

Race Report
Louisville Trail Half Marathon
2018

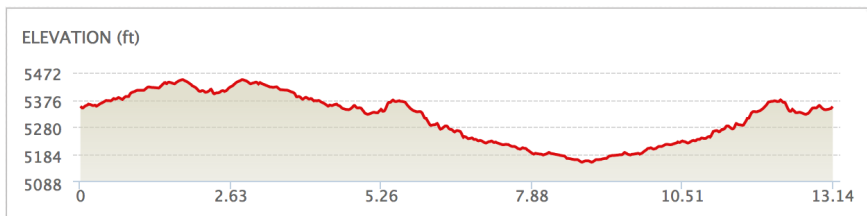
A. Cynic

Version , Wed Oct 17 21:16:33 MDT 2018

Race background and goals

I'm training for a local marathon on November 4, but having made significant improvements during my recent training means I'm more unsure than ever as to how I should pace myself. The only races I've done recently are a [downhill 10k](#) (40:15), and a [17.1-mile mountain trail race](#) (3:20), both of which are too atypical to provide me much feedback about my marathon pace.

So I decided, rather last minute, to sign up for a local half marathon which was exactly 4 weeks out from my marathon: the 6th Annual [Louisville Trail Half Marathon](#) (October 7, 2018). The name is a bit misleading because it is not a mountain trail race but is run on a nice smooth packed-gravel suburban multi-use path (which I regularly run on during my long runs). It is mostly flat with only one short steep climb (~40 ft) to speak of which it goes over twice (at mile 5.5 and mile 12) The hill doesn't even really stand out on the elevation profile:



Elevation profile

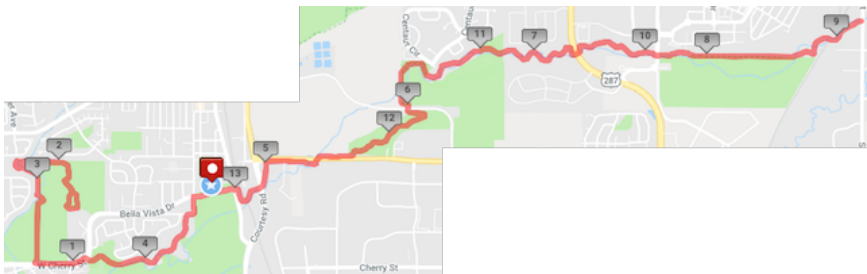
I've been running my tempo runs at about 4:15/km (6:50/mile) and my marathon pace long runs at around 4:45/km (7:38/mile). Actually many of my recent "marathon" pace kilometers have ended up being closer to 4:30 (7:14/mile) which I'm almost sure is too fast, but gave me confidence that I could run a half in

1:34:00. So I set that as my goal going into this race (although I hoped I would be able to go a bit faster, of course). My plan was to stick to 4:30/km until going over the hill at 9km, speeding up for the gradual downhill, then trying to maintain on the gradual uphill on the way back.

I did my first (and maybe only) 20-mile run of my marathon training cycle on the Tuesday before the race, but then did a mini-taper the rest of the week so my legs were still somewhat fresh.

Race

The course consists of two out-and-back segments. From the start we ran west about 2 miles to a small pond, around the pond, then back past the start line (at about mile 4.5). We then continued east, up and down the hill for the first time, out to the turn-around point just before mile 9, then back to finish just after going over the hill the second time.



Pre-race and a patriotic start

With an 8am race start time my mom volunteered to drive me to near the start line so I wouldn't have to wake up early and jog

the 4 miles over. Because she loves me.

The weather was cool (about 42F by the time the race started) and overcast—perfect for racing. I found the registration tent with no issues and picked up my bib which I pinned to my shorts. I had opted out of a T-shirt to save a few bucks on registration. I like races that give that option. I warmed up in a light jacket for about 10 minutes around the park where the start line and after-race expo (a few vendor tents occupied by cold-looking attendants) were located, finishing with a few strides. I also brought a backpack with a heavier jacket and some pants because I knew I would get cold after the race.

About 15 minutes to the start I took off my jacket and put it in my backpack—it wasn't as cold without it as I had feared. I ran with short sleeves and gloves. I didn't see any bag check so I hid my backpack under a nearby spruce tree and jogged over to the port-o-potties. It was a short line but took for-ev-er. I finally got my turn and then got to the start just minutes before 8am when the race director was describing the course for everyone. The director then announced that we would start just after the national anthem played. Ugh.

