



JDJ Foundation

CHARITABLE

My Marathon Journey (If You Care)



How It Started

During the pandemic, I picked up running to fundraise for our nonprofit. We led our Sweat for Good challenge that encouraged people to push themselves by setting a month-long physical challenge for our nonprofit. My 1st goal was to run 100 miles in 30 days. My 2nd was to run 120 miles in 30 days. Never running before in my life, this was quite a hurdle, but I pushed myself and crushed it.

Applying for Bibs

Fun fact. We applied to be a charity partner for the NYC marathon a few years ago but didn't get it. In 2020, Our wheelchair program started to gain more notoriety, and we were introduced the NYRR through one of the chairs we granted. We learned about their push racing program and began helping the program as much as possible. Given the new relationship, we applied again for bibs and were granted 11 spots.

What Have I Done?

Once we were officially approved, I realized that there was no other way for me to convince people to run a marathon unless I was doing it myself. So, I continued my running and began reading all that I could about marathons. I realized I needed to set some goals and build a weekly training plan. Everything I read mentioned the 4hr mark as being quite an accomplishment so that became my target.

Recommended Training

Training consists of a weekly long run, one day of speed drills & sprints, and another tempo run focused on your marathon pace. The other days of the week, they suggest doing some cross-training such as cycling or rowing and then weight training where you can fit it in.

My Training

I was very worried I was going to lose too much weight if I started running more and only focused on cardio. So, I didn't cut back on the weightlifting as much as I probably should have. I still hit upper body in the gym like 3x per week as well as my 3 runs.

To achieve a 4hr marathon you need to be at a 9 min pace per mile. So that's what I targeted in my tempo runs. For the long runs, I found myself waking up at 6am to beat the heat in the summer and running all the way from Tribeca to the GW Bridge. THESE LONG RUNS WERE BRUTAL. Getting up and taking a 3hr run during the middle of the week was truly miserable. The furthest run I got to was 20 miles. I wanted to get to 22 miles, but my body had other plans. They suggest not running more than 3 & a half hours to prevent injury before the big day so that's where I capped it.

I looked like an absolute nut case running sprints and doing drills on Pier 26. These were necessary to work on my running form and to get faster. To be honest, I hadn't focused on my running form since high school baseball. My wife thought I was insane.

Gear

The Theragun saved my life. My pre-run routine was to wake up, hit the bathroom, 10 min stretch & Theragun warm up. I bought a few pairs of 7-inch lined shorts, a runner's water bottle to carry on long runs, a Garmin watch to track my distance, and an armband to store my phone for music. I also bought the new AirPod headphones which last 6hrs off one charge which was important for the big day.

Hesitantly, I went to Fleet Feet, and they did a scan of my feet to see which shoes were the best for me. I upgraded my shoes to the Saucony Ride with different soul inserts which was the best thing I did. They even recommended new socks which greatly improved the way my feet felt during each run. The entire process took 15 minutes.

I also dived into the world of gels to replenish during runs. My weapon of choice was the Gu energy gel. I would carry a couple of these in my pocket and take one every 45 minutes. They tasted pretty good and included the equivalent carbs of a banana. At first, I didn't want to take any of these because I was panicked about having to use the bathroom on a run but that never happened. I would crash afterward if I took 3-4 of these on a run but nothing too intense.

Taper?

A few weeks before the race, they recommend tapering your workouts to help your body rest. To be honest, this was a weird time. I felt like every day I had a new injury. It was all in my head. Going for runs and not pushing myself for distance or pace was also weird. I think I might have tapered too much toward the end.

Bib Mania

If this doesn't get your adrenalin going, I don't know what will. The bib pickup is like a marathon festival at the Javits Center in this massive hall. They had vendors from all over the race world, high-tech gear, and activities for runners to enjoy. The sheer magnitude of the race really set in here. Seeing how many people would be on this journey with you was incredible. A nice perk was finding my name on the wall of runners for 2022.

Marathon Eve

About a month before the race, I started to curtail my drinking. I would only have one drink instead of two or three. I stayed away from hard alcohol and tried to eat better. I lessened my fried food intake and cut out snacks completely.

