

## **EXPLOITS FROM CAPE TOWN**

It was Ndungu Kahihu, our very own journalist, who wrote and I quote, ' McDougall in his famous classic, 'Born to Run' stated that the body of a human being is built to run. The body on its own does not recognize distance or fatigue and normal human beings can run almost any distance. It is the mind that acts as a brake, warning you to stop when, according to it, you go 'too far' and playing all sorts of tricks when you refuse to listen. Remove the mind's interference and a normal, healthy, human can run almost indefinitely.' This words never left my mind from the time I signed up for the 56k Two Oceans and I can confirm this is very true.

I have done full marathon before and it is easy to say 42.2 k is just 14k short of the Ultra. But there is no way you can prepare for an Ultra run. Not mentally or physically in any way I can remember.

Friends, let me put this distance in perspective. It is 56km from Nairobi to Machakos. Throw in a hill that will rise from zero to about...I am not sure, but it felt like 1000 and make it part of the package. I did not want to think about this before the race for obvious reasons. I didn't know how to train for this either and my goals were left to ensuring I finish within the cut off time of 7 hours.

SA requirements for VISA can be tiring back and forth affair. Go bring this go bring that. But that was the easy part. I needed to get another 'VISA' from my household parliamentarians who include my daughter (9) and her mother. My son (6) is always easy and I am assured of his vote any day, at least for now. This was a bit tricky to put on the floor of the house because the valid argument from my VP is that my indulgence, at this rate, is likely to deplete of the economy its meagre resources. For my daughter, how could I on earth put up a plan to fall on her birthday and Easter as well? And I am going alone, how? This debate required a very coordinated approach. It required lobbying and ensuring that popularity index soars to the ceiling weeks before the formal debate is put on the floor of the house. Though I got an approval, I have some promises to keep, lest I don't get this Visas in future. I am sure a lot of Swaras can identify with this scene.

I get to the Cape with a day to spare. Enough to acclimatise. Weather, beautiful for a run, but the wind is nothing I have encountered before. I am able to do a 6k tune up run on Good Friday just to test my system a little and careful not to tire myself. I am set for the big day. Surprisingly I am not tense. I remember when I did my first Full Marathon last year I was so tense the day before.



In retrospect, I think it is because I had set myself a target for the full marathon but none for the Two Oceans Ultra. My target here was to finish. Crawl to the finish line, literary.

The run starts amidst showers of rain. Seems great for a run. I am seeded in the last group E where you have to do a km before it starts counting. Make a mistake of starting your Garmin at this point and you will curse their timers towards the end. I get to interact with a few South Africans before the start and get tips here and there. The best one I get and plan to use is 'start slow then get slower.' Sounded good. We begin with a relatively flat 28k which actually tempts one to let go and fly. What the heck, I let it go. It feels easy. I am flying at an average of 12km/hr slowing at times to 11km/hr. I feel guilty about it in the knowledge of what lays ahead. My body is responding well and I pass the 21k in 1hr 49min. For someone with a PB of 1.42 for a half marathon, this was the first mistake I made, and I will pay for it dearly towards the finish. John Kuria catches with me at 15k. He too is flying. Wow, Swaras do put up a fight I tell you. We are head to head till 27k where I let him go. I can't keep up.

28k, Chapmans Peak, the Hill. A steady, not gentle rise, of approximately 7km. This is the killer. Your only saving factor is the deadly scenery so beautiful, too surreal a beauty, that you momentarily lose all your tactical concentration. You wake up to realise you not running. You almost stopped.

Endless hills started at the half mark, and it is going to be like this to the end. Going up or going down. I am preferring going up the hills because my brakes (knees) seem to be failing. At this point your mind goes into high level debate. "I think this thing is not for humans," it says. But again it changes tune, 'yes you can, Jack you can.' The shame of stopping to walk when you are surrounded by cheerers all



over and you are donning a Kenyan Flag is too much to bear. I had read that the Chapmans road has twice been closed due to falling stones and so my mind goes again 'What would happen if a huge rock just rolled down on my head, and you are surrounded runners who seem like they would not give a damn? This goes on and on.

Two Oceans is very well organised apparently and you get full support. Water is in plenty, coke, isotonic drinks and bananas. Even boiled potatoes. Every one km you find all these and you can even get massaged in one of the medical tents. At 39k I began getting clamps. They don't warn. I get massaged but it doesn't seem to work. I only end