

As I was finishing at work on Wednesday 11th June, I checked the Phuket weather forecast. It didn't paint a pretty picture – lows of 26 or 27 and highs of 31 or 32 along with thunderstorms for pretty much all of the next 10 days.

I was starting to feel pretty negative about my upcoming [marathon](#). I had expected the race to be warm and steamy even though it started at 5am but for some reason I had thought that overnight temperatures were around 20 degrees. I had suffered cramp in the very first marathon I tried (Melbourne 2006) and although I had run another two without cramp, they (Las Vegas 2006 and Boston 2007) had both been run in pretty cold conditions.

As I boarded the plane on Wednesday night I was even wondering whether I should downgrade to a half at Phuket and upgrade to the full at Gold Coast. I didn't want to waste all the training I had done over the last 4 or 5 months and in particular the 120km/week I had done over the last 10 weeks, mileage which was significantly higher than I had ever clocked up before (for the 10 weeks leading up to Boston I averaged 75km).

In the end I decided that it was just too hard mentally to swap: I had set myself for this date, deliberately picked a race with what I hoped would be a weak field, and told too many people I was running a marathon in Phuket. I also thought that if I could get through Phuket in a reasonable time, I would be pretty confident about being able to run virtually any other course in the world (with one or two exceptions!).

My goals for Phuket, in order, were as follows:

1. Live to tell the tale
2. Break 2.40
3. Win the race
4. Break 2.39.06 (a goal I mysteriously added on 2nd June)

As a bit of background, my previous marathon pb was 2.45.46 set in Boston, April 2007. It was run in difficult (cold, wet and windy) conditions. I hadn't run a marathon since Boston.

More recently (March 2008) I had surprised myself by running 32km in King Island (in warmish conditions) in 1.53.20 at about 3:33/km. I knew I was in even better shape now and this gave me a bit of confidence.

We arrived in Phuket on Thursday morning after a couple of hours at Bangkok. At about 4pm I went for a 7km run with my mate, Dean Godfrey, who would be running the half. We ran at about 4:45/km and were both drenched in sweat after a mere kilometre.

On Friday at about 8am I ran 5km with Deb, my other half who would be running the 10.5km race. Even at about 5:30/km pace we still heated up pretty quickly. After that we went berserk at the breakfast [buffet](#) before hitting the Laguna Phuket Golf Course for a sweaty round of [golf](#). The heat didn't seem to affect the caddies who were little old Thai ladies in long sleeves, long pants and scarves.

Returned from the [golf course](#) and thought I'd see how I'd go at race pace so at about 3.30pm I ran 7km at 3:39/km. I averaged a heart rate of 158 and it was above 170bpm for the last 2 or 3 km. I knew that this was not sustainable for 42.2km! Spent the rest of the day splashing about in the hotel pool.

Saturday came around and after again murdering the breakfast buffet of fried rice, [pancakes](#) and noodles (amongst many other things) we walked to the marathon expo to collect our race kits. Upon returning, I made one last desperate attempt at getting used to the humidity, running 7km at about 5:30/km. I was still sweating profusely but at least for this meander the heart rate was only 110bpm.

After this last hit out, I took it very easy by the pool for the rest of the afternoon before grabbing the hotel shuttle bus at about 5.30pm to the pre-race carbo-load dinner at another hotel at the Laguna Resort. The dinner was great and after a few speeches we saw some footage of the previous year's race and in particular the winner, an American who was about my age. Last year he won the race by over 20 minutes in 2.45.41. Back to our hotel and in bed by about 8.30pm.

Race day finally arrived and we caught the shuttle bus from our hotel to the start at about 4am for a 5am start. Dean would start his half at 6am and the two girls would start at 6.30am so it was a long morning for them. Marathoners who expected to take over 4 hours could start at 4am but would not be eligible for prizes. After a Gatorade and half a bag of salty pretzels I was ready for business.

