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The Runners Blog

Written for runners of all strides

And the quest continues...

Wednesday, April 25, 2012 by: [John Splendido](#)

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This past weekend I ran my 9th attempt (6 races and 3 full effort 5K training runs) at breaking the 20 minute mark barrier since I broke 21 minutes back in August 2009. Each one of those previous 8 attempts have been in the 20's. My best race was 20:13 and my best training run 20:03 – of course the problem with training runs is there are no police/volunteer escorts so you have to stop at intersections – so you get an unintended breather here and there.

It was nice to have Schenectady Mayor Gary McCarthy on hand to start the health walkers on their 2 mile journey. After a quick welcoming and thanks from race organizer, Tim Fecura, who happened to run very well himself, the 4th Annual Cherry Blossom 5K was on its way.

I went out fast (as planned) and was in the top dozen or so as we passed my house at the 1/4 mile mark. My wife and kids were cheering wildly, which gave me a little extra oomph as I moved into 10th place. I knew there was a nice downhill after the accent of Van Antwerp (home course advantage), so I pushed hard up the hill into 8th – where I stayed until the 2 mile mark when I moved into 7th on the flats of Regent Street. I was giving it all I had – my lungs were burning – I kept saying to myself “only 15 (or 10 or 5) more minutes of pain.”

As I was approaching the last hill (Grand Blvd) I knew I only had 3/4 of a mile left. I took a quick glance at my watch and knew what I needed to do. I leaned into the hill, shortened my stride and quickened my turnover. I had done this same process on this hill hundreds, maybe even a thousand, times literally. I reached the top of the hill quickly, my legs feeling a little rubbery, my chest pounding as I started the decent down Van Antwerp hoping to catch my breath again as I passed some friends on their front porch (Bill you should do this race!).

I heard the roar of the crowd (Karen and my 3 kids and Jeanne and her 3 kids), as I made the left onto Ray Street. Cowbells were clanging, maracas were shaking – it was really loud – it was really great. I gave a quick smile and a thumbs up to my fans as I heard Karen yell “you are going to do it!”

I knew I was real close to my target and if I had any chance of making it, the final push had to start now. I picked up the pace although my HR was already close to max, hoping to reel in the racer ahead of me. I did not care if I beat him, I just knew if I could catch him I would make my goal.

My legs were teeter-tottering between sprinting and out of control – my lungs were hoping I would just stop already. As I got closer I could see the race clock at the far end of the parking lot hit 19:52 and some how I found even a little more speed. I was not going down without a fight. According to my Garmin I crossed the finish line at an insane 4:35 pace – faster than I did at any other point during the race (maybe any race or run for that matter). However, I knew 5 seconds before I crossed the finish line that I had missed my goal. 20:04. Sidenote – I never did catch that guy in front of me (19:58). I knew I needed to catch him.

As I was in the chute giving my race strip to the time keeper – and trying to get some much needed oxygen back in my system – I felt happy – not disappointed. And why not I just left everything I had on the course (my lungs reminded me of this the rest of the day) – I could not have run better or faster that day – and I set a real 5K PR to boot. Then when the results were posted I realized just how great a race I had! I finished 7th out of 152 finishers (top 5% 😊 yeah I was surprised too – there's a first time for everything) and 2nd in my age group. Another positive of this outcome: at least I still have my goal to reach for and to keep me motivated – and reach it I will – I am so close now it is just a matter of time – 5 seconds to be exact.

My kids were happy when I returned – and not only because “I won again” (because as I tell them “everybody wins every time they try”) – but because they know the race is just the first part of the Cherry Blossom Festival. As we do every year, I clean up, put on my race shirt and then we all head back to the festival for lunch. Then we visit the many vendors looking for the perfect after lunch dessert and gifts. Of course no festival would be complete without some face painting and various kid's games so they can win their own prizes, too. A win-win all around. Looking forward to next year's race.

PS – By the way – my legs had and have no soreness at all – have I told you [I love my compression wear?](#)

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Vitus Chow says:

[April 25, 2012 at 8:30 am](#)

Very nice, John! I used to do the same with my kids when they were little. Their favorite was a 10K in Cooperstown. Why? Because they played cow bingo there! :0

grant says:

[April 25, 2012 at 11:50 am](#)

I was really hoping you'd get it, there's always next time.

John Splendido says:

[April 25, 2012 at 11:58 am](#)

Cow bingo! not sure what that is – but I can imagine kids liking it.

Me too Grant – but yes – next time. I need to find a flatter course. The Cherry Blossom is not too hilly, but it's not flat either.

Alex says:

[April 25, 2012 at 12:17 pm](#)

John- you were flying and you will get there.

I was ecstatic with my finish (I think 13th place is my best ever, and also 2nd in my age group). Even though I was 19 seconds slower than last year, I am doing it the right way this year – i.e. I am not about to take a month off from running due to injuries. I have been slowly building up endurance and working on my form and better yet, I know how to keep my shin issues in check now (the magic of tennis balls!)

John Splendido says:

[April 25, 2012 at 12:45 pm](#)

It was good to see you and the family on Sunday Alex...glad you are keeping the injury bug away this year, but what is the magic of tennis balls? I'm sure some others may want to know.

John Splendido says:

[April 25, 2012 at 12:47 pm](#)

Alex – also – was that you that passed me and Carly on a bike this morning? Someone said hi to us, but I did not see their face.

J Mac says:

[April 25, 2012 at 6:44 pm](#)

Killer run!

Ken says:

[April 25, 2012 at 10:45 pm](#)

I think your commitment and progress are milestones that dwarf a sub 20. Mark my word, you are already in the 19's – just have to get your mind there now.

BTW, what is your heart rate during this 4:35 finish?

Also, last year we answered the question "our favorite place to run". Has your answer changed to "in the front" yet?

John Splendido says:

[April 26, 2012 at 9:20 am](#)

Thanks J Mac.

Ken – Thanks and I purposely left the heart rate strap at home for this race. I had it my head I was going to red line, but I did not want my Garmin to confirm it for me! My front yard better be on my favorites list because 90% of my runs take place there! Of course any race I have my family cheering is a good place too.

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