It's the Pocono MOUNTAIN Marathon – What do you Expect?

Warning: Long report, like the marathon itself.

<u>Statistics:</u>
Time – 3:56:31
Pace – 9:01
PLP – 63.5%
AG Time – 3:16:40*
Overall – 213
Gender – 146
Division – 26

*Although I've run 31 marathons faster than this in my career, this was actually my 2nd fastest from an age-graded basis. Guess all that means is that I'm really getting old.

<u>Background:</u>
My running had been abysmal through the first 3 ½ months of 2007, culminating in an embarrassing and discouraging 4:11:59 at the National Marathon in March. I was so depressed; I couldn't force myself to write a race report, and figured that Father Time had finally won out. The day after that debacle, I received an e-mail from my good friend Doug to join him at the Pocono Marathon on May 6th – for redemption. I told him that I wouldn't do it unless I had reason to believe I could perform respectably, as I couldn't handle another disappointment like National. I tried a 20-miler, and it was a disaster – 3:26 of slow, agonizing pain. My confidence was shaken, to say the least.

I ran the Brooklyn Half in mid-April and it was so-so. A few days later, I had my monthly deep tissue massage and promised my therapist/unofficial coach that I absolutely would not succumb to the pressure and temptation to run Pocono, because basically my running just sucked. I really meant it, and she almost sounded like she believed me, despite my infamous track record. Then something unexpected happened. I had two very encouraging 10-mile runs that ended very strongly. I told my wife that I had to give a 20-miler another try. What was the worst that could happen – I'd bonk again? So I did exactly the same 20-mile course as 2 weeks earlier, but the results were dramatically different. I guess I had something to prove and ran much harder than I had any business doing in a 20-mile training run, but I finished in 2:52!!!, or 34 minutes faster. That afternoon I had no choice but to register for Pocono, as otherwise I'd never know…

Unfortunately, I had months earlier registered for the Lehigh Valley Half Marathon, which was a week after the 20 and 7 days before Pocono. I tried to hold something back, but when you pin a bib number on me and the gun goes off I have little or no control; and with the benefit of 20:20 hindsight, I raced just a little too hard. C'est la vie.

My stated goal at Pocono was very clear. After the horrible time at National, I'd be OK with breaking 4 hours and that would represent redemption, if not a result that would make me ecstatic. A serious shot at a BQ wasn't realistic given my training, and wasn't expected for this rather impromptu marathon.

One of my race strategies was laughable for those who know how anal I am, and how I'm always planning and calculating. I decided that although I would wear my watch and hit the split function at every mile for post-race analysis; that I would not look at it even once until I got to the 25-mile marker. Remember that this is someone who can't help but refer to his chrono constantly on even the most benign training run. But my strategy was to run by feel, and take whatever that provided.

The course:
First off – the course is gorgeous, with some of the most spectacular scenery I've ever seen. A good part of it runs alongside trout streams, and I made a point of looking around continually. As always, one can never believe course profiles shown on Marathon websites. To look at this one, you'd think that all you had to do was roll down the hills from start to finish. What could be easier? Although it is true that the middle third of the course is basically a continuous downhill, I found the up and down rolling first 5 miles a bit of a challenge, but that was nothing compared to the series of hills from mile 19-25 that just don't appear on the profile. Not saying that they were as long as the Newton Hills in Boston and there was some flat sections in between, but when you have 4 significant hills from miles 19-23 and another slight one at mile 24 or 25 in a marathon, your legs will not be happy. But despite the beating, there's no question that the net downhill makes for a fast course for most people.

The Weather:
Temperatures were just about perfect for marathoning. It was in the 30's at the start and probably rose to ~50F or 55F by the finish (depending on how long you were out there). It was sunny throughout, and the wind never really let up. It was supposed to be a NE wind which for the most part wouldn't have been bad, but at times it seemed to be coming more from the ENE. However; I don't think it had a major impact on time, at least not mine.