The race director finally got his phone plugged in to the PA system. As that ode to Ol' Glory began playing, *everyone* in front of me in the starting chute turned, their hands over their hearts in accordance with the finest etiquette of automatons, to face a flag that was just behind me.

In 2005 when John Roberts and Samuel Alito were confirmed to the Supreme Court, the late Howard Zinn warned progressive activists not to place too much importance on that institution:

It would be naive to depend on the Supreme Court to defend the rights of poor people, women, people of color, dissenters of all kinds. Those rights only come alive when citizens organize, protest, demonstrate, strike, boycott, rebel, and violate the law in order to uphold justice. (“[Howard Zinn: Don’t Despair about the Supreme Court](#)”)

This race morning, the morning after the much-publicized confirmation of [Brett Kavanaugh](#) when it might be expected that even the most oblivious Americans could entertain some doubt about their government, this assorted group of recreational runners thought the thing to do was to literally worship the closest American flag.

Just as I was getting to peak self-righteousness, I realized I had paid \$80 to have someone time me running back and forth on a public path I normally run on for free, and that as a self-elected member of this group that no-one would accuse of being the brightest or most independently-thinking cohort of American society I should maybe not be too quick to judge.

Anyway, that disgraceful display was soon over, and we were off!

Around the pond (start to 4.5 miles)

I intentionally started a few layers back from the starting mat to

help prevent myself from going out too quickly (which I'm prone to doing). It didn't work. I had way more adrenaline than usual thanks to the anthemic start; my heart was pounding with indignation like a conservative who has just seen a black athlete kneeling. 4:00/km felt effortless.

But after a few hundred meters I caught up to two guys who had slowed to and were maintaining 4:30/km, my goal for the first bit, so I made myself stay with them. We finished the first kilometer in 4:27. Perfect.

We took a right turn toward the pond we were to run around, and the course began a gentle downhill slope. It was here that the first-place runner passed me going the other direction — already almost a kilometer ahead of me and way in front of even the chase group of runners!

I decided to maintain the same effort we had been running at, which meant speeding up on the down hill and passing my two pacers. I was within 100 meters of a few runners around the pond, but now on the flat and slightly curvy return they were out of sight ahead of me, and I couldn't hear anyone behind me. I like running alone and fell into a very comfortable rhythm as I passed the start/finish line and headed toward the first climb.

Average pace for this section was 4:20/km (7:14/mile). Already a minute faster than my goal and feeling good.

There (4.5 miles to 9 miles)

Soon after passing the start/finish line and starting off east on the longer out-and-back segment, I heard footsteps approaching from behind. But just when I was sure I was going to be passed,

we hit the hill that goes up to Aquarius Trailhead, the highest point of the course. I tried to maintain a consistent effort which meant slowing down a bit on the climb (this would be my slowest kilometer at 4:31), but apparently the runner poised to pass me slowed even more. Even after I slowed again to get some fluid at the aid station at the top of the hill he was several seconds behind.



Near the top of the hill

Despite the cool weather I felt pretty thirsty and I grabbed the electrolyte drink they had in little clear plastic cups at the aid station. I don't know what it was, but it was sweet and delicious. I wasn't planning on eating anything during the race, so I was glad the aid stations offered a drink with carbohydrates. There were trash cans right at the aid station, which I guess is good for people who wanted to stop and stand while they drank, but it would have been better to have them 50 meters or so past the station. Utilizing what I assume is a typical technique I tried to

keep running as I got about half the contents of the tiny cup in my mouth and the rest on my beard and shorts. I ended up just hanging on to my cup from each aid station and throwing it away at the next one.

The other side of the hill is a perfect grade to [run fast down](#) (giving me my fastest kilometer of the race at 3:55), and then at the bottom it stays very gently downhill until the turnaround point just before mile 9.



The other side of the hill

Around a mile out from the turn around point the first-place runner passed me going the other direction. If anything I think he had sped up since the last time I saw him. There was a small group a ways behind him, a few lone runners, and then me! When I turned around I saw there was also a runner not too far behind me. The turn-around point itself was marked by two small signs at the side of the trail. No timing mat. No cone to run around. No flour line that I recall. No course marshal to prevent anyone from overshooting the turnaround. Risky course design. I was actually so unsure that I had turned around at the correct place that I looked back to watch the runner behind me; he turned around at the same place I did.

