

## TOKYO MARATHON 2014 RACE REPORT

by Hutz

Or – “The clergymen, Tinker Bell, Batman, the cow and the daikon”

### THE LEAD UP

I flew to Tokyo on the Thursday before the marathon. I was glad finally to be on my way, because I had found the last couple of weeks very nerve wracking. As you approach a marathon, every niggle becomes magnified into a potential injury disaster and every sniffle feels like the beginning of a major cold. I had noticed some discomfort in my right hamstring in my recent runs over two hours, but my physio did not think it was of concern, so I pretty much ignored it, as it did not bother me at all in shorter runs. I completed a successful 12k tempo run with House at 3:56 per km the weekend before flying out, so I remained very confident that my body could handle 42 km at 4:00 per km or faster.

The plane trip was uneventful. I spotted a guy in a Boston Marathon tracksuit at Tokyo Airport. His name was Sven, a German previously resident in Sydney but currently living in Manila. He was another Travelling Fit customer and was staying at the same hotel, so we shared a taxi. He told me that he only trained about once a week because of the heat in the Philippines, but last year ran twelve marathons in Asia and Australia!

Friday began with a pleasant 8k morning jog in beautiful cold, sunny weather. My hotel was in Ariake, which is in the dock area of Tokyo and was next to a wide pedestrian pathway over several bridges, perfect for my jog, and very unusual in Tokyo, which has few good places to run. I went to the Runners' Expo with Sven in the afternoon. It reminded me of Ikea with a seemingly never ending one way path through displays of things for sale – shoes, clothes, watches, sunglasses, energy foods, overseas marathons and more. House and Rog arrived that evening, as they were staying in the same hotel. They went off to search for dinner, but had to be satisfied with potato chips and chocolate milk.



*Expo girls*

On Saturday morning we took part in the International Friendship 5k Run, which fortuitously took place on the pedestrian pathway outside our hotel. We thought



*Me, House and Rog*

it was a great idea to wear our Japanese bandannas, but photographic evidence revealed that Rog and I had managed to wear ours upside down, appropriate for runners coming from down under. The other guys still needed to collect their numbers from the Expo, so we met Bacchus and family, Coalminer and Natsuko there. After lunch, it was back to the hotel to rest.

## THE RACE

The marathon started at 9.10 am on Sunday, but because Ariake is where the race ends (our hotel was within walking distance of the finish line), we had to catch a runners' bus at 6.10 am. We were given a breakfast pack on the bus. I drank the fruit juice, but did not touch the rest, having already eaten my own modest breakfast in my hotel room. It was very, very cold, perhaps around 2 deg C and cloudy, unlike the previous two days, and there was little or no wind. I was feeling incredibly nervous and knew that the next two hours would be a drag.

Upon arrival, we contemplated staying in a nearby hotel lobby to stay warm for a while, but not knowing how long the bag drop off and toilet queuing would take, we decided to keep moving through to the assembly area. We ended up in an underground car park for a while, which was cold and austere. There were queues there for the western-style toilets, but there was no wait for the Asian-style squat toilets! We checked in our clothing bags, retaining old tops that we could discard before the gun and joined the milling throng.

The race directions required us to enter our designated starting corral by 8.45 am. All the milers were in corral B and we quickly found Bacchus and later MJ, who was late and had to sneak in after the cut off time for assembling. House, Rog and I tried to bluff our way into corral A by keeping our numbers covered, but the other two guys were somewhat taller than the average Japanese runner and we were quickly banished back to corral B. This was unfortunate, because there were around 3,000 Japanese club runners in corral A ahead of us, many of whom were clearly not serious about the event, being dressed in all sorts of fancy dress costumes, including a group of clergymen complete with dog collars.

It seemed to get colder as we waited. Despite my long sleeve top, I was shaking with cold and, to make things worse, it was now an hour since my toilet stop in the underground car park and I was busting to go. What should I do? If I left the corral, I probably would not get back in. We were jammed in like sardines, so just letting loose on the spot was not an option. I resolved to let go once we started running and not worry about having wet shorts or shoes.



