

Just 4 weeks after running the New York City Marathon I sought redemption and drove east with Jonathan Bennett to run in the Baton Rouge Beach Marathon. We were on a quest to set our personal bests; I in the full and Jonathan in the half. We wouldn't arrive until late Friday evening and the race was on Saturday morning. We couldn't study the course first hand, so instead, Jonathan's friend Matt gave us a rundown of the course on Thursday evening, which made us feel comfortable knowing what to expect. Jonathan's stepdad, Jeff, would also be running the half so he picked up our packets at the same time he went to get his, which put less stress on us. Remember how New York wouldn't allow such time management; Baton Rouge was already on my good side.

We rolled into Jonathan's mom's driveway around midnight and I laid my head down after a quick snack and goodnight call to Anne, we could wait and rummage through our packet in the AM. I woke up to a lovely good luck wake-up call and kiss from Anne's text and had my usual hard-boiled egg with toast and fruit. We prepared for the race at the house, pinning our numbers and lacing up our shoes with D-Tags. I was really happy with the Baton Rouge race packet, a medium sized bright green tech shirt, a pair of equally loud socks and a pair of gloves. Thanks New York, for nothing but a too-large shirt.

I was in good spirits when we left the house to drive to the start. Jeff took along his bike so Jonathan could try and find me on the course after he finished the half to offer me support and encouragement. We parked about a half mile from the start with just one hour from the start time (not 4 hours prior like in NYC). We loosened up with a warm up routine and stretches. At the restroom facility I noticed water dripping from the roof; it hadn't rained in Baton Rouge for a while, so that moisture was a result of the high humidity. It would get warm too in the later stages of the race, so I knew it would be important for me to hydrate.

This is a very small race compared to NYC; crowds were thin, waits were short, no confusing lines for corrals and waves. About 1,500 runners were registered in the half and 200 runners in the full. The race started on a boulevard street with halfers on one side and "fools" on the other side, slightly further back. I wished Jonathan good luck, crossed over to my side and literally toed the line. Past results show runners placing with times in the 2:50's, so I quickly measured up my competition and off went the gun.

Within the first couple miles I found myself running with a group of triathletes, sharing our stories and goals. Among them were a couple of Ironman finishers, so we could all relate. Our little group didn't last too long as we settled into the pace we wanted to hold for the race. My strategy was to run comfortable the first half, and by mile 5 I was running alone at 6:40/mile pace, on pace to break 2:55. At

this point I knew 5 marathoners were ahead of me, but I wasn't worried because I wanted to run my race and not be influenced by other runners. Being alone afforded me that opportunity and I set my cruise control on crossing the half in 1:27 and change – perfect!

Jonathan was there at the half to cheer me on. I asked him real quick if he had gotten his time, and sure enough he did, in PR fashion! On to New York he will go in November to erase the sour taste The Big Apple left when he ran the 2009 NYC Marathon. His victory (1st place age group and 3rd place overall) made it an even sweeter homecoming in Baton Rouge. I was also excited to get a bike escort in front of me for the second half. Though I know I'm not either, it gave me the feeling of being elite and leading the race. Plus, he was also wearing yellow, which made me happy. I realized a couple miles into the second loop that I had picked up the pace with all this extra adrenaline, so I settled back down because there were still a lot of miles left to race.

After getting water from the mile 18 aid station, I heard a murmur of cheers and applause. I glanced to the right and over the lake I saw the finish area, oh how much I wished to have been crossing the line at this point. Shortly thereafter my hopes were lifted again when Jonathan showed up on the bike, holding up a sign that read "Because 26.3 is crazy". He found me again at mile 20 with another sign reading "Yes, your pace does make your booty look fast". At this point I realized that Anne must've put him up to this – a duathlon which required circus tricks to balance the poster board. It was a great surprise. Jonathan sped ahead of me and was able to rally up the volunteers at the water station. I ran through a scream tunnel and through "the wall".

At this point I had a couple runners in my sight and kept my focus to reel them in bit by bit. He biked by my side for a little while until I caught up with the other two runners. He pointed out St. Joseph's Christian Academy to give me inspiration and later along the course was Bet-R Market, where he worked his first job. He stayed with me a bit longer and wished me luck before going back to the finish area to receive his awards.

I hadn't made a move to pass the two runners I caught up with because I didn't feel strong enough to keep and build a lead. I knew I'd be crushed if I should fail to stay ahead, so we ran together for a couple miles. The mercury kept rising and it was getting harder to keep up the intensity. Two of us dropped back a little and let the other runner go on ahead. The late miles and weather finally got to me when I pulled to the side shortly into the 25th mile due to leg cramps. I walked it out as best I could for

the next 5 minutes. A couple traffic officers saw that I was struggling and hurried to their patrol car to offer me a bottle of water. I was grateful and told them I was desperate enough to drink the lake water.

I attempted to jog for a little while, but my leg cramps came back and forced me to walk to the finish. I finally made it to mile 26 and with 385 yards left I finished as strong as I could. It was hard enough for me to walk and nearly impossible to run or jog. I swung my legs around in order to keep them as straight as possible and minimize impact. I saw the clock tick past Boston Qualifying time. I crossed the timing mat in a time of 3:11:__. Not the most impressive time, but a finish nonetheless. Jonathan saw me cross the finish and came up to congratulate me. He said he could see my calf muscles knotting up as I finished and offered to help me stretch.

After I composed myself and let my throbbing muscles relax a bit, Jonathan and I enjoyed a couple beers with jambalaya, fried catfish, and a buffet table of other great Cajun food – definitely the laid back and easy lifestyle Louisiana is known for. I don't remember having as much fun at the New York finish, which was all hustle and bustle, typical of the New York lifestyle. We killed some time lounging and walking around listening to music while waiting for the awards to be handed out. My effort earned a 1st place age group award and the sweet victory and good times washed away the sour taste of New York.