My race got underway on time and although I wasn't right at the front for the start, within 500m I was in the lead pack. Within 2km, it was already pretty clear that this would be a race with only 3 contenders. Myself, defending champion American Brent Roeger, and a Japanese dude (whom I would later find out was actually Taiwanese) had already cleared out by a couple of hundred metres from the next [runner](#).

Thanks to my new Garmin 405, I was receiving plenty of data (some would say too much?) with the autolap set to 500m and constant [heart rate](#) readings. We were through 5km in 18.39 and bunched tightly together as we ran the still dark streets from Laguna towards Phuket

airport. The official motorbike was just in front with the cameraman sitting on the back, filming our every step. I have no idea where this footage is. Hopefully I'll be able to get my hands on a DVD of the race in future. There were a couple of officials on [bicycles](#) accompanying us also.

We went through 6 km together, a tight bunch of three but I was already soaked through from the humidity and 27 degree temperature, despite the darkness. There were drink stations every 2.5km or so but I had already failed to effectively grasp the bottles at each of the first two stations (how uncoordinated can I be???) and was becoming hot and thirsty way too early into the race! The other two runners looked comfortable. The American was very smooth while the Taiwanese had a shuffling/bustling but strong style seen in many Asian marathoners.

After the 6km I was not quite beginning to struggle but I certainly felt the other two were going a little too quickly for me and I didn't want to get sucked along and blow up at 30km. I wanted to run my own race and give myself every chance of running sub 2.40. I backed off a little and by about 10km the two of them were out of sight, leaving me almost alone in the dark with just a sole [cyclist](#) to show the way.

Without worrying about keeping up with them any more, I was able to successfully grab drinks at the next few water stations and they were great: not just plastic cups but 600ml bottles which had been kept in ice buckets. They were soft plastic which meant you could squeeze them to drink and they were big enough that you could pour the remainder over your head.

I'm not sure how far ahead the two leaders got but it must have been somewhere around 250m as I estimate that I lost at least a minute between the 5km and the 12km marks. Now I had "mastered" the art of snatching drinks at the water stations and controlling my hydration and body temperature a little more, I felt a bit better and unconsciously sped up, running the 6km between 12km and 18km at close to 3:30/km pace without feeling as though I was exerting myself. During this time it was very exciting to see the leaders gradually come back into view and by 19km I had caught them. I think they were surprised but the cyclist who had stuck with me seemed to be delighted.

The three of us ran together from 19km to 32km, maintaining a pretty solid pace, utilising the regular drink stations and all pushing the pace at various times though I think it's fair to say that I did the bulk of the pace-setting after I caught them. Nevertheless, to my eye it seemed that all of us were comfortable enough despite the fact that the sun

had come up at about 6.15am and the temperature was increasing.

Between 30km and 32km we did a couple more solid 3:30 pace kms. After about 25km we had started to get through some of the slower half [marathon runners](#) and many of the 4am start marathoners. Leading up to the next drink station at about 32.5km there were a few slower runners just ahead so I put in a few quick steps and squeezed through a smallish gap to make sure I didn't miss out on a drink. I grabbed my drink and performed the usual routine of [drinking](#) about half of it and pouring the rest over my head, all the while becoming aware of the fact that the footsteps of the other two leaders appeared to be fading. I looked around and the Taiwanese guy was maybe 15m behind me and the American was a further 10m or so behind him.

By 35km I couldn't see either of them but this was partly because when I looked over my shoulder, all I could see was a sea of the slower runners from other races behind me. Although I had no idea exactly how far behind they were, I thought they were far enough away that I might have the race in the bag, barring a meltdown.

At about 37km I passed Dean who was running the half. He knew I was leading the [marathon](#) and his extremely vocal encouragement gave me a real spur - I was still feeling good. Nevertheless, by 38km it was starting to become a real grind and although I didn't slow too much it was starting to hurt. At about 41km I passed Nat, Dean's other half who also gave me some encouragement but by this stage, although I was still maintaining a decent pace, I was regularly looking over the shoulder and was counting down every 100m on the Garmin.

