

Tom Meany - Bangor 24 hour race 2012 Diary

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I started training for my first 24 hour race last December. I had taken a month off after my last marathon in Sixmilebridge which was my 7th of the year including the Portumna 100k. My training started with circuit training two nights a week and in parallel I built up the running to over 70 miles / week including back to back marathons for the month of May with a lot of walking built in. Typically the Sunday marathon was around six hours. My only official marathon was the Limerick one where I came in at 3:58 just to remind myself I could run 26 miles without stopping. In May I decided to stop the circuit training as something during the training was aggravating an achilles tendon injury. Also due to the high mileage I could no longer keep up with the rest of the class.

At the end of May I managed over 100 miles of running in one 8 day week and even though I normally took every 4th weekend off I decided to run for the 4th weekend in a row because I would have to cut back during my holidays and on the Sunday I woke up, changed for my run but had to stop after a mile due to pain in the achilles tendon. This was more than an ache. I tried again Tuesday night but was still sore. I eventually took two weeks off completely and then started walking 5 miles a day for a week followed by 5 miles walking in the morning and 5 miles running in the evening for a second week. The last week was 70 miles but with the longest run only five miles it didn't feel legit. After four weeks of taking it easy I decided to go for a 70 mile week including a 26 miler. The ankle held up due to a combination of rigorous icing and an exercise which involved rolling a can of beans under the the ankle. For the next 2 weeks I backed off the mileage by 25% a week and did nothing at all the last week. The last 6 weeks wasn't ideal but at least I was getting to the start with my weight at its lightest in over 5 years and I had a pulse rate of around 50.

I finalized my crew and booked Bewleys at Newlands Cross as a stopping point on the way to Bangor Thursday night. We had a good nights sleep and the full Irish in the morning. I had brought a sandwich bag to get ice for my ankle in the bar but even better Bewleys had a free ice machine, through the doors to the bedrooms, behind reception. I iced my ankle on Thursday morning and on Friday morning as we drove to Bangor.

We arrived in Bangor at 2:30 and were the first to put up our tent which was probably just as well because it was a much larger tent that most of the others. We shopped down the road in Tesco buying ham, bread, jellies, apple pies, coke, water, swiss roll and other essentials. The apple pies in particular turned out to be very popular as the race wore on. Between putting up the tent, shopping, registering, attending the race briefing and changing there wasn't time for a sleep before the race start at 6:45.



Figure 1 - We had the nicest bin

At 6:45 the race started. I ran 10 laps with no walking and then I saw Thomas Bubendorfer walking so I decided I would start walking too. My strategy was to run 1, walk 1, run 1, walk 1, run 1. This meant every 5 laps I would run two in a row. I kept this up for most of night despite the weather turning nasty sometime around 11pm and being really nasty from perhaps 12am to 5am. When it did start raining I put on a rain poncho over my tee shirt which kept out most of the rain especially when I put a peaked hat on over the hood of the poncho. I also switched from my ASICS Gel 1160 to my ASICS Gel Lahar which are a waterproof running shoe. However water proof or not once the inside two lanes flooded I needed to change my socks every hour. I am always paranoid about blisters as it is one thing which will stop you in your tracks. Luckily I had twelve pairs of socks and I used ten of them before the rain stopped some time around 10am. Getting in to change gear was easy due to the pit lane. At the start of the straight you could leave the track and run up the inside of the straight behind a barrier before joining back onto the track at the end of the straight. Tents could be pitched along this area so you passed your front door once per lap. I nearly missed the pasta at midnight because with the peaked hat on my head I was keeping my head down to keep the rain off my face.

The ponchos didn't keep out all the rain either so I switched to my raincoat and that also quickly soaked through. The changing of gear was also made easy by the provision of two race numbers. This meant your crew could have the number already on your next set of gear. This was rain of biblical proportions.