I focused on my sleep the entire week before making sure I got at least 7-8hrs. Being a classic toddler, my son got sick, and of course, I caught the same cold. I was super congested even leading up to race day. I tried to ignore it but obviously, this contributed to my nerves. My final dinner before becoming a marathoner was pasta with garlic and oil & a side of spinach.

Ferry

Going into the race I was anxious but excited. This was technically my third official race ever in my life, the others being a 5K and 5miler. I was uncertain as to what to expect.

I woke up at 5:45am. Packed a bagel, banana and wore some extra layers to be tossed at the start of the race. I met a few other teammates, and we journeyed to the Staten Island ferry for our 6:30am departure time. The ferry hall was a madhouse with no lines, but we were able to board our ferry on time. Looking out the boat while the sun rose was special.

Bus Madness

Once we got off the ferry, the chaos began. Everyone told us to start our journey early, and I didn't know why until now. After you disembark the ferry, you need to take a bus which is given a police escort to the start line. The problem is that there are no real lines, and everyone is trying to board at the same time which becomes mayhem.

We stood there for an hour and half waiting to get on a bus. By far the worst part of the morning. I ate my bagel and banana and then we arrived at the start camp around 9am. My start time was 10:20, so luckily, this was still plenty of time.

The Start

The way the start works is you are assigned a start time based on your expected finish and a corral color to help break down the groups of runners. For the beginning miles each of these corrals have a different race route that eventually combines at mile 8. I was orange.

I hit the bathroom again (port-a-potties everywhere), met the rest of our team for some pictures and walked around. Pro tip, bring a blanket to sit on and some toilet paper just in case. There are donation bins everywhere for clothes and anything else you don't want to take with you. I chose not to do the checked bag because I heard nightmare stories.

To my surprise, the corrals close 20 minutes before your start time to give you time to walk to the start line. I didn't realize this and almost didn't make it. I had to stretch as we walked to the start. It was an extra layer of stress you can avoid by just heading to the corral earlier.

Bring on the Heat

Before I started the race, everyone warned of the heat. 70 degrees with high humidity seemed easy to me given I had trained during the peak summer heat. The advice was to change to an effort-based goal rather than a time-based goal. Sound advice that I didn't listen to. My thought process was that I was in good shape and that I had put the training time in to attain my sub 4hr goal. So, I still went for it. I was severely wrong!

Tears

I asked friends and family to send me songs that reminded them of my parents for my marathon playlist. I compiled a 17hr playlist, mostly with dance music and a handful of rock and disco songs that were Blauvelt classics. My Dad was a huge Rolling Stones fan. Out of the entire playlist of hundreds of songs, there were only 3 Rolling Stones songs. As we approached the start line, I put the playlist on shuffle. As they played the National Anthem, "Satisfaction" by the Rolling Stones came on. What were the chances this would be the first song to play? I immediately began to tear up. I felt like all my training had led to this moment and that it was his way of saying, "Crush it. I'm right here with you!"

The Big Show

As I started across the Verrazano Bridge, it was a surreal moment. Looking at the skyline from a far distance and just thinking about the miles to come, I was pumped. I weaved in and out of people to stick to my bridge pace. I knew I had to take it slower on the incline of the bridge which everyone mentioned, so I did and finished my first mile at 9:41. On the come down I felt good, so I began to pick it up. I finished mile 2 at 8:31.

Then I was in Brooklyn. I began to settle into my 9min pace target. Mile 3 9:06, mile 4 9:00, mile 5 9:06, mile 6 9:00, and then I noticed my heart rate. For the last few miles, I noticed my heart rate was pushing past 180. Through all my training runs, I had never pushed 180. This instantly became alarming. I still was feeling okay and attributed it to my adrenaline being part of the race.

Hitting the Wall

Mile 7 9:15, mile 8 9:52 and then a complete brick wall. I noticed that my pace was starting to slip so I thought I could slow down a bit to reset my heart rate. As I did, my heart rate didn't change, and my breathing started to get out of control.

