

This was quite the race experience. I had what I felt was maybe the best training camp I've had, and I felt so good throughout majority of it and especially as it wrapped up. I hadn't done a road race in ages, and had never run a road marathon, so I was excited for this new experience. I knew even with the experience of ultras under my belt, this was a different challenge to take on.

The week leading into the race ended up one of the most emotionally toughest weeks I've had. Our beloved dog of 11.5 years had his health turn for the worse very suddenly and we laid him to rest on Tuesday. He was surrounded by us with so much love as it happened, but I had a giant hole in my heart and in our home. Our original plan was to take him with us on this trip and we knew full well it may have been one of his last trips with us. The blessing is that this didn't occur while we were away, as that would have drastically altered our plans. Our week continued because life has to go on however that stress of a loss was in the background.

We left on Saturday morning and headed up to Maine. We arrived at our cabin we rented, toured the property after unpacking the car and then drove up for bib pick up. After getting our bibs we took a ride up to the start line to see it, and also did a little shakeout run. Then our return trip to our place included driving the entire marathon course. We were stoked! It was so pretty with beautiful views of the Bigelow Range Mountains, Flagstaff Lake, quite a few small mountain communities and it wound along the Carrabassett River for a huge portion.

Once back to our cabin, we relaxed, had our dinner got our race gear together and it was lights out around 8pm as we had an early wake up. I went to bed with a whole lot of excitement and just gratitude to be taking this on in my heart.

Race morning we woke up at 3am, did our normal morning routine of coffee, getting dressed, making sure we had all our race stuff and eating some toast with nut butter. We drove to the finish line where we got the shuttle bus up to the start. At both places I used the porta johns and at the start line we did our mobility routine and warm up. I kept having to use the porta john, which started concerning me, but I also knew it could be nerves even though I truly didn't feel nervous.

Once the race started I did my best to take it slower and look around. The first few miles we ran through this area with extremely cathedral pine trees lining the road and it was surreal. As I was looking around and looking at all the runners ahead of me, I couldn't stop smiling and I had a few tears of sheer gratitude well up in my eyes. We progressed past Flagstaff lake which was gorgeous with the mountains right there as well and into

one of the first towns. I was with a handful of other people and a group of us noticed that everyone on the sidelines seemed to be cheering for this one guy. I said 'wow, you're so loved out there that's amazing!' and it turns out he was the middle schools gym teacher running the marathon to raise money for the school. That was just so cool to experience.

The next several miles seemed to go by quickly, I kept an eye on my heart rate and kept trying to back off the pace a bit but it felt like I was going at an almost walk when I would do that. I started to notice that my heart rate was higher than normal for the pace I was at. I kept that in mind as we hit our first smaller hills. At this point I had taken my first gel and was sipping my hydration as normal. Somewhere around mile 7-ish my GI tract started feeling very off, and as we started the big climb between miles 8-10 I had to make a run into the woods. I got back out on course and continued to climb but had to walk a bit as my energy felt completely drained and my HR was super high. I told myself there was a lot of race left still and to manage this in the moment, so I walked until my HR lowered. Once the crest of the big climb came I knew there was a lot of downhill, but I took it easy on it almost like a recovery. The next handful of miles went by smoother than expected even with popping off into porta johns when I'd see them. Every time I took a gel or drank just a little too much hydration it all went right through me. I knew I had to keep taking it all in though as the risk of dehydration was increasing if I wasn't keeping it in. I also utilized on course water from the aid stations as I needed a different taste in my mouth at that point.

Somewhere around miles 20-22 my legs started some slight seizing up...it would be the calves then the quads, then one calf etc. I started doing a run/walk, running when and how long I could and walking when I needed to. I pretty much continued this until the end. I kept my mindset positive the whole time though, even knowing I was way off the goal I wanted for myself. As I looked at the beauty around the course and ran by the people of the community who were supporting us I couldn't help but be happy still. I also thought of the life of our dog (it may sound corny and dumb to some but he was huge part of our life) and had immense gratitude in that moment for him. I knew I could've gotten all negative on myself, but I also knew that doing that wouldn't help the situation at all and make it worse. My first goal for this race was to enjoy it, and as I walked a good portion of mile 22, I was still enjoying it. I know not everyone has the ability to move their bodies in this way and I was grateful to be out there taking this marathon on, even if it didn't go to plan. The last few miles I was able to run a little more and when I saw the finish area approaching I couldn't stop smiling. I came through the finish with a huge smile on face, Jeff was already done and cheering me in and some of good friends we hadn't seen in a long time were there cheering as well, which was so wonderful.

I loved this marathon. Even with using more porta johns in one day than I ever wish to, I still loved this race and would love to go back again.

These are not in any particular order just what came to mind.

Lesson 1: Figure out the race GI issues. This isn't the first time I've had "run to the porta johns alot " pre race, but it is the first time I dealt with during a race.

Lesson 2: It's perfectly fine to take time in the middle of a race to manage a situation. Besides the bathroom stops, I also took extra time to walk to help manage a higher than normal HR and let the seizing in my legs subside while I took in nutrition at an easier effort. I had the thought that if I was walking while I ate a gel, it might settle a bit easier.

Lesson 3: You can still have a wonderful time while your goals go out the window.

Lesson 4: I spent the last week or so of the training cycle reflecting on the entire 16 weeks. As I remembered where I was both physically and mentally at the beginning compared to where I was going into the race, I was already extremely happy with it all. I also spent time during the race reflecting on it as well and had the same amount of gratitude. As the saying goes, it's not the destination, it's the journey along the way. This was one heck of a journey, and it was made even sweeter by the fact both Jeff and I were training for the same thing. Even though we didn't do majority of our training units together, having each other to lean on, cheer on each other and support each other was amazing.