Figure 2 - The rain around midnight

Sometime around 4:30 am it started to get bright and by 7am the music came on again around the track followed by the call for porridge in the medical tent. I heard rumours later that several people pulled out over night because of the cold and wet and that the whole race was nearly cancelled for health and safety reasons. Our tent only had one real leak and some rain came through where the wind blew the outside lining against the inside. Ed had also advised us which way to turn the door so that the rain didn't come in and I could see faces inside waving out all through the night. Some other of the support crews didn't have this luxury and sheltered under umbrellas and must have been very wet and cold as must the manual lap counters.

The lap counting seemed very comprehensive. Two electronic systems with a tag for each shoe and a manual backup system. Only the inside two lanes were covered by the electronic tags which I forgot several times while either talking or running on lane three to avoid the worst of the flooding in lanes one and two. The manual system consisted of volunteers from the various support crews and others who were each given three or four runners to monitor and tick a box each time they passed. The tent for the manual counting was facing into the rain so I am not too sure how that got on.

Around 9am I discovered I was running with my eyes shut and with the thought of 10 hours still to run I went to the tent to lie down leaving firm instructions to call me after half an hour. At this time I had around 100k down and I think I should have taken a 2 hour nap and probably taken it around 7am. It was four hours into the race before I realized that it involved staying awake for 36 hours and not the 24 I had been dreading. You might ask why doesn't the race start at 7am to avoid this but I guess its safer to have everybody running the last couple of hours during daylight.

After my lie down I came back out and ran again but it was never the same. With seven hours remaining I had only twenty nine miles to run. It sounds easy and if you had promised me this before the race I would have bet on myself. However despite the sun eventually appearing I couldn't manage to keep up the pace. First my good knee acted up and I went in for my knee bandage. Then I got a bad knot on the back on the same calf. I visited the massage tent and they did a great job to sort it out. They sorted it out again another hour or two later. I was told that on a scale of 1 to 10 if the pain got over an eight to tell them and they would stop. They kept it at eight but I can't say it was pleasant. Despite all the repair work I quickly got into a cycle

of run 2 miles, lie down for 30 minutes, run 2 miles lie down for 30 minutes and in the last 7 hours I covered only 14 miles. My final total was 348 laps, 86.52 miles (approx 135k). I would have liked to get to the 100 miles but it was not to be. Perhaps if it had rained less I might have got another few miles but it is hard to say. What beat me in the end was tiredness in the front of my thighs. I did manage to run the last lap but it was slow and somewhat painful. Run 30 yards, walk 5, repeat. When I lid down later and tried to do a straight leg life I could not lift my legs without using a hand to pull them up.

The winner John O'Regan came home at 129 miles chased all the way by Thomas Bubendorfer who finished around 126 miles. I hadn't realized Thomas was doing so well until afterwards. Perhaps he didn't know it himself early on. At one point he told me that he never realized it would be that difficult and this was only around 12 hours into the race. Towards the end he was running constantly and made John O'Regan earn his prize.

Along with the pasta, porridge and stew supplied at 6 hour intervals by the race organizers I ate their bananas, mars bars and snickers. The only drink was water but I had my own full sugar coca-cola and some mixed up bottles of High 5 4/1. Around 10pm I had a burger onions only with no salad bits added and around 10am I had a sausage sandwich. I also ate lots of Bramley apple pies so no trouble with liquids or food.



Figure 3 - The final measurements

I enjoyed every minute of the race and finished happy. My big fear of my achilles tendon injury acting up never came up. Once I knew I was going to get a respectable distance I was happy. I

would recommend this race to anybody and in fact the relay looked very interesting for anybody who isn't brave enough to try for the 12 hour or 24 hour versions of the run.



Figure 4 - The Mayor of North Down presented the medals

The relay consisted of teams of 4 which had to include one woman. Each team member ran for 4 sets of 2 hours which meant you had 6 hours to rest. The eventual winners got to around 179 miles but it should be easy enough to find a team to do a respectable 140 miles and still get the 24 hour experience.

After the race there was an awards ceremony in the pavilion. The medals were presented by the Mayor of North Down and everybody had their picture taken.

Since I didn't get to 100 miles I'm going to have to try again but perhaps not next year.

Thanks to my crew of Helen, Thomas, Elaine and Valerie. Thanks to Ed for organizing and Energia for sponsoring.