

8th International Peace Half Marathon Gangnam, Seoul

Sunday October 3, 2010

My plan going into the 8th International Peace Half Marathon in Seoul was fairly straight-forward and easy to track during the race: try to run 20-minute 5Ks as long as I could.

This early October half marathon would be a good measure of my current ability and progress toward my goal of a sub 3-hour time in the November 14 Seoul Sports Marathon.

In the last half marathon that I ran on a warm September Sunday morning in Seoul, the Amsa Prehistoric Site Race, I had gone through 5K in 19:41. With this 5K split in mind and based on my performances from recent workouts, I knew that I was strong enough to hit at least 2 20-minute 5Ks in a row.

I figured if I hit the first 2 5Ks each in about 20 minutes, going through 10K in about 40 minutes, then I could hold on for at least around a 1:28 finishing time for the half marathon, even if I wasn't feeling so great or recovered from the previous week's race.

I was still recovering from a race I had run the previous Sunday, September 26, the Korea Climbathon Federation's 5-mountain race from Yangjae, Seoul to Suwon. This race was a 26.6 kilometer mountain endeavor, rope climbs included, which I found more taxing on my legs than running a marathon. The actual distance I covered in that race was probably around 29 kilometers as I had unwittingly taken two wrong turns during the race and subsequently done some extra "zero mile" running off course. I finished the event in 4 hours 7 minutes.

I knew that if things were going well in the International Peace Half Marathon and I stayed close to the pace of 20 minutes per 5K pace, I'd have a shot at 1:25.

The weather for the International Peace Half Marathon was a little warmer than I had expected it to be, but it was still good racing weather, at least for the half marathon, 10K and 5K races. For me, a bit cooler weather would have been more ideal as I

run better in colder weather, but for many people, I think it was really good temperature-wise to race a half marathon.

The marathon started first at 9 am and the half marathon started about 7 minutes after it.

The number of race participants was large, but I had been expecting a bigger turnout. There were over 1000 people signed up for the half marathon, so it was a sizeable field even if many of those registered runners didn't actually make it to the starting line.

After a few speeches by Korean and American civilian and military representatives who proclaimed the good relations and partnership between the 2 countries, and the traditional shoulder massages and fist-to-back pounding runners do before the start of many races in Korea, the air horn to start the half marathon was sounded. I had a good starting position in one of the front rows, so I only had to dodge a few people, who shouldn't have lined up in the front rows of the race starting area, to get clear and run free.

Almost the whole 1st kilometer was through the streets of Gangnam, between Samseong Station and where the course dipped down to the bike path on a tributary of the Han River.

After a few kilometers, I started passing people in the marathon. As the half marathon and marathon followed the same route for the first 20K, I continued passing marathoners until the race courses diverged close to the end of the half marathon course.

There were plenty of water stations along the route, some with snacks and bananas and sponges, so staying hydrated wasn't a problem.

I checked my watch at the 5K sign and it read 19:47. I was happy with that split. Check it off - 1 5K down, right on pace.

Knowing I was close to the time I had run the first 5K in my previous half marathon in September, 19:41 in the Amsa Prehistoric Site Race, I was curious to see how my next 5K would match up with that race. Although the temperature for this half marathon was much better to run a half in compared to that of the Amsa race in which the temperature was considerably warmer, my legs were still recovering from that 4+ hour mountain climbathon from 1 week earlier.

The heat had caught up to me after 5K of Amsa half marathon. I knew if I was going to survive to cross the finish line that day, I'd have to dial back the pace due to

the heat, and that's what I did. I went through 10K in 41:44 and ended up finishing the race in 1:31:37.

I hit 10K in the Peace Marathon in 39:49. Feeling reasonably good through 10K, I didn't see myself falling apart in the second half of the race and I continued pushing ahead.

The race made a few turns and switched directions a few times. There was a turnaround at about 15.25 K. Before reaching this turnaround, you could see the number of people ahead of you in the marathon and half. I counted 17 people in front of me in the half before reaching the turnaround.

I hit 15K in 1:00:05 and still felt reasonably good. I had definitely worked that first 15K but didn't feel like I would crack before the finish. I felt good about the third 5K being not too far off 20 minutes, and overall I was only about 2 seconds off a 20-minute 5K pace through 15K.

A little before 15K I got some minor cramping/tightness in one leg. I took water every 3 or 4K and I'm sure this helped the cramping from getting too bad. The tightening seemed to change legs every few K with a short break between legs. I was glad that it was taking turns on my legs.

In that final 6.1K, you know you're closing in on the finish. Psychologically, this helps you push more when your body is more tired due to the accumulated stress of the race on the body up to this point. It becomes mind pushing body. Every K is 1 K closer to the finish. But it's rarely easy if you're pushing yourself hard. At around 18K, I got a hot spot on my left foot that developed into a minor blister. Nothing too serious this close to the finish of the half marathon, fortunately, but it might have been problematic had I been running a full marathon.

I hit 20K just before turning off the Han River tributary and back on up to the road. My 20K time was 1:20:28. I was happy that I had done a respectable 20:23 4th 5K and, with a strong finish, had a shot at breaking 1:25 for the half.

Before getting back on the road to the finish, however, the course took you up a hill that connected the bike path with the street above. It wasn't a major climb, but it felt tough enough after 20K of aggressive running. I passed quite a few walkers from the 5 and 10 K races who were in their last K on this uphill stretch. My pace really slowed on this uphill and my legs screamed of lactic acid build up, or something like that, which caused fatigue at this point. After the climb ended upon reaching the road, it took a bit longer to clear my legs from the effort and get my speed back to where it had been before the climb. At this point, I figured I had about 600 meters of racing to go.

Strong finish now, I thought. You're on track to get your second best half marathon time ever and maybe even still have a shot at going under 1:25. My mind urged my legs forward.

Closing in on the final turn, I picked up steam knowing that I'd be in sight of the finish after the turn. The finish line wasn't far off after I made this last turn on the course, and I picked it up more as I approached. Seeing the race clock ahead at the finish line, I noticed it read 1:24:52 for the half marathon. I might still be able to sneak under 1:25. I threw down my closing kick and hit my stop watch after I was sure I had crossed the finish line. The watch read 1:25:01. I was very close to 1:25 and pleased with the race. I knew my final time might be under 1:25, depending on where the exact finish line was and when my chip hit the start and finish line sensors. A few hours later, **I got a text message with my official race time - 1:24:55. The race results revealed that I placed 15th overall out of 823 finishers.**

The Peace Half Marathon race is a good indication that I've got a fair chance of dipping under 3 hours in the Seoul Sports Marathon in November. A lot still has to go right with my training, however, between now and then and during the marathon itself to go sub-3, including keeping up the training, getting in the long runs, avoiding injury, particularly re-aggravating previous injuries in my left knee and left Achilles tendon areas, and having good marathon-racing weather.

I'll run 2 more races before the Seoul Sports Marathon. On Sunday October 10, I'll compete in the Hi Seoul 10K from Seoul Plaza near City Hall to Seoul Forest Park. This race will give me practice running at a pace considerably faster than marathon race pace, which should help make the pace of the marathon seem quite a bit easier – at least for awhile. On Sunday October 17, I'll take part in the Korea Climbathon Federation's 30K mountain race in Daejeon, to focus on the endurance-building side of my marathon training.

The 8th International Peace Half Marathon was a well-organized race which I enjoyed participating in. I recommend the race to others who'd like to run an early October half marathon in Seoul.

Written by Brett Dixon