

## Unusual happenings among running highlights

By Charles Clines

To really remember a race, just have something unusual happen. Because I have participated in many races the past 27 years, it's easy to forget the races where nothing was out of the ordinary. But if something unusual or bad happens, those memory are never erased. They take a permanent seat in the brain. Of course, the good things, such as PRs and beating your nemesis for the first time are remembered, too. Or so, I've been told.

But the out-of-the ordinary happenings seem to hang on like a bad hangover. Take, for example, my first marathon, the inaugural Dallas Trails in 1993. I had trained for almost six months and was in good condition, and had a goal of beating four hours. I had just completed my first 30K the week before at the Cross Timbers Trail Run at Lake Texoma. It seemed like a good idea at the time to do the trail run as a "warm up" for my first marathon. But I wasn't counting on rain the day before that would make the course a slippery trek over the rolling trails. Nor did I expect such a challenging course. I fell three times on the muddy downhills, but managed to keep my dignity mostly intact.

The first segment of the race was on one side of the start/finish line and the other part was on the other side, where you actually had to grab tree roots at one gulch crossing to reach the other side. I was told that the year before, it had rained so hard, ropes had to be used for participants to reach the other side because water was waist deep.

The trail on the back side was fairly narrow in some spots and I was looking down to make sure I didn't step off and fall into Lake Texoma on my left. Then, bang. My head smacked into a large tree branch and almost buckled my knees. I would have cried, but that wouldn't have been too macho. Finally, after the last hill, another participant and I mustered enough strength to run across the finish line together yelling and waving as if we had won the lottery. I was drained and saw the folly in doing this a week before the marathon. But this was so much fun, I didn't really care.

When marathon morning came, I was feeling good and had plotted my strategy. I decided to run the first 10K at a 9-minute-mile pace and then see how I felt to determine what I would do next. Well, I was doing so well and feeling so good, I decided to pick up the pace. Oops.

Remember, this was my first marathon. You sometimes do stupid things. I did.

I was still feeling good after 18, but was wondering how I would feel after the turnaround at mile 20 because as I was going out on the trail, several runners were coming back. My brain started figuring that I already had gone quite a few miles going out. I had yet reached the turnaround and would have to COME BACK. My math isn't so hot when running, but I had calculated this: This wasn't going to be easy.

When I finally reached the turnaround, I was looking for a sag wagon. My good feelings had been replaced by "Why am I doing this. I'll never do this again!"

To make matters worse, a cold rain blew in that really made everyone's day more uncomfortable. Fortunately, it didn't last long, but it did add another dark cloud over my deteriorating mood.

I was looking for a way out, but the only way back to my car was go head back to the finish. I had slowed to a crawl, and sometimes a walk. Why am I doing this? Why am I doing this? I will NEVER

run another marathon. (Of course, those words proved to be lies and I'm sure many other runners have uttered similar feelings during their first marathon).

FINALLY, the finish line was on the horizon, a line that I believed with about three miles to go had been moved to Mars. THERE IS A FINISH LINE AFTER ALL!! Believe me, I had begun to doubt it. Somehow, I managed the strength to actually run to the finish. My pre-race hopes of beating four hours had long disappeared and I crossed in about 4:15.

A few hours later after my brain began to function somewhat again, I figured that time wasn't too bad considering the trail run, the rain and my early "move." But the worst part was to come just minutes later. Because the course was on cement trails, my knees felt as if someone had drilled nails in them. The only way I could walk down an incline was backward. And I had a five-speed to drive back to North Richland Hills, which meant I would have to be using a clutch. Why didn't I bring a designated driver?

But I survived and went on to run other marathons and I won't forget any of them. But the first one seems more vivid, though the time I broke four hours at the Cowtown Marathon certainly rivals it. The Dallas Trails, though, definitely was more painful than any of them.

This is but one of my many running experiences. If you have a running experience to share, please [e-mail me](mailto:admin@clinesrunningcorner.com) at [admin@clinesrunningcorner.com](mailto:admin@clinesrunningcorner.com) the sordid or pleasant details in a report so it can be posted on the website. Send a picture, too, if you want. Thanks.