of running friends that I have met either virtually or in person at various races around the country. I dragged Dennis Schmatz along with me to a series of get-togethers (called FE's, or Forum Events) with said colleagues, and hopefully, he will acknowledge that they in fact are very real, decent, warm people. We spent a good part of the weekend with people who are on my on-line Mileage Game team (Team 4). You'll note that as is customary, people eschew the use of real names when posting on on-line forums, and come up with anonymous monikers. Mine is "The Beast", but no points are awarded to those who decipher the origins for that name - . certainly not those of you familiar with NJ's River to Sea Relay, at any rate.

Back in the spring, Dennis mentioned to me that he was thinking of running the Columbus Marathon, as his daughter was going to school there. I immediately invited myself to go along with him, as I had fond memories of this marathon that I had first run back in 1992 (before I became old and slow!).

Fairly early on in 2006, the idea of a Team 4 Marathon was planted, and momentum and enthusiasm grew over the summer and early fall. But it's a long journey to get to and through any marathon, and obstacles and detours arise along the way. In some cases, there are unforeseen medical/injury problems; and for others, "life" issues happen.

Nevertheless, eight team members did make it to Columbus, traveling from Delaware, Virginia, New Jersey, other parts of Ohio, and as far away as Texas. Some were rewarded with PR's and the rest shared in their achievement. Some experienced disappointment, and the others commiserated with them. There was one dns; one dnf; and one major crash and burn – literally!

But unquestionably, whether one experienced race success or not, all agree that the most memorable aspect of the Columbus Day 2006 weekend was the opportunity to spend some quality time with fellow teammates & forumites and to get to know each other just a little bit better. Team 4 members who came for the marathon, half-marathon, or just to lend support to the others were: Mothaudio, Oh2Run, Bzzzy, Campeona, Alisonvet, N3103f, Markhh, and The Beast. Even the presence of one of the Mongrels from Team 1 ☺ - Sparky Runner – could not detract from a series of awesome FE's. We had a great time, and enough can't be said about the efforts and hospitality of MikE and Annette to make us visitors feel welcome.

Unfortunately, there was also a race that had to be run...For me, the result was a disappointment after some quality training and preparation, but at least I have the satisfaction of knowing that I gave it all I had and did the best I could. I've experienced marathon disappointment before, and I'll survive the mental ordeal.

Weather conditions were very good, albeit a little colder (35-40F) than most of us would have liked. It was an 18-mile garbage bag marathon for me. I had run the Columbus Marathon back in 1992, and I distinctly remember it being much flatter! But it's a fair course, a well-organized event, and the volunteers were excellent.

To put you out of your misery so you don't necessarily need to read any further, here are the raw facts of my 2006 Columbus Marathon:

Time – 3:54:36

Pace – 8:58/mile

Overall place – 1425/3828 finishers

Gender place – 1090/2274  
Age division – 52/138

Performance Level Percentage – 63.4%

Age-graded time – 3:16:58

Beast Columbus 1992 time – 3:29:09

Remarkably for such a poor result, this is my second best age-graded time after 42 career marathons. I'm not sure what to make of that, except the fact that maybe it's time to acknowledge that I'm just getting too old for this nonsense. "Ya' think"?

This report would be quite different and a lot more upbeat if my final time had been 8:37 faster, but it wasn't and it's not, so here goes.....

Based on my times in shorter races, combined with the training I had done this year, the "experts" all predicted that I was in 3:35 +/- 5 min shape, and should run between 8:00-8:17 pace. I knew that was folly, and felt that I had a 25% chance of running 3:45. No need to spell out the significance of a 3:45 at age 57, but that was the goal. The strategy was well thought out and reviewed with numerous running colleagues, and it almost worked. I wanted to maintain 8:24-8:25/min. miles (3:40 pace) for hopefully up to 20 miles, and then expected to fade to at least 9:00/min. miles for the final 10K. That would still do it.

#### Miles 1-7:

I comfortably ran with the 3:40 pace group for the early miles, and was well in control, consistently at an 8:24/mile effort. At around mile 6, I saw Lisa (Sparky Runner) who was gunning for a 3:30 marathon, and she asked what I was "doing up here". I responded with "what are you doing back here? I'm running exactly at a pace for a 3:40 marathon". Alarmed; she took off like a shot, and I was concerned she was going to try and make up too much time all at once. As for me, in no way did I feel like I had gone out too fast, had no noticeable physical problems, and the only concern was the congestion on the course (it seemed like all 3000 half-marathoners were running at an 8:24/mile pace too).

Splits and cumulative:

1 – 8:37.16 – 8:37.16

2 – 8:29.53 – 17:06.69

3 – 8:00.61 – 25:07.30 (gradual downhill)

4 – 8:42.78 – 3:50.08 (gradual uphill)

5 – 8:20.86 – 42:10.94

6 – 8:07.86 – 50:18.80

#### Miles 8-11:

The half-marathoners had taken a shorter route, but then re-joined the marathon course around mile 7 or 8. But now, the 8:24/mile marathoners were intermingled with half-marathoners running 9:00+ miles. And we started to encounter hordes of walkers who had departed an hour before us. It became very congested and it was around this time that I lost contact with the 3:40 pacer. I noticed that many others suffered this same fate. And then mass confusion arose with 2 sets of clocks and mile markers – one for the half and another for the full. One bright light is that around mile 10, I was encouraged by the sight of Paige (Campeona) out there yelling my name.

