

The marathon is a race of endurance that tests your physical and mental strength. The busy schedule this race weekend would put all this and more to the test. First, I drove with Steve on Friday to Dripping Springs, TX to attend Blake and Meredith's wedding. The groomsmen were showing off their ties in the beer garden before the wedding and for good reason because typical of Blake's hobbies (design and cycling), he custom ordered ties accented with a cycling silhouette at the tip. The ceremony was beautiful, staged on top of a hill overlooking the great Texas hill country at sunset. After Blake and Meredith pronounced their vows and kissed for the first time as a married couple we moved inside for the reception. The layout and decorations were fabulous and we partied well into the night. Blake and Meredith drove off in a 1959 Jaguar IX Saloon – a classy ending to an elegant wedding.

The Tornado entourage had already arrived in NYC the day before – Leno Rios, Jennifer Brown, Anne Nguyen, Stacy Holden, Anna Helm and Amabely Lopez. A Tornado cheer squad also followed them from Houston to New York. Anne Finke, my friend from the 2008 Ironman Brazil, had her family join her in New York as well, for her marathon debut. We were set to run another big racing event together, but I was still in TX. Early Saturday morning Steve kindly dropped Trey and me off at ATX for our flight to NYC. The trip took 7 hours with 2 stops, leaving little time for me to make it to the convention center to pick up my packet. Therefore, I had arranged for Anne Finke's brother, John, to pick it up for me.

They were to leave the race packet in Precious (my sister's Toyota Matrix), which Anne graciously drove up from DC to NYC so that Trey and I could drive it back to Houston. That plan was thwarted, though when John was approached by officials and told he couldn't pick up my packet. He handed the packet back to them and thankfully that was the end of it. Stress was building and Trey and I had to rush out of the airport to hail a taxi cab. It was a great relief meeting Anne N. at the expo, which by the time we arrived was beginning to break down. My name was flagged with a pink slip to see an official about my packet but after some admonition I was able to retrieve it. Next I had to arrange transportation to the start of the race on Staten Island. There were no more spots available on the ferry, which my friends would be on, so I had to settle on an early morning bus and meet up with them later.

We got to the hotel and took a breather after all that drama, then joined the rest of the group for dinner and came back early to prepare for race morning. We woke up very early. I walked with Amabely to the library where we boarded the bus. At 6:30 we were one of the first to arrive at the runner's village. I sought shelter from the chilly wind under a tent and waited for the rest of the group to arrive later on the ferry. It seemed like an eternity for the others to arrive. I was ill-prepared for the 3 hour wait. I had little clothes to stay warm and I was not aware of food and beverage tents available deeper inside the

runner's village, so I continued to wait under the welcoming tent wasting energy trying to keep myself warm on the frozen ground.

I called Anne N. to get an update on when they'd be arriving. I was in such bad shape that I wanted to give up and return to the hotel. They kept encouraging me saying they'd be there shortly. When they did arrive I had the hardest time trying to find them amongst the 50,000+ people. My phone calls no longer connected and to make matters worse I took my frustration out on my phone and broke it into pieces (the very one on which Jennifer told Kara Goucher to "Shut up" when Anne excitedly called 2 weeks earlier after running into her at Forest Park in Portland). Now I lost my ability to make contact with anyone. I had to ask others if I could use their phone to call Mom and Dad at home, the only number I knew by heart. There were able to retrieve Anne N's phone number, who sent Anna and Leno to meet me with food and warm clothes.

The sun was now beginning to warm the air so I began my pre race routine, but I was so delayed that I missed the entrance for the first wave of runners. I was told I had to wait for the second wave, but I didn't want to wait any longer so I managed to squeeze in through the barricades. Then I had to force my way through the crowd and vie for a closer spot to the start. I was huddled among the masses for another 10 minutes before the start of the marathon ceremonies and then the starting gun of the race.

After waiting for what felt like a marathon, it was time to do what I came here to do – run a marathon through the streets of New York. The crowd of runners started to thin out and by chance I ran up alongside Leno on the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. I was glad to see him because we trained hard together to prepare for this race and now we had a chance to run it together. He told me of his earlier predicament of having to relieve his bladder but not wanting to leave his starting position. He saw others using plastic bottles so he followed suit, apparently you can teach an old dog new tricks!