*David "Huge Hands" Mellings*

After various short speeches and the Japanese national anthem, we were on our way. It took about 80 seconds of walking/shuffling for us to get to the line and start our watches. House and I had discussed what would happen if we were held up during the first part of the race. We had agreed to try and get back on to our planned race schedule of 3:58 per km (2:47.20 pace) by 10k or so, i.e. in a gradual manner rather than running very fast for a couple of kilometres to make up ground.

The first two kilometres were chaotic. It was a matter of jogging, then running, then getting blocked and slowing down again. It was necessary to zig zag frequently to find clear air. All thoughts of taking a leak were forgotten. House called out that I should just run and he would follow me through the mob. I saw



Bacchus take off hard with Rog in close pursuit, which was interesting given that Rog had said that he was just running to finish. I was happy to pass the group of clergymen who had been ahead of us at the back of corral A. Prayers will not help you now, I thought.

Finally House and I were able to run side by side, but we were more than a minute down on our target at 5k. House ramped up the pace and we ran 3:54 per km for the next 5k, but still found ourselves about 45 seconds behind schedule with a 10k split of 40:28. During this stretch, we were passing runner after runner from the A group, many in fancy dress, including a young woman in a fairy outfit complete with wings. I wondered if the wings qualified as artificial assistance. We also caught and passed Rog, who assured us that he was going OK after his fast start.

10k to 15k was a good split at 3:56 per km, bringing us within nine seconds of 4 minute k's (1:00.09). I was feeling pretty good, but working harder than I would have liked. I remember passing a guy in a cow costume and noting that he was going pretty well for a guy in a cow costume.

There was a turnaround point at around 16k, so this was our first opportunity to see how the other Midday Milers were going. Bacchus looked strong, but also appeared to be working hard. MJ looked smooth. After the turn, we got to wave to Rog and Coalminer coming the opposite way behind us. It was still freezing cold and somewhere along the way we spotted a brief flurry of snowflakes in the air! My gloves were not coming off in this marathon, that was for sure, but they were still great running conditions.



15k to 25k was a somewhat frustrating part of the race. House was doing a magnificently even pacing job, but his Garmin was now only showing minutes and we clocked 39:55 for this stretch, but we really needed to do around 39:30 to achieve our pre-race target. It seemed that every time we passed a marker, we remained a few tantalising seconds shy of 4 minutes per km. Our times at 20k and 25k were 1:20.04 and 1:40.04 respectively. At this point I told House that "2:48 will do", realizing that 2:47 or better was now most unlikely.



We continued to overtake runners and I cannot remember anyone passing us, although I am sure at least one or two must have gone past. The crowd support was tremendous. I gained some measure of satisfaction around 18k by passing Batman, who went stride for stride with me for about 200m before throwing in the towel. I thought to myself: you're not such an invincible caped crusader

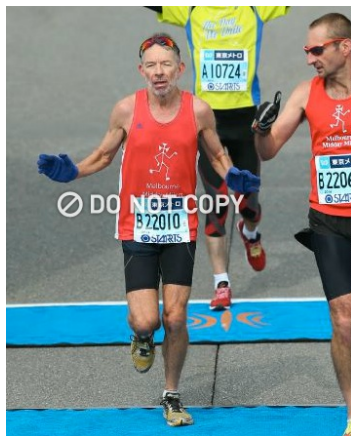
now, are you? You do have some unusual thoughts in a marathon – perhaps put it down to the overdose of adrenalin or endorphins.

Just after 25k, House seemed to become somewhat distracted by a runner in the pack chasing us. I spotted a guy in a white head to knee costume with a green sprout on top. “It’s a daikon!” said House. I had never heard of a daikon and learned later that it was a Japanese vegetable. So here we were, going hard at four minute pace nearly two hours into a marathon and we were being challenged by a vegetable! And he appeared to be smiling! Fortunately, he did not get past and we did not see him again.