Splits and cumulative:

7 – 8:26.32 – 58:45.12

8 – 8:35.59 – 1:07.20

9 – 8:26.05 – 1:15.46

10 – 8:49.65 – 1:24.36 (bio break)  
11 – 8:25.69 – 1:33.02

#### Miles 12-17:

With the benefit of post-race reflection, this is the section that really did me in. It is a straight, continuous, slightly uphill section that goes on for an interminable 5 miles! It was a fight to maintain the 8:24-8:26 per mile pace that that I had so consistently managed up to that point. Also; I missed mile markers 13, 14, and 17, which didn't help, and so individual splits are estimates in some cases. Did see Paige again, and it gave me a temporary lift.

Splits and cumulative:

12 - 8:31.98 – 1:41.34  
13 – 8:38.60 – 1:50:12 (est)  
14 – 8:38.60 – 1:58.50 (est)  
15 – 8:38.60 – 2:07.29  
16 – 9:00.06 – 2:16.29  
17 – 9:05.00 – 2:25.34 (est)

#### Miles 18-22:

This was the highest point on the course and through the neighborhood of **Upper** Arlington. At mile 18, I finally took off my trusty garbage bag, although I held onto it for another 4 miles. Tough running here, particularly for those of us who had come to the realization that we were not going to meet our goals on this day, and yet still had a relatively long way to go. It was around mile 18 or 19 where I had no choice but to take stock and re-assess my situation, and make a new goal for myself. I knew it would only get worse (I've done this marathon thing once or twice, you know ☺), and decided that I would push myself as hard as I could to break 3:55, or 9:00 minute miles.

This is when those mentally tough 20-milers on the treadmill allowed one to keep plodding ahead, even when your dreams have come shattering down. Emotionally; you are all alone, and it's just you and the relentless pavement in front of you. I really don't want to hear another damn "you're looking good", or even worse, "you can do it; you're almost there". Shut the frick up, you ignorant spectator. Maybe if THIS marathon wasn't one of those that are 26 miles, 385 yards.... I made a small effort to look for Paige again around mile 20 or 21, but secretly I hoped she wouldn't see me and my pathetic 9:20 pace. I was embarrassed and just wanted to be alone. Missed mile markers 17 and 21.

Splits and cumulative:

18 – 9:46.97 – 2:35.21 (bio break. Damn; it's a bltch getting old)  
19 – 9:56.73 – 2:45.18 (high point)  
20 – 9:34.77 – 2:54.53  
21 – 9:19.48 – 3:04.13 (est)  
22 – 9:19.48 – 3:13.33

#### Miles 23-26.2:

Thanks for bearing with me so far, but "don't give up; you're almost there". Much of this section goes through the Ohio State campus, and indeed, I did feel like I had been hit by a couple of mean middle linebackers. Parts were quite interesting, although I remembered appreciating it a lot more 14 years ago when this was the first loop of the course. It seemed like the photographers were plentiful throughout this section. Why couldn't at least some of them be situated earlier on in the race when we weren't in "Death March" mode? Somewhere during this section I once again came to the realization that for most of us, it's a real accomplishment just to

finish one of these marathons. If they weren't so hard; they really wouldn't be worth doing. Saw and heard Alison calling out to me at the mile 25 marker, and I could immediately tell that she felt sorry for me or at least shared my inner pain, but I shrugged and continued on. I had run the last mile of the course the day before as part of my pre-marathon jog, so I knew what to expect at the end. I made the final turn and despite the crappy time, I did make an effort to finish the final few hundred yards strongly.

Splits and cumulative (based on my chrono):

23 – 9:27.99 – 3:23.01  
24 – 9:49.26 – 3:32.50  
25 – 10:09.02 – 3:42.59  
26 – 9:49.88 – 3:52.49  
26.2 – 1:47.79 – 3:54.31

After the finish, I made the volunteers work hard to recoup their ridiculous AMB chip, which weighed a ton, and wouldn't fit in any of the conventional Velcro chip holders that I own. Drank 4 glasses of Gatorade and ate a bagel, and then waited for David, as I was convinced he was due for yet another PR, and he did. I was happy for him, although he looked like hell. ;-). My legs were wobbly, but I managed to retrieve my checked bag and made it back to the hotel in one piece. The shower felt good, but not as good as the beers at Mac's, where the gang all met up once again. Honestly; it would have been one heckuva weekend if it wasn't for the race.

What's next? Even though both my doctor and my massage therapist are concerned, I'll probably run another marathon this fall, although I have no logical reason to expect to finish substantially better than I did at Columbus. Again; I feel that I trained hard (many will say too hard, I know) and I did my best. It just wasn't good enough – period.

It was ultra runner Ann Trason who said "It hurts to a point and then it doesn't get any worse". That is certainly true, and in my case, I believe that the physical recovery is no big deal. But coping with the agony of mental anguish takes a lot longer, and is a lot harder.

Thanks for reading.

Photo link (Marshall, bib #2296)

[http://www.marathonfoto.com/order\\_assigned\\_photos.cfm?BFI=ios63pzh2l&OID=17812006F1&BibNumber=2296&CustomerNumber=C78265&Currency=USD&Language=en](http://www.marathonfoto.com/order_assigned_photos.cfm?BFI=ios63pzh2l&OID=17812006F1&BibNumber=2296&CustomerNumber=C78265&Currency=USD&Language=en)