I maintained an average pace of 4:11/km during this segment. I still felt good, but I was a little worried because that is closer to my traditional 5K pace than half marathon pace (!) so I was worried I was setting myself up to hit a painful wall during the slightly-uphill return trip.

And back again (9 miles to 13.1 miles)

After turning around, the course spends a very straight and boring mile away from the tree-sheltered creek. When I run here in the summer during long training runs, this mile is always hot and thirsty for me. Today there is a slight but chilly head wind. I allow myself to slow from about 4:15/km to 4:20/km.

Typically during my long training runs, which I never run this fast, fatigue sets in around 10 miles, usually beginning with my hips/quads, and suddenly a pace that felt easy starts taking

effort to maintain. That is definitely on my mind as kilometers keep going by and I know (though can't really feel) that the trail gets increasingly steep up to the Aquarius hill.

But sudden fatigue never sets in like I fear. I keep a steady pace and medium effort and pass a few runners. First a woman who seems to be fading (though I think she hung on to finish as the 2nd overall woman), and then a man who looked strong and I expected to stay with me, but he let me go on by. (It turns out he stayed closer than I thought and finished only about a minute after me.)

At the bottom of the hill I looked up and saw the next runner in front of me was already near the top. I thought it was unlikely that I'd ever catch him (the top of the hill is right about at the 12-mile mark), but he stopped at the aid station at the top which allowed me to gain some ground on my way up.

Running up the hill felt surprisingly easy and didn't slow me down much (finished that km in 4:27), and I again turned it up for the down hill. The guy in front of me was also running hard down, and a I barely gained on him, but when the course flattened out I steadily rolled up to him. By the last half mile we were running shoulder to shoulder. And then with less than 400 meters left I asked myself a question that should probably have occurred to me earlier: the race is almost over, why do you still feel relatively comfortable?



Racing to the finish

So I kicked it to the finish. I turned around and high-fived the guy I passed, who finished 5 seconds behind me (he was in an older age division, so our little race at the end didn't affect our relative standings). I bent down as someone put a commemorative finishers medal around my neck. I wish races would start allowing people to opt out of medals to save a few bucks during registration.

My official chip time: **1:29:04**

Five minutes faster than my goal, and even faster than my secret optimistic fantasies of 90 minutes! I don't remember what my half marathon PR is, but I'm sure it is at least 10 minute slower than that.

Apparently I failed to stop my watch as I crossed the finish mat so there's no way to know my exact pace (without downloading the data from my Garmin Forerunner 305 to my computer to analyze like some sort of data scientist nerd). My last two kilometers were close to 4:00/km. My watch actually measured the course a little short so all of my paces were a bit faster than I thought during the race.



Failing to stop my watch at the finish line

Post-race

I retrieved my backpack and was very glad to have my jackets and pants. Even with all my clothes on I was shivering while I waited for the award ceremony. But there was post-race food: bratwurst, yogurt, potato chips, pretzels, and orange juice!

At the awards ceremony I was pleasantly surprised when the race director announced that I had finished as the third overall man!

I went up and got my award. But then the three guys who finished in front of me started saying something about how, mathematically speaking, it was impossible for me to have gotten third. So I gave back my prizes as they re-printed the results. I ended up being demoted from 3rd overall to 1st in my

age division, which still came with an awesome little 350ml handheld water bottle as a prize that I think I will actually get a lot of use out of.

This was obviously not the most competitive half marathon ever, but the first place guy ran it in a respectable 72 minutes — almost 15 minutes ahead of second place!

Finally I put my extra clothes back in my backpack and slowly jogged the four miles home.

Afterthoughts

The race was fun and I'm very happy with how I ran: beat my goal by several minutes, negative split, and felt good the whole time. Based on my time, the [FiveThirtyEight marathon predictor calculator](#) says I should be able to run a marathon in under 3:15. So at least I have a good idea of what to aim for now.

Jack Daniels recommends taking up to a week after a half marathon before doing another hard workout. I decided to move my next long run (30km with a few race pace kilometers) to the Friday after the race. That went well so I was planning on doing that week's tempo workout the Sunday after the race. But then it got freezing and snowy so I ended up instead running zero kilometers. Because that's the kind of discipline and dedication I can be expected to bring to the table during marathon training. Now there's only one full week of training left, and then taper time! I hope it warms up a little. But not too much.

Other reports

- Laura from 50x25 ran this race last year and wrote a report:
[Race Report: Louisville Trail Half Marathon](#)