

STANDARD CHARTERED- GETTING CUT DOWN TO SIZE

A little History

My story of a full marathon begins in March 2015 as I run my first 21 kms race at the Beyond Zero marathon, here is where I get my first encounter with the Swaras through an “urban Swara” tagging along a balloon with a 1.40 emblazoned on it. This swara, I get to learn later is Davis.

After the half marathon, I start entertaining the thoughts of a full in the future. As I search for a running group, I look up Urban Swaras, tender my application and get inducted into the herd in May.

Fast forward to October and 11 runs with the swaras later- including the ones talked about in eerie tones; Eco, Boston, Magadi, Flourspar... I have clearly come of age, a full marathon is squarely in my cross hairs, and the Standard Chartered is privileged to host my debut on the 42 kms stage.

I am not a well read person, but this marathon prep has made me read acres and acres of web pages, making me a desktop marathon expert. I can almost draw the chemical structure of glycogen and calculate to the last joule the amount of calories that will be burnt in a marathon race...

I only almost miss a step on tapering. In the two weeks to the marathon, I get set to stick to a downloaded taper program, one problem... I clearly understand **‘taper’** means **‘decrease’**, but implementing the mileage on this program will mean I increase my mileage... well, well... I make adjustments -on the program.

There is always a minor hitch in any preparations, mine comes up in form of a stomach upset Friday evening, I try to zero in on the cause and come up empty. I’ve not tried anything new, that lunch? Nah, pretty normal...

Then it hit me... earlier in the day, two friends had an extra complimentary ticket to the homes expo at KICC, I decide to tag along... It’s now clear to me that their bad taste in furniture must have upset my stomach...

So on Saturday I am on full throttle damage control, the ongoing upset has interfered with my carbo-loading; I had heretofore done a commendable job at thickening the armor covering my six-pack.

Not a problem, I’ll have to energize on the road. I embark on external carbo-loading; procuring energy bars (for the sake of my reputation -if I have any- I won’t say which ones) and lakes of lucozade, I then recruit two troops to act as fuel stations on Sunday morning. The rest would be covered by the Swara support crew.

One troop resides along Mombasa road, their area of operation would therefore be the loop at Panari, the other troop would set base at the junction of Haile Selassie and that road that goes through Uhuru Park.

Race day

5.30am I leave the hovel, first port of call is Ngong road to pick my first troop.

The said troop, a niece, has interacted with Swaras before. To satisfy her curiosity as to how a regular human could sacrifice Saturday mornings to go run, I take her to a swara run- the Run Together at Mai Mahiu where she ends up being literally pushed up the Boston hill and thereafter hiking a ride on the Otoro bike...she now has deep distrust of any run...

30 minutes to the run I medicate hard and energize harder, I daresay had I been tested at this point I'd be disqualified for doping. I feel fully primed to take on the little matter of a full marathon.

The 42kms start line is a meet and greet for swaras, what a representation.

I have an ambitious target of 3.30, kill the first 21 kms in 1 hour 40 and power through the second 21 in 1 hour 50.

How I arrived at this time is a mystery to myself too, could have been revealed to me through a dream for all I know.

Gun goes off, we do the loops through town and head to Forest road, I feel strong, at around 10 kms the evil one knocks feebly at my tummy. Not to worry, I tell myself, could be those normal fleeting discomforts customary to most runs.

The evil one knocks persistently, incredibly my tummy lets them in. Not to worry, the morning drugging, legal and otherwise, will prevail.

I slow down marginally to maintain my comfort level. Still focused on the goal though...

At 17kms, I answer the rather urgent call to inspect those portable washrooms.

I get replenished by my troops, she cheers me on like a mad-woman (girl really, but 'woman' sounds better when used alongside 'mad'...and before I raise eyebrows, the same would apply for 'man').

I take my lucozade ration.

I am a firm believer that every experience in life has lessons, this marathon hands me an important lesson in the following minutes;

I hate lucozade... that's the lesson.

*Nothing personal, I have used you while hiking and you are just fine, but for running, **NO**. Let us stick to your friend- Fanta Orange...*

I get to 21 kms, 1 hour 45 mins is the time... not bad, I tell myself, not bad at all. But I do a quick readjustment of my target to a sub 4 hr time.

Mombasa road, I get to Total, Susan had said there would be a cheering squad here, no one has showed up as yet, they're definitely still conquering tarmac. I inspect Total's washrooms.

The evil one gets down to work in earnest from here- at the behest of my handlers, I suspect. They feel I am getting too big for my size (I can't say they're wrong), time to cut me down to size. They're getting really worked up, these handlers... I revise my time to 4:30 for the sake of peace.

Swaras start zooming past, strong and single minded.

I get to the loop at Panari, where my other troops set base, I hungrily get energized as the said troops has the time of their life gleefully documenting my 'walk of shame'...



Fully restored, I do a test run assess my prospects. After a few hundred metres it is clear that I have to readjust my target finish time to **'some other Marathon'**.

I no longer attempt to run.

During the walk from Panari to Nyayo the steady stream of swaras persist... Otor, Sam, Timo, Davis and Elvis come round their second loop on their way to the finish.

A notable marathoner, bottle of water on one hand and a beer on the other, is welcome company for a while with his wisecracks.

'Is that Joshua?' A swara (what's your name?) asks at around 29 kms, she encourages me to keep going and for a moment I court second thoughts on completing the marathon, Ashok comes up two minutes later, I decide to give it a try.

I run for a few metres, nothing doing... time to hang my boots... unfortunately I'll have to wait a little longer to be enrolled into the exclusive club 42.

There is a sizeable herd of Swaras at Café Bistro, congratulatory tidings are doing rounds.

I am full of admiration (laced with just the right amount of envy) of the finishers as they trickle in, their senses of accomplishment infectious.

And so ends the memoirs of a nonfinisher... (Sounds like a good title for this narration... "***Memoirs of a non-finisher***"...too late, should have thought of it before...)

Congratulations to all finishers, you are indeed an inspiring lot. I definitely will be joining you.