

Cowtown holds special memories, which includes my first-ever race



In a few more days, thousands of runners will be lining up for The Cowtown at the Will Rogers Memorial complex. And I might or might not be among the half marathon participants (lack of training and a cold has curtailed my schedule).

However, The Cowtown remains one of my favorite events, mainly because it's where I ran my first race. Cowtown also is where I beat four hours for the first time at the 26.2-mile distance, it's also where my future son-in-law joined me one year for the last seven miles or so of the marathon and asked me if it was OK if he asked my daughter to marry him. I think he asked me in the last four or five miles and by that time, I would have agreed to almost anything. But because I liked him, it was an easy yes. And this is an event I covered several years for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, and there were several highlights during those years.

Among the older highlights I remember (without doing too much research) include watching Calvin McGill, Bill Rodgers, Agapius Masong and James Jackson race down the Main Street hill in the 10K. I was going up the hill when they zipped past. That was the year Calvin won with a 30:10 in one of the closest finishes, maybe ever. Another memory was that of Wesley Brown winning his first of three Cowtowns in 1991. What was so memorable about that is for maybe 18 miles or so, Ed Swiatocha was in front and there was no one in sight behind him. I'm not sure when Brown was first noticed by those of us in the leading media vehicle, but he was just a speck in the distance when he was seen. As the race progressed, that speck got larger. Brown, whose training course in Oklahoma had featured many hills, continued to gain steam as those of us watching were stunned that someone had come from so far behind to finally overtake and pass Swiatocha as they begin heading into the city and toward the Stockyards. Though Ed was a late-minute entry, he had among his achievements, a Cowtown and two Dallas marathons victories, and had been an Olympics Trial qualifier.

Other highlights included Ricky Cox winning his third Cowtown marathon in 1986; Ireland's John Treacy winning the 10K in two consecutive years with 29:28 and 29:19 times. He missed the course record of 29:17 set by Stann Vernon in 1981 when he had to slow because of a vehicle on the course; James Jackson running away from some stiff competition to win in 1992 with a 30:19; and the many celebrity runners who Cowtown invited to compete, including Rodgers, Frank Shorter, Mark and Gwyn Coogan, Francie Larrieu-Smith, Jody Hawkins, Alan Culpepper, Ed Eyestone and Treacy, among others. I had interviewed Shorter over the phone before he came to Fort Worth while he was running on his treadmill. But it was more fun, at least to me, to see some of the other local runners break through with victories. Among those include Joni Dodson of Fort Worth winning her second marathon in 1993 with a 2:54:11. One of her rivals had been Marjorie Stewart of Lubbock, who won in 1994. I also enjoyed seeing two of my favorite local female competitors – Gayle Seefeldt and Alice Pruitt – win the marathon in '96 and '97, respectively.

I could go on with the many highlights, but the main highlight for me is Cowtown was my first race. When I began running in 1982 after I turned 40, Cowtown only had the 10K and marathon when the event was in the Stockyards area. Because my "training" was painfully coming along as I increased my distance to finally reach six miles, I decided to enter the 10K. This might have been in '84, but because I don't keep records of my runs, I'm just guessing. I naively lined up in the 10-minute mile area, though I figured I could run at least at a 9-minute pace. After lining up, I also had to pee, but didn't see any port-o-potties. I did noticed several participants running over to an old skeleton of a building next to Main Street, so I headed over there and found males and females taking advantage of the make-shift "potty." I learned then that runners are quick to lose their modesty when they have to go.

I also learned that I had lined up too far back. I hadn't taken 15 steps when I had to brake because of several walkers, who apparently had lined up in the eight-minute pace area. That's a problem that, unfortunately still exists. Anyway, despite a difficult last mile, I finished in about 53 minutes or so. Not great, but something to improve on, which I did. What was sort of frustrating was when I was heading down Exchange Ave. to the finish, I was passed by an assortment of runners who didn't appear capable to beating me, including two females

pushing joggers. My ego was hurt somewhat, but I grew to accept that some "non-looking" runners were faster than me.

But I was happy with my effort and have continued competing (though participating would be more correct now) ever since. One big change has occurred over the years -- chip timing. Pull tags and manual timing was the method used then, but Cowtown and other races have grown so big, that method would never work now. Too many runners want their "real" time, not just the gun time. I'm not sure now, though, that I want a time.