

## 2011 Halloween Halfathon (10/30/2011)

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We had a lot of races on this year's schedule, but decided to end with one just for fun. But really aren't they all "just for fun"? The Halloween Halfathon takes place at Fort De Soto Park in Florida and costumes are encouraged. It is advertised as "a flat course with no discernable elevation change", which was quite accurate. While many people don't wear costumes, I thought it would be fun to play along. I've run a couple of three mile races in costume, but this would be my first half marathon.

From past experience I knew less is better for running, so I decided on going as Tarzan. Julie was initially planning a costume for the 'orange and black' category, but I talked her into going as Jane. Shirley was also doing the race, but refused to go as Cheeta. We made a loincloth for me and a top and skirt for Julie out of leopard print fabric. Julie added a sign "Have you seen Tarzan?" since we wouldn't be racing together.

Packet pick up was low key at a nearby hotel. We had a choice of a white or orange technical shirt. They said, "I had a Spooktacular Time" and didn't have any sponsor names on them. The numbers were unique to each entrant, for example mine was 461 - the month and year I was born. They also preprinted our name and emergency contact information on the bib. They think of everything. We also got a small bag of treats and coupons. The timing chips were distributed race morning.

The official costume unveiling to the family was the night before the race so we could make any last minute changes and figure out where to pin on numbers. We were staying with Jim and Carol and it was a little like prom night with all of the pictures being taken. As I was standing on the balcony in the brisk wind, I was questioning my wisdom of running a race in a loincloth with a forecast of 55 degrees and 20 mph winds.

As in the past we were up at 4:15 and on the road an hour later. As we entered the park, the only lights were on the huge American flag that was standing straight out in the wind. (Not necessarily a good thing to see just before starting a half marathon.) We continued on to the north parking lot several miles up the road. We were able to park about 30 parking spaces from the start/finish line. It was pitch black and the sky was full of stars. They had set up temporary lighting around the registration and finish area, but otherwise it was very dark. The good news was that they had permanent restrooms. The bad news was that there were no lights in them - more new challenges. I need to remember to take a flashlight to the pre sunrise races.



We took our traditional start photos, got and put on our timing chips, and wandered around looking at the other costumes. It was warmer than forecasted, but at 60 degrees with 20 mph winds it was still a little chilly. We decided to sit in Shirley's car until closer to the start of the race.

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The excitement was building as more costumed runners showed up. One guy had a shirt that said, "Got Honey?" It had two arrows and on either side were two women runners in bee outfits. There was also an assortment of super heroes, a box of crayons, skeletons, butterflies, and other misc creatures. There was a girl in a bikini and a guy in a Speedo, both with white body paint and fake blood. I'm not sure what they were, but they got a lot of attention.

They started taking the costume photos that would be used for the judging a lot later than planned, but we got through the line about five minutes before the race started. The national anthem was great and was sung by someone who normally runs in the race.

The race started on time and went through the parking lot for almost one mile. That gave lots of time for the group to spread out before we turned on the narrower bike path. The sun was just beginning to rise so I could see the road surface well enough but could not read my watch. The course had a loop that went by the shoreline and then doubled back so we could see the other runners. It continued back to the start/finish line. A cave girl asked me about the pace, and I told her I couldn't read my watch until it got brighter, but was probably too fast. That took care of the first 5K. Next was the 5 mile out and back section. We were getting very spread out at this point. The only spectators were family members gathered around the start/finish line and the volunteers at the water stops.



We passed a fort with cannons and a pier. We had great views of the water surrounding the park and of the Sunshine Skyway Bridge. About 2.5 miles were directly into the 20 mph headwind. It was like running up a hill without a top. It added about 20 seconds per mile to my pace and seemed to affect everyone about the same. There was a girl name Kristin that was running my pace. She seemed disappointed with the wind since she was hoping for 1:40 race. She was a local and greeted many runners by name.



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I was having a better day than I was expecting to have. I had not run in over a week and I had worn a “hole” in the side of my foot wearing my five finger shoes on the beach. I filled it up liquid skin and it wasn’t a problem on race day.



