

Warning: Don't try this



Warning: Do not try this for your next half marathon. I discovered for the second time in the past two years that not training for the 13.1 distance can be a painful, slow ordeal. At The Cowtown on Feb. 28, 2016, I made the mistake of letting my son-in-law talk me into doing the half even though my “training” had been geared more toward the 5K. He promised that no matter how slow, he would stay with me. To his credit, he did.

The last time I tried a half was at the Wounded Warriors in Irving two years ago. I had been training for the 10K, but was mistakenly listed for the half. So, I joined my son-in-law again for the 13.1-mile trek. This time, though, we ran at our own pace. And through the first six miles, I was doing OK, but then when reaching the seventh mile, my body told me that was as far as I had trained and it started shutting down. I tried walking and jogging and that worked until I had just a little more than a mile left, and then a severe left calf cramp almost forced me to quit. But I stumbled in with my worst half at 2:57. At Cowtown, that time would have looked good.

However, even though we started Cowtown with a jog/walk method, I still ran out of gas after seven miles and struggled in with a 3:08:23. Because we had started in corral eight, the last one, the gun time was 3:44:23, not far off of my best marathon time. Sort of embarrassing, especially when marathoners and ultra marathoners were passing us to the finish. Though I had to be reminded that I and the others who finished the half are just a small percentage of the population who do this, I should be proud. And I remembered my previous Cowtown half in 2012 when I finished with a 2:37:47, which wasn't great, but far better than this effort. I have never run too many half marathons, but in the past 12 years, my best was the Casper (Wy.) marathon when I tackled a hilly, mile-high course, and finished with a 2:04, though I had to walk some after mile 11 when facing another hill. And there are some challenging hills at that event.

Anyway, back to Cowtown. The course is mostly downhill until heading through the Stockyard area, where the Cowtown was conducted for several years before moving downtown and then to the present Will Rogers area. That doesn't mean to imply there weren't a couple of challenging inclines before then because there were. There's a fairly nasty hill when leaving Exchange Ave., but the biggest test is soon after when the North Main bridge heading into downtown looks more like Mt. Everest (at least to me). That's when I really begin to have tiring leg issues. My longest training runs seldom had gone over five miles in the weeks leading up to Cowtown because I had not planned to try the half.

However, the journey was entertaining most of the way as several bands were rocking with their music and there was even an Elvis sighting. In downtown, there was one restaurant that was passing out small cups of beer, which was welcome at that juncture of the race. Also, Fort Worth Mayor Betsy Price was in the middle of the street encouraging participants. Several of the participants didn't know who she was, though, as I heard a few of them asking who she was. Maybe she needed a banner. By then, I was walking more than jogging and was wondering why I had let my son-in-law talk me into this. Then, I remembered why I agreed – a nice medal, a jacket and finisher's shirt. But I was beginning to question whether the pain was worth it. But as (nearly) always, you're happy you did it once it's over. The unique medal alone almost is worth the effort.

I have to compliment the medical staff, too. After finishing, I must have looked so bad that a couple of the staff were asking me how I felt and if I was all right. Well, other than a painful left shoulder, aching big right toe and extreme leg fatigue, I was fine. But we weren't finished. I had to muster enough energy for a fairly long walk to acquire the light green jacket, and then face a fairly long line for food. After reaching the food and loading up with a banana, orange, yogurt, ice cream, energy bar, I dug into the hot chicken soup at the end. Yum. A couple of brews also helped soothe some of the pain.

But again, I urge everyone: Don't try this. I know I won't unless I have properly trained.