I was devastated. I felt like that meant the race was over. I wanted to quit. I immediately started looking for a way off the race map. No one else seemed to be struggling around me. I was panicked, so I called Allyson through my headphones.

I told her I was struggling and that I couldn't do it. She was stunned. The other side of the phone went quiet. And then she gave me the best advice I could've asked for, "Just walk." Never did it occur to me that I could stop and walk a little to reset my heart rate. I had never done this on a training run and almost felt like that wasn't allowed.

So that's what I did. It helped a bit, and then I got a second wind. One thing that absolutely crushed me was the steady incline that I experienced all through Brooklyn. It wasn't a lot of elevation, but it gradually went up every block with no break in sight. This was something I didn't train for and kind of took me by surprise since everyone told me this marathon wasn't hilly.

Walls on Walls

After struggling through mile 9 10:07, mile 10 9:52, and mile 11 11:52, I came to another brick wall. I dialed Allyson again and told her I just couldn't do it, that I was done. I was looking around to head to a train station. Honestly, if it wasn't for the thought of having to commute home from Brooklyn, I may have quit. Again, she gave some heartfelt words and told me to never give up. She said that if I got to where she was standing at mile 16 she would make sure I finished. So that became my focus.

Mile 12 10:41 it started to rain. It was warm. It didn't help. Mile 13 12:12. At this point a fellow racer tapped me on the shoulder and was like, "You've got this, almost there." That didn't help. I was now walking over the bridge into Queens reassessing my life. I had this strict plan going into the race that I wasn't going to eat or drink anything besides my gels and water. I realized I needed help so I went into full survival mode. Anything I saw, I grabbed. Orange slices, ice cubes, bags of cold water, Gatorade. Thanks to all of the generous New Yorkers out there.

Lightning

I then caught a bit of a second wind. Mile 14 13:33, mile 15 12:08. Running through Long Island City was cool but then I died again. Mile 16 13:17 was horrible. My legs started to cramp on the 59th St bridge which was way steeper than I expected. This incline was mostly a fast walk for me.

Heading off the bridge I did hear the roar of the crowd everyone talks about, but it didn't matter much. I was just focused on getting to Allyson and my son. Mile 16 13:17 I got to give them a hug and kiss which gave me a burst of speed and motivation. I then started to reassess my goals. It quickly became, maybe I could beat Oprah at 4:29, or at the very least, finish sub 5hrs. I smoked mile 17 11:22 and mile 18 12:36.

Then came Harlem and the battle of cramps for the rest of the race. I would run from water station to station which felt like an eternity and then walk a block to reset. My legs physically felt exhausted, and my chest muscles felt crazy tight. Everything hurt. My pace really started to lag here. Mile 19 13:21 and then mile 20 14:12 as we entered the Bronx.

The Bronx

The worst part of the entire race. Steep uphill, few fans, and the misery of knowing we still had 6 miles to go. Mile 21 13:54 we were back in Manhattan but still it was a struggle.

Mile 22 14:07 felt like a block party more than a race. Mile 23 13:37 we enter the park, and you could feel the energy building towards the finish. At mile 24 14:44, I realized my sub 5hr goal had slipped away. At this point, I knew I just needed to finish. That became my final goal.

Mile 25 14:16 there were so many people, the race lanes narrowed, and you were shoulder to shoulder with people cheering for you. As I approached the final mile, my left toes began to cramp.

It was a wild feeling. Almost like you had no control over your foot. I got a small taste of what major cramping could turn into which was horrifying. Thankfully, I saw Allyson and Jonah again which helped me power through the finish. Mile 26 14:30.

The Finish

At no point was my race pretty, but my final time came in at 5:12. And I'm damn proud of it. An average pace of 11:55 per mile. 3,319 calories burned. I made the NY Times, so I guess it officially counts. Out of my age group of 30-34 males, I came in 2,789 out of 3,528. 32,228 out of 47,745. How I wish there was a first-time marathon bracket.