Around 8 miles we reached the turnaround point. I ate a GU to celebrate and enjoyed the start of the tailwind. The loincloth flapped around more with a tailwind. I reached Julie and Shirley around mile 10. Then there was one more stretch with a headwind before reaching the finish. I like the small races where they call out names, “Tom Moll from Indianapolis, way to go Tarzan, nice job Tom Tarzan”.

They had a nice spread of food at the finish including, water, soft drinks, beer, pretzels, oranges, bananas, rolls, muffins, and pasta. (Only pasta and oranges were left when Julie and Shirley finished.) I felt really good at the end and stood around and chatted with some runners. I noticed a girl wearing an old army helmet with a bandolier of plastic bullets and short shorts. Someone was taking a very close up picture of her. I walked over to see what was going on. Apparently she wasn’t used to wearing short shorts and wore the skin off her thighs – ouch! I talked with Ellen (cave girl), who runs two half marathons a month. I also talked briefly with Kristin. A guy in a tux top and shorts came up to me and said that a girl was looking for Tarzan. I told him that was my Jane.

I always debate whether I should walk back to see Julie and Shirley. I’ve read where it can be discouraging for the people still finishing, but is acceptable if you provide some encouragement. In this race it was easy to cheer for people, since almost all were already having a good time. It was also fun to see more costumes including bat girl, superwomen, rubber ducky, and butterflies. One girl offered me \$20 to give her a piggyback ride to the finish. She added, “I’m serious”. Another one said that it was encouraging to see someone with a medal.



As I walked back to meet Julie and Shirley, I saw the water stop volunteers dumping the extra water and Gatorade. I told them that I was going to meet my wife and sister who were still on the course. I was hoping that they would save some water. When I came across Julie and Shirley they were walking into the headwind. About this time Jim, Carol, and Anne drove into the park. They pulled over to take pictures. I think it looks like we were walking across the Serengeti. In most races you occasionally come across cups or GU wrappers on the ground, this race also had cat ears, tiger tails, neon feathers, and plastic spiders.

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As Julie and Shirley were finishing, the costume awards were being handed out. The bloody man and woman got one, along with Lady GaGa, and the bottles of beer. The announcer was doing an awesome job and was dressed as a pirate. She had to take a break from announcing to collect her award.



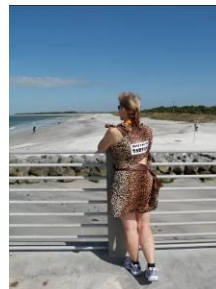
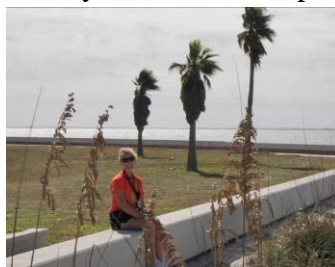
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As Julie and Shirley were finishing their snacks, we listened to the award ceremony for the men. I was very surprised to hear my name called out for third place in my age group. I got a bronze medal that was similar to the regular medal only larger. I thanked the presenter for putting on a great race and told him that I had enjoyed it very much. He said it was easy since the park provided the setting; all he had to do was set out cones. When we asked about the women's age group awards, we were told they had already been given out. They checked their list and determined that Shirley had won her division and gave her a Gold medal.



On the way out of the park we stopped at the fort and pier to do some exploring. We were still in costume. There was a family with a few kids and some comments were made about our costumes. I asked one of the kids if he knew who Tarzan was. He said that he did and that Tarzan was "Way cooler than George of the Jungle". A couple of women fishing on the pier asked if they could take our picture.



It was fun running in costume and I would recommend it to everyone to do at least once. I got a lot of comments like, "Alright Tarzan", "Nice loincloth", "Love it", "Oh my Gosh", and "Love your costume". A couple of reactions made me laugh. A little kid just pointed and laughed. Some guy said that he was glad that I wasn't in front of him because it would not have been motivating! I definitely brought smiles to faces – whether laughing with me or at me - I don't want to know.

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