As we continued, I noticed that House was drifting away from me from time to time and I was having to go a bit harder to catch up. 28k marked the second and last U-turn on the course and as we changed direction, I had a momentary “I’m stuffed” moment. Almost in the same instant, House turned to me and asked how I was feeling. I had to concede “not that great”. I did not know it at the time, but through 30k our speed per km had dropped marginally to around 4:05 per km, giving a split time of 2:00.24, which was 24 seconds down on our revised 2:48 schedule.

It was around 32k where I first noticed some tightening in my right hamstring. I guess that I should not have been surprised – a marathon will always find your weaknesses. Then from 34k we entered the section where we had to traverse the rise and fall of three bridges, one of which involved a very long uphill grind followed by a shorter steeper downhill section. Each successive downhill grade caused more and more cramping in my hamstring to the point where at around 39k, I was not sure that I would be able to finish. We were now running around 4:30 per km. 2:48 and then 2:50 became unattainable goals.



The 40k marker cheered me a little and, with House’s encouragement, I tried to run as strongly as I could from there to the finish. All I could raise though was 4:39 per km for the last 2.195k to cross the line in 2:53.46. Unfortunately, just 100m from the line, the diminutive female with the fairy wings surged past and there was not a damn thing I could do about it. So I was chicked by Tinker Bell in the home straight to add insult to injury, literally! The previously vanquished cow finished not far behind us as well, although Batman, the clergymen and the daikon were thankfully nowhere to be seen.

The results showed me in 480<sup>th</sup> place out of 36,000, which means House and I passed around 2,600 runners from the A group along the way. Age group placings are not yet available.

## POST-RACE SHENANIGANS

Initial thoughts were: that's it for me, at 56 years of age I have run a sub 3 hour marathon, and that is not too shabby. My hamstring was hurting pretty badly and I thought if that was going to happen every time I ran beyond two hours, well, there was no point in putting myself through it again.

But the next 48 hours showed me why it was worth it! Rog arrived back at the hotel, ecstatic with his performance. It was great to share in his weary joy. After a hot shower and a sleep, it was time to party! Natsuko had booked a Tokyo restaurant, where the food was great and the beer even better. Jug after jug arrived and was gratefully consumed.



We shared our stories: MJ jubilant after a PB and finishing full of running, Bacchus disappointed but happy to be part of it, Rog proud of his sub 3 hours, Coalminer pleased to have participated. Natsuko had run 24k before withdrawing. So our group was united in our achievements, great and small, and celebrated accordingly.

After dinner it was time for karaoke! We had a private room for two hours, which had to be extended to three hours as more beer flowed and everyone took their turn at the microphone (all except Rog, who would not be tempted). Bacchus was the Rapmeister and Coalminer's vocal style would have suited a



death metal band. MJ and House favoured more conventional fare, with the duet by House and I of Elton John's "Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me" garnering the highest on screen score (whatever that meant) for the night. We didn't hold back! After running almost stride for stride for 42.2k, it was great fun to finish the day still in sync with House.

There was Disneyland and lunch on the 59<sup>th</sup> floor of the Park Hyatt yet to come in the following days, but this report has gone for long enough. Thanks to all the Milers, both those on the trip and others like Lurch and LG who helped me through the necessary training, for making Tokyo 2014 an unforgettable experience.

### ***Postscript***

*For those new to the Milers, the cast in order of appearance:*

<i>Hutz</i>	<i>Mark Purvis</i>
<i>House</i>	<i>Stephen Paine</i>
<i>Rog</i>	<i>David Mellings</i>
<i>Bacchus</i>	<i>Paul Marsh</i>
<i>Coalminer</i>	<i>Gerard Koelmeyer</i>
<i>MJ</i>	<i>Michael Johnson</i>