The flood of runners poured off the bridge and into the streets of Brooklyn where spectators lined the course to cheer and watched the spectacle while alluring scents of fried chicken filled the air. The atmosphere turned serene as the course took us through the Chassidic Jewish neighborhood. We ran through the half mark in 1:28:25 over the Pulaski Bridge and into Queens as I started to distance myself from Leno. The Queensboro Bridge stretched across the East River for a mile and dropped us into Manhattan at mile 16. I took advantage of the downhill and came screaming through mile 19 with a 6 minute mile leading up the Willis Avenue Bridge into The Bronx. The course quickly turned direction as I crossed the Madison Avenue Bridge back into Manhattan at mile 21.

With the bridges now behind me I thought it would be free sailing to the finish line. I was however greeted to a most unwelcomed steady incline of 2 miles, which lay before me to the entrance to Central Park. My pace quickly dropped. The last 3 miles were hillier than I had anticipated and they were going to be a struggle. I fed off the energy of the crowds and tried my best to tuck in with some other runners. My legs were spent and had nothing left in them for a kick as I entered Central Park. I managed to maintain some kind of running form as I limped to the finish in 2:57:19, a satisfying finish time, only 30 seconds shy of even splits, but well short of my expectations to run a 2:52.

How we faired on the streets of NYC:

Joseph	2:57:19 (seeking redemption)
Leno	3:03:06 (not yet retired from marathons, just tired)
Stacy	3:07:04 (PR)
Jennifer	3:22:51 (recent Ironman finisher)
Anne N.	3:25:16 (PR – won the pool for closest to predicted finish time)
Anna	3:37:13 (crowd pleaser but hates them all the same)
Anne F.	3:53:54 (marathon debut)
Amabely	4:03:08 (PR)

The finish area was a mad house and it felt like another marathon just to get my checked bag. I had to step into the medical tent along the way to get fluids and warm dry clothes. When I finally did get my bag, there was little area to step aside and wait for our group to all finish. The Tornado entourage eventually did reunite and we headed towards a tavern to celebrate with the cheering squad. The walk from the tavern to the hotel seemed extremely long, especially with the added detours from some streets still being blocked off for the marathon. A proper rest was in order before we hit the streets in the city that never sleeps.

I was supposed to meet up with Kevin, my friend from high school at the finish line, but since I broke my phone, I had to contact him later. We rescheduled to have a double date, so Anne and I met him and Jenn for dinner at Lombardi's Restaurant. Jenn was inspired by our feat and baked us scrumptious cookies to butter us up and reveal more of our secrets. Kevin's known me long enough to know how crazy I am and not to follow my lead, but Jenn ran the Seattle Marathon later that month, finishing in 5:33:39. The feeling of accomplishment to cross that finish line in the last 0.2 miles can only be understood by experiencing the mental and physical anguish through the first 26 miles. Jenn got

hooked and is signed up to run the 2011 NYC marathon. Anne and I capped the night off with laughs and drinks at a stand-up comic bar.

The next day Trey, Anne and I set off to do atypical tourist activities. We walked through Times Square to the NYC Marathon memorabilia tent in Central Park. Trey was on a scavenger hunt snapping pictures of all the bikes he saw with his 35mm camera. We joined Anna and Jennifer for breakfast then dropped by a university law library for Anne's 1L studies. We visited a Van Gough sculpture art exhibit, took in the views from atop 30 Rock and ate pizza by the slice for lunch. Lessons learned from the unseasoned New York visitor – wear comfortable shoes and expect to buy very expensive 35mm film. We made it back to Precious and I tested my NYC driving skills to drop Anne off at the airport for her flight back to Portland. She'd return a celebrity as being one of the 100 faces of the New York City Marathon on the New York Times Online.

Trey and I then began our brutal marathon road trip home. We drove and drove and drove, on the New Jersey Turnpike into Pennsylvania, through Maryland and after 350 miles we spent the night in Roanoke, VA. We continued the journey early Tuesday morning logging 1200 miles through Tennessee, the Volunteer State and Arkansas, the Natural State making it to Waco, TX in the Lone Star State. Wednesday we logged the last 250 miles by driving through Austin so Trey could get his Subi and returning home to Houston. Thus concludes a weekend full of marathoning. New York was a dream marathon but it did not turn out to be the marathon of my dreams. I think Leno, Jennifer and Anna would agree with me that we're happy to have experienced it this once. Hopefully I can reclaim another finisher's medal since it was stolen when my car was broken into on the night of my birthday.