

Covenant Health Knoxville Marathon

Knoxville Tennessee

Sunday April 1, 2012

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John and I flew into Nashville on Friday afternoon. We stayed at the Gaylord Opryland Hotel. We attended the Grande Ole Opry that evening. The hotel supplied a shuttle to and from the theater. It was a fun evening. The hotel has lots to see, do and places to eat without even going outside.

We left early the next morning to drive the 180 miles to Knoxville. The drive was scenic and very enjoyable. We arrived at the Holiday Inn downtown which was one of the marathon hotels. It is located at the start of the marathon. We walked across the street to the expo.

The expo was not large. We picked up our bib numbers, had our bib chip checked and then got our orange marathon tech shirts within 15 minutes. We found the pacer's booth and met the 4:15 pacers that I would be running with the next morning. One of the two was a long time veteran of the marathon. I figured I was in good hands, he would know how to get over all those hills we were going to face the next day. (I was told the hills were "relentless")

The morning of the marathon the temperature was in the low 50's and no wind. Excellent! John and I found the bag drop off trailer and went inside the convention center to locate the pace group. We found them easily and waited for the start of the marathon. As with most pacers, they were excited to get started and begin their stories of past marathons and local runs. I like talkative pacers, it helps to make the miles go by faster.

John made his way towards the front of the starting pack. He had been injured for the past 10 weeks, so his longest training run had only been a 12 miler. He planned to run / walk the marathon. Even his run / walk was-is faster than my 'slog'.

I was not disappointed; the stories began as did the marathon, right on time. We immediately began the first 'hill', about 2 blocks long, just enough to get out of breath. I dropped one of my water bottles from my hydration belt I had strapped on, so retrieving it was a feat. As I stopped and turned to get my bottle a wall of runners did their best to avoid a head on collision. I managed to pick it up and 2 more fell out of my belt. I picked them up and began to catch my pace group that were now about a block or more ahead. (*not a good start*). I caught up with the group and we were off. I kept within hear-shot of the pacers, they were letting us know what was coming up. (*surprise!, another hill*). This was the first marathon for one man in our group. (*I thought.. Heavens to Murgatroid! Why in the world would you pick this one to be your first!*)

I just kept my head in the hill we were on and tried not to think about what was ahead. The 'hill' at mile 7 was the worst hill in the whole race. I was thinking that it was a good place for it to be. I don't think I could have crawled up it if it had been at the end. We managed to keep about a 1-1.5 min in the 'bank' for the up hills. This made me feel better about the end. I knew I would need it.

The course took us through a wide variety of neighborhoods. They varied from manicured lawns with white fences and 3 car garages to college student off campus housing with patchy lawns and peeling paint. No matter what type of neighborhood we ran through there were always people out cheering us on, handing out water, oranges and bananas. Each neighborhood took pride in their support of the marathon. There were signs welcoming us to their neighborhood as well as signs of encouragement. (*There were several that said "this is the worst parade I have ever seen". They made me laugh*) .

The advise I was given about the 'relentless' hills of this marathon was spot on! The only flat running we did was about mile 21-24 through the Dessert Island neighborhood. This was the only out and back part of the course. My legs were getting very wobbly by this time, but just then I spotted something that I have never-ever seen in a race: The back of John's running singlet! Ok, I did have to get back on pace now, if nothing else just to see if I could catch him. I managed to pass him at mile 21 (*really, did that just happen?*). I kept thinking he would pass me so I never looked back.

The 4:15 pacer was about a minute ahead of me, but I knew I couldn't catch him now. I just put my head down and finished the race as best as I could (4:18:13). The last mile, was of course a long gradual uphill then we turned the corner to the stadium and it was a steep downhill. (*not good on screaming quads*) . I managed to get down that hill and the stadium was another gradual uphill. (*Really? - they make you earn this one*). We finished inside the beautiful Neyland Stadium to "Rocky Top" playing in the background

My experience was very good from start to finish. I would recommend this event to anyone that likes a challenge and a smaller venue. It was well organized and well supported from the very visible orange shirted volunteers to the enthusiastic community.