

## The Background

Our posse this year numbered 14 and included Milers (Dizzy, The Job and The Webmistress), family, work colleagues and various other friends. Pre-race we were also joined by two additional marathon debutants, former AFL boundary umpires Shane Jansen and Adam McDonald, bringing the group to 16.



Having missed the race in 2011 after competing in the previous 3 years, I was keen to perform well, especially as the 2011 winner had broken my course record running 2:33:51 despite apparently sleeping on the beach the night before and entering the race 5 minutes before the cut-off!

I was hoping rather than expecting to run well, having trained reasonably but having run the smallest no. of kms in any of my 4 Phuket Marathon build-ups to date. I'd had a couple of little niggles and Oxfam was probably a little too close to allow a quality preparation but in the 7 weeks leading up to Phuket following Oxfam on 20<sup>th</sup> April, I'd averaged 94kms per week.

I was hoping that although I was probably in the worst shape I'd been leading into Phuket, a bit of experience and my attempts to acclimatise by running in jacket, beanie and gloves pretty much every day for 5 weeks would more than make up for my preparation.

I wanted to win the race (though this would depend on who turned up) and if things went perfectly, I hoped to re-claim the course record. I certainly left Australia hoping to run no worse than 2.40.

We arrived in Phuket at about 9pm on Thursday evening (the latest I've arrived before this race having usually travelled on the Wednesday) and managed a couple of light jogs on Friday and Saturday along with a damp game of golf on Friday. Conditions were warm and steamy.



We attended the carbo-load dinner on Saturday evening, an event which did not compare favourably to that of previous years (despite the attendance of Miss Thailand) due to long, long queues for cold, uncooked pasta.



## The Race

Being older and wiser this time around, I managed to avoid alcohol on the days leading up to the race and made it to the startline for the 4.30am start feeling reasonably good about things.

The plan I'd devised pre-race was to attempt about 3:40/km which would give me a shot at the record if I had a good day but even at 4.30am it was at least 25/26 degrees and close to 100% humidity with heavy rain having fallen that night. I also had a plan to run based on heart rate but this quickly went out the window when I realised I'd left the HRM at home.

The race got underway and it quickly became apparent that a 2:34 marathon would not be required to win. I had started conservatively with 3:46 and 3:42 for the first 2kms and had already opened up a lead of several seconds as we ran through the dark streets away from Laguna and north towards Phuket airport. I made the early decision to focus on winning the race rather than chasing a time and blowing up.

I passed through 5km in 19:16, having extended my lead despite running only 3:58, 3:56 and 3:54 for the last three kilometres. I decided to aim to run a tick under 4 mins/km for the remainder of the race, figuring that this would give me a reasonable margin and should be readily sustainable even in the conditions.

The 10km marker came up in about 39:11 and by this stage I could no longer see the glow of the lamp from the bike accompanying 2<sup>nd</sup> place. I felt comfortable enough though I was already drenched in sweat and pretty warm. The drink stations were plentiful and I was a big fan of the sports drink being offered, 100 Plus. Try it!

I pushed on over a few testing undulations with little company apart from the lead bike and a police car before hitting a hairpin turnaround and the first timing mat at about 19.5km in 1:17:05. This would give me the chance to check my lead and I counted out almost 45 seconds as I headed back towards second place, meaning my lead was close to 90 seconds.

I brought up the second 10kms in a similar time to the first 10km and clocked up the half marathon in about 1:23 (allowing for a bit of Garmin error).

It was a nice feeling to be heading back towards the finish line as daylight started to emerge but the 5km from 21 to 26 slowed me down a bit despite being little more than a very gradual rise. 20:12 was my time for this section but I pushed on and was able to regain my momentum covering the 5km from 26 to 31 in 19:41.

The 30km timing mat gave me a time of 1:57:31 and showed I had a lead of 62 seconds. I had no idea of this at the time but had assumed that given my fairly constant pace my lead would have grown rather than shrunk. For this reason I was very surprised to have a look over my shoulder at about 32km and see someone only a couple of hundred metres behind and even more surprised to look again a minute or two later and see how much closer he was.

I was passed between 32 and 33 kms by a bloke who was absolutely flying. I had still been moving along reasonably well but I knew I had no chance of tacking onto him as he went past and I estimated that he was going quicker than 3:30/km. At this point it's fair to say I dropped my bundle. Thoughts of winning vanished and I just wanted the race to be over.

