

The Back Of The Pack

Relays are good way to join long distance runners



I think most of us remember fondly those elementary school relay races where we had a team of four or five kids. We had to run a short distance and pass a baton to the next person who would also run that distance and so on until the last person received the baton and raced over the finish line.

In fact, a former principal at Pope Elementary School in Arlington was famous for his before school relay races. When I began running, I never thought of there being a relay race for such long distances that I would be running, but I noticed there was an opportunity to do a relay for the first half marathon I ran. This was the Rock 'n Roll Half Marathon in Dallas.

Near the halfway part of the race, I noticed a group of people waiting for their relay partner to arrive to begin their portion of the race.

There were only two members to a team.

Since it was 95 degrees at the end of the race, I thought that "wow, now that would have been a great idea today to just have to run half of this sucker!"



Relay races are an excellent way to experience a long race such as a half marathon or a marathon without having to run the whole distance. There also are Ragnar races where you and 11 of your friends (or five of your friends for an ultra team) pile into two vans and tag team running around 200 miles, day and night, relay-style. Only one runner hits the road at a time. Each participant runs three times, with each leg ranging between 3-8 miles and varying in difficulty.

There also are Ragnar races that are done on trails. A number of members from my running club in Granbury participated in one of those races several weeks ago in South Texas. They already are planning on doing it again next year.



I finished my last column letting all of my readers know that I have registered for my first marathon the end of March. One of my running

friends scheduled her first marathon for the Route 66 Marathon in Tulsa on November 21 and a number of us

wanted to support her and run with her. None of us felt confident enough to run the full marathon with her, but we thought at first that we would run the half marathon while she did the full. In the discussion, someone stated how fun it would be to run the relay marathon that Tulsa offered and so we did.

We had three of us that were strongly committed to this relay, but we could have five members and that is what I felt the most comfortable with. A team of five would have fairly equal legs of from 5 to 5.6 miles. If we had only four members, then one of us would have to run two legs, and if we only had the three members, two of us would have to run two legs.

Once we committed to the relay marathon, we then all worked on trying to find two more members to join us. To make a long story short, one of our members decided that her husband could run a leg and when we read the rules, we found that it was possible for someone to run the full marathon and also be part of a relay team, as long as they were the first runner. Our team was set.

I spent the \$200 and registered the team once we had this decided. Since I was our Captain, I made the decision as to when each person would run. Jana was our first runner since she was doing the full marathon. I decided on Robin going second, I would be third, Marc would be fourth and Katie would be our finisher.

Jana and I met in our first class together run by Bill Richardson in Arlington. We met Robin at the Chocolate run in Dallas in 2014 and have run many races with her. Jana met Katie at a race and became fast friends. She is in her early twenties and has many challenging racing goals. Her husband Marc is not really a runner, but he rides a bike a lot. He had a bit over a month to train before running his first race. This was certainly going to be a “different” team compared to some of the other ones that were formed. We called ourselves “We Run Together.”

We arrived in Tulsa the day before the race. I went straight to the Expo and picked up all of the relay bibs. I found out that we all had the same number on our bibs and we would be transferring a small bracelet to each runner as we finished our leg.

Robin and Katie were delayed in the Metroplex as they were running races that had been rescheduled from April to November because of the flooding in April. Robin ran a 10K and Katie ran a 10K, a 5K, and a 2.5K!!! Oh well, we were there to support Jana, not to try to win any relay race.

Dinner was at Baxter’s Interurban Grill. Fort Worth Running Company had reserved a room there. I had my fifth straight pasta meal, spaghetti and meat balls (goodness, one would think that I was running the full marathon, not Jana).

We all rode the shuttle from the hotel to the starting line and wished Jana good luck. Carol had joined us, another friend that Jana had made. She was doing the half marathon.

After a very difficult time locating the relay shuttle, we were shuttled to our waiting location to wait in 25-degree temperatures for our turn. Runners had to ride shuttle 2 if running leg 3, and shuttle 1 if running leg 2, so you can guess how confusing that was. Robin texted me that her bus driver was lost and she feared she would not be there when Jana reached the relay point. She did make it with a few minutes to spare.

As I waited for Robin, I did my usual mixing with the other runners waiting with me. I told them a lot of my running stories and told them I didn’t mind joking with them because I would never see any of them again. It was brutally cold and I think it did help them to forget. There was a pod where many were waiting but I chose to wait in the sun. I had a lot of clothes with me to keep me warm and the plan was that I would hand them all over to Robin and Marc would do the same with his clothes to me. I got a text from Robin that she was at mile 9, and soon after that Jana ran by and stopped for a minute. Her husband had made his way to this location just before she got there. Robin then arrived around 10 minutes after Jana. She apologized for taking so long but I told her

not to worry. Goodness, she had not been training for a marathon and also her legs were tired from her race the day before.

My leg was fairly uneventful. I was about as fast as the people who were around me since they had already run farther than 10 miles. I was surprised how hilly the route was. I had chosen the 3rd leg for myself because of this, but all of the legs proved to be quite hilly. I got to run some on route 66 and I also got to run through the portion where the half marathon and the full marathon separated.

Half marathoners stayed to the left side and full marathoners stayed to the right. I finished my leg in 1 hour 11 minutes and 40 seconds, about a 14:32 pace/mile. The only time reported on the website, however, was our finishing time. I passed the bracelet to Marc, took his bag of clothes, and he took off in a flash. I saw him at the Turkey Trot and he told me he finished his leg in around 55 minutes.

I made my way to the shuttle stop and guess who was there? Waiting there were all of the runners I had seen before that I told that I would never see again! A bunch of them had a great laugh about that. I found out that there had been people waiting there for an hour so far with no shuttle. My wait was about another 30 minutes, so I was lucky in this endeavor. A guy talked to me that said his friend had gone to the wrong relay point and he was waiting for him to show up on a shuttle to pass him the bracelet. His friend was on the bus when it arrived and he scooted off. Robin had decided to walk to the finish line since she was not that far from it at our relay point. My walk would have been over three miles so I needed the shuttle. I found Robin at the finish line and we ate some pasta in the food tent and then waited for Jana to finish her full marathon. The shuttle never did come for Marc and he finally decided with some others to walk the four miles to the finish line.

Robin and I did see Jana finish and it was quite emotional for all of us. Her finishing time was 5:18:28. We Run Together had a finishing time of 5:35:10. We missed Katie finishing for the team since we were celebrating with Jana, but the official photos had tons of pictures of her finishing. There was only one of me and one of Marc running. Robin had to get on to the course to make it back to the finish line and there was one of her strolling with all of the runners with her bag over her shoulder. There were not very many older runners in the relay, I do know that I was the oldest Captain.

I gladly did my evaluation of this race and praised everything except the shuttles. Shuttle drivers, people monitoring shuttles (those that ran around the starting lines), and people at the information booth had no knowledge of where and how to catch the relay shuttles. I really do not know if a shuttle ever did make it to Marc's relay spot, People had waited two hours total and no shuttle. I know he really would have liked to see both Jana's and Katie's finish but that did not happen.

Still, it was the only dark spot in what was a very memorable and fun day. Here are a couple photos, one of the relay bib, one of all of us the night before the race and then another of us at the Fort Worth YMCA Turkey Trot (since we never did get one of all five or six of us after the race). It was a bit humid for that Turkey Trot, but I had pretty much my fastest 5K this year, finishing in 40:37, 13:01 pace/mile. And, let me take this opportunity to congratulate Jana on a job well done, her first marathon!!!