The Race:
See below for splits. As I said, I found the rolling hills in the first 5 miles a bit of a surprise, but I was running strong regardless. Not looking at my watch, I wasn't sure exactly how fast I was going, but knew very well that I was going much quicker than my intended 8:40 pace. But I didn't care. "Do what you can while you can when you can". On a course like this, it's almost meaningless to try and run even mile splits, but rather you're better off trying to run an even effort. So running 7:57 for mile 9 wasn't cause for concern because that represented a screaming downhill portion of the course. The next mile was much slower, but it included a bio break. Even though my legs were protesting in the final 7 miles, I still was surprised at just how slow some of those miles were when I looked at the splits post-race, as I felt like I maintained a fairly steady effort throughout the race. But obviously, my legs were no match for those hills, at least not after 18 miles including some quad-busting downhills. Thinking about it, I don't recall ever feeling like I hit the wall, which was certainly the case at National 6 weeks earlier. The finish was on the high school dirt track, and I can't say that I finished in style. But I finished, and I maintain that finishing any marathon – whether it's your

first or your 45th – is still quite an accomplishment. I am not unhappy
with my time or the way that I ran, considering that my training was less
than optimal. That's what happens when you don't decide to enter a marathon
until 2 weeks prior to the event. I felt like I ran as well as I could, and
have no regrets. I certainly feel like I regained some pride and redemption
after the sub par performance at National. And my self-confidence has
returned, even if the feeling in my legs hasn't!

Oh, and another pre-race objective was achieved. I never looked at my watch
until I hit the mile 25 marker. I have to admit I was somewhat disappointed
when I saw that I was already at 3:44, as I felt that I had run strong and
fairly steady the whole way. But I'd definitely "run by feel" again. It
certainly took some of the pressure off, and if I had been studying my
splits, seen those 10-minute miles, and mentally calculating earlier on,
perhaps I might have been tempted to give up the effort and just jog/walk
in. Unfortunately, I couldn't avoid seeing the big clock at the half-
marathon point, but I don't think it impacted the way I ran the rest of the
race.

Splits (miles, splits, cumulative, comments):
1-----8:11.76-----8:11.76-----uphill
2-----8:13.15----16:24.91
3-----7:08.65----23:33.56-----downhill & obviously short
4-----9:45.95----33:19.51-----long steep uphill & long
5-----8:35.40----41:54.91
6-----8:27.35----50:22.26
7-----8:41.06----59:03.32-----flat
8-----9:00.73----1:08.04
9-----7:57.41----1:16.01-----downhill
10----8:58.99----1:25.00-----downhill & bio break
11----8:14.75----1:33.15-----downhill
12&13-17:17.25---1:50.32-----downhill; missed 12 mile marker
13.11-----------1:51.30
14----8:45.56----1:59.18-----uphill
15----8:43.23----2:08.01-----downhill
16----9:06.58----2:35.26-----flat!
17----9:12.61----2:26.20-----downhill
18----9:06.32----2:35.26
19----9:32.92----2:44.59-----uphill
20----9:31.97----2:54.31
21----9:34.12----3:04.05-----steep uphill, but that's it, right?
22----9:45.00----3:13.50-----another uphill! now I'm cursing
23----10:22.82---3:24.13-----uphill; well this just isn't fair
24----10:36.62---3:34.50-----somewhere on 24 or 25 – another hill!
25----9:38.12----3:44.28-----check my watch – darn; I tried so hard
26----9:54.82----3:54.23-----they moved the stadium!
26.2—2:07.96-----3:56.31-----no kick, but it's done.

HRH at Pocono:
As Colin put it afterwards, you could almost call this race the local HRH
Marathon, as it is relatively close to home and certainly has its share of
picturesque hills. Most of us slept in our own beds and drove the 1 hour up
to Stroudsburg the morning of the event. There were 9 of us all told, and
aside from some incredible times as the Race Results attest, we had a Good

Time. There's something about a small marathon and the people involved that is just special. Logistics proved to be relatively easy. Congrats have to go to just about everyone for their performance on this day. This may be a relatively fast course, but it's not an easy one. You had to earn your time, and the gang from HRH did just that.

Conclusion:
I felt remarkably good about myself the morning after, although my legs might have a different opinion. You can't imagine just how beat up mentally I was after National, and how discouraged I was getting with my running this year up until the last 2 weeks. My goal was redemption, and that would manifest itself by running under 4 hours. I knew I hadn't done the proper marathon training to have any serious thought of a BQ, and that really wasn't the overriding objective this time. I just wanted to prove to myself that I wasn't totally washed up quite yet. The time was very close to my time in Philadelphia in November, but yet I feel like I ran a much better race. I never hit The Wall per se, and gave it my best. It was a beautiful course, extremely well-organized, great people, and an enjoyable way to spend a weekend with good friends.