My pace dropped off and I covered the 34<sup>th</sup> km in almost 4:20. An American guy went past, not quite as quickly as the first bloke, but kindly took the time to ask if he could assist in dragging me along but he was going too fast so I congratulated him and sent him on his way. I held onto 3<sup>rd</sup> until another guy flew past at 36km and I was now officially out of the placings. I had basically given up and just wanted to finish in a time that began with a 2. I was running kms in over 4:30 and I was actually stopping at drink stations to rehydrate.

At 36.5km the first local passed me. He wasn't travelling as well as the others and took some time to shuffle off into the distance. One more runner passed me at 39km and I hit 40km having run the last 5kms in about 22:30. At about 35km we had merged with the middle of the 10.5km race so it was now difficult to tell whether people from the marathon were catching from behind.

I sped up a little for the last 2km, covering them in under 8:30 and crossed the finish line to very little fanfare amongst a sea of 10.5km finishers.

### **Post Race**

Thank God it was over. It was very hot and I was sporting some nasty chafing. I'd had a crack and come up well short. I saw a mate and went over to have a chat. He asked if I was disappointed and I said "Yeah, I wanted to win but some of the guys were just way too quick in the second half. I don't think I could have beaten them even at my best. I guess I'll take 5<sup>th</sup> though – hopefully 5<sup>th</sup> scores me an age group prize." (I'm trying to think like a triathlete already...)

He said "What are you talking about? You came 2<sup>nd</sup>! The winner only finished a couple of minutes ago!"

It gradually dawned on me that some of the guys who'd passed me had been running the half marathon and the more I thought about it, the more obvious it became:

- The lead bike had stayed with me the whole race
- The first couple of guys who had passed me were going way too quickly to be marathoners
- I had heard that a couple of gun triathletes were running the half and a couple of the guys who passed me had certainly covered themselves in lycra
- The police car had stayed with me until 36.5km. When it left I assumed it was because there were too many 10.5km runners around but it was at this point that I had been passed by the winning marathoner

The more I thought about it the more disappointed I was with my run. Irrespective of the fact that I'd made the novice mistake of confusing which races my fellow contestants were running, I should have continued to run to the best of my ability.



Even if a hundred people had run past. I don't think I've ever just given up in a marathon like that before. I can only put it down to the fact that I thought I had the race in the bag at 31km but a mere km later believed I had been blown out of the water. My mindset had changed so quickly.

Don't get me wrong, I was doing it tough, but could I have gone harder? Definitely. Could I have won? Maybe. I have only myself to blame and I remain very angry with myself. From the last timing mat I ran a very slow 17:51 (for about 4.2km) but still put a couple of seconds into the winner. The internet is now full of articles with titles including the words "...Denies Paine a Hat-Trick..."! Aaaaarrgggh!

Conditions were tough but I don't think they were any worse than for previous Phuket Marathons and the race was there for the taking with the winning time the slowest for at least 5 or 6 years. I'll need to significantly HTFU if I'm going to run a marathon off the bike in a few months time!

I guess the difficulty of the day is shown by the fact that the 3<sup>rd</sup> placed half marathon runner Fredrik Croneborg ran 1:16:40, a time he beat by almost a minute two weeks later **off the bike** in coming 3<sup>rd</sup> at Japan 70.3. And he's a Swede who lives and trains in Phuket!

Many of the others did well with The Webmistress and The Job claiming age group prizes and Dizzy finishing 5<sup>th</sup> overall in the half (but 4<sup>th</sup> in his age group!) with Nick 8<sup>th</sup>, three places behind. A mate, Dean, along with Shane and Adam (on debut – pretty tough choice for a first marathon) did very well to get around the whole 42.195km too.

I won my age group and was again surprised to receive a Timex Ironman watch with HRM for this but absolutely nothing for 2<sup>nd</sup> place overall.



Above: The happy finishers get around team mascot 'The Job' who erotically chooses to show just a hint of nipple.



Above: Who would have thought the ladies would be literally lining up to 'tap' The Job?



Above: Age group prizewinner The Job hams it up for the crowd at the presentation



Above: A few \$2 Carlsberg stubbies at the Aussie Bar for Collingwood v Melb the day after the race



Above: A day trip to Phi Phi Island

Following the race we checked out and moved down to Patong for the best part of a week and enjoyed many cheap beers, massages, green curries along with more golf and a day trip to Phi Phi Island.

Patong is a town with an amazing nightlife and a plethora of crazy stories. Sadly however most are not mine to tell!

The group were all great to travel with and I'd return again in a flash but who knows, maybe next time it will be for the Laguna Phuket 70.3!