Everyone says to look at the race in 3 parts, the first 10 miles, second 10 miles and last 6. So, my first 10 were fun and everything else was horrible. I had no clue other runners were struggling as much as I was during the race. Running, I felt like I was the only one, but when I started to hear about everyone's experience, that became the underlying theme.

Zombie Walk

One thing they don't mention is that after the race is over, they make you walk another 20 blocks to get out of the park. They hand you your medal, a race recovery bag with snacks & drinks, and a poncho, but then you must make your way out of the race grounds which was an absolute struggle. Your legs can barely walk, you feel gross, and you basically look like a zombie crawling to the street exit to meet family and friends. There is nowhere to sit, and no one is happy.

What I Learned

First off, if you use a watch or app to track your distance, it is most likely off. I figured my watch would be slightly off but on race day it tracked me as running an additional half mile. Food for thought as this can severely impact your training goals.

In hindsight, I think the slight elevation & heat smacked me. I should have focused more on enjoying the race and the fans rather than trying to put up a specific time.

My advice to any first-time runners, don't put the extra pressure on yourself for a time goal. Rather, take it slow, start with friends, take selfies, and enjoy the experience.

Good Vibes

Seeing friends and family along the way is the true secret sauce to the special experience of the marathon. It is amazing how much a hug, high five, or even just a wave carries you through to the next mile. At key parts of the race it helps keep you motivated as well as gives you something to look forward to.

Feeling the energy of New Yorkers all around you, united and cheering you on was surreal. I watched fellow runners help each other; I saw bystanders pick people up who were struggling. Loving this city, it was spectacular to see the good of New York displayed in every fashion. Random signs with awesome sayings, handouts of items you desperately needed, and cheers that carried you each step of the way. Just pure empathy on display in a city in which it is sometimes hard to find.

Humbled

Overall, running this marathon was one of the best experiences of my life. It deepened me as a person and proved that if I put my mind to it, I can do it. I realized I could beat that inner voice that says you can't. It is 90% a mental battle, and I loved every second of it. At times, I swore during the race that I hated myself for doing this but those moments are a distant blur. As I look back, the entire race feels like it went by in minutes, but I remain humbled.

Engraving

The next day, I had a meeting on the UES. I had no intention of getting my medal engraved, but Allyson told me I could get a saying on the back. So I popped in and asked them to put the words Allyson told me on the phone when I almost quit, "Never Give Up." I didn't realize they would put the words in place of my time, but that's what they did, and I kind of like it.

If it wasn't for Allyson and her unrelenting support, I may not have finished. Quitting would have been the biggest regret of my life. Especially telling donors and friends that I couldn't do it. I hope that Jonah and Alaia grow up one day and realize that if they put their minds towards something and never give up, they can do it. That is the lesson and the example I hope I set.

What Was My Motivation?

im and my mother were a big part of it. But also, the cancer families and wheelchair families we have gotten to know through our charitable work. I know these families deal with intense challenges every day. I hoped that our effort would raise awareness about their struggles and help support future families by raising money for our nonprofit. At the end of the day, we hit our team goal and raised \$50,000 for JDJ. The real icing on the cake.

Something You Didn't Know

Every day my mom wore a St. Peregrine medal and my dad a St. Joseph's medal. I wear them often and ran with them in my pocket. During the most difficult times of the race, I reached down and grabbed those medals. Their spirits played a big part in carrying me to the finish.

Recovery

To my surprise, my legs felt pretty good the days after the marathon. I guess all my training accounted for something. My head though, did not. I remained congested for about a full week after. I think I had a case of exercise-induced rhinitis which included an annoying runny nose and nasal congestion. This was frustrating but a small price to pay for such an awesome accomplishment. That and some purple toenails which I hope to get back someday.

What's Next?

Will this be the end of my running journey? I'm not sure. I felt like my marathon time wasn't a good representation of the training I put in or my physical ability. I also feel like I have a lot left in the tank. I promised myself I would think about it for a couple of months before committing to any future races. Our charity plans to be a partner every year so that is enticing. Tick tock.