After weaving through stragglers from the other races, the finishing straight finally loomed up and I was able to hear the race announcer advising the crowd that the first marathon runner was arriving. One more look over the shoulder and I was able to put the arms in the air, break through the ribbon, and most importantly stop running. I was greeted by a happy Deb who had finished the 10.5km race about 5 mins earlier.

Only later did I discover that I'd actually won by about 4 mins and that although the Taiwanese had got away from the American by over 100m, the American had finished comfortably ahead.

I did about 3 camera interviews (which were a lot of fun), one of which can be seen about 90 seconds into the following:
http://thainews.prd.go.th/news/andamannnews-files/20080617_262.asf

I also had several Japanese runners ask if they could have their photo taken with me. What the...?

Half an hour after finishing, I started feeling a little queasy but the post race food (which I forced down although I didn't really feel like eating) consisting of fried rice made me feel almost instantly better.

The prize ceremony dragged on as they went through all the placegetters for all the age groups for all the races (and prizes for biggest fundraisers) but it was eventually over and I received a couple of delightfully tack plastic trophies! I sat next to last year's winner, the American who has run a 2.28 before and now lives in Chiang Mai. He told me they flew him out to defend his title and gave him some free accommodation. I received an envelope with a couple of nights accommodation only but hopefully I can score some flights next year as I certainly plan to return to defend the title!

After collapsing by the pool for most of the remainder of the day, on Sunday night the Official Presentation dinner was at our hotel and like the carbo-load was bloody good. As the female winner was also an Aussie (living in Bangkok), the announcer invited us up onto the stage saying he'd play a typically Australian song. Expecting to hear "Down Under", I was a little surprised when "You Shook Me All Night Long" came blaring through the speakers. After another interview we enjoyed the rest of the night with many a Phuket [Lager](#) and plenty more rice and [pasta](#). The dessert part of the [buffet](#) also proved to be a big hit!

With the marathon out of the way, we moved to Patong on Monday and enjoyed plenty of [Thai food](#), late night [McDonalds](#), Singhas, Changs, Tigers and a vast array of colourful cocktails.

For the statisticians, the race details are as follows (the splits displayed on the race site are not quite right):

HR 5km Splits Progressive
156 5km 18.39.47 18.39
160 10km 19.18.08 37.57
163 15km 18.00.02 55.57
157 20km 18.29.68 1.14.27
162 25km 18.59.22 1.33.26
162 30km 18.33.24 1.51.59
166 35km 18.31.89 2.10.30
168 40km 19.09.28 2.29.39
173 42.2km 8.18.26 2.37.46

For "Sometime Forum Watcher" the stats are as follows:
Thai green chicken [curries](#) of note: Many consumed, usually for about \$6AUD each

Unfortunate mistakes involving ladyboys: 0
Love you long time (or even short time): 0
Full moon beach parties: 0
Copious amounts of booze post race: Yes
Nights where I couldn't remember how I got home: 2
Thai massages: 3
Nights spent listening to dodgy coverbands at Rock City, Patong: 4
Number of Go-Go bars/ping pong shows I was allowed visit: 0
Number of suits bought from dodgy Indian tailors: 0

I suspect "Sometime Forum Watcher" will be somewhat disappointed with these results and to this end I pledge to return next year.

In summary, I was over the moon to achieve all my goals and although I should probably now aim at a race in a flat, cool environment, I am very tempted to have a crack at Honolulu in December as my next big one.

With regard to Phuket, I would recommend the race due to the flat course, excellent organisation, great pre and post race dinners, and the excuse for a holiday in a part of the world that offers something for everyone at a very good price! The hospitality of the locals is also very impressive.

Other recommendations include the Garmin 405 – I'm a big fan!

I'll try to post a few photos on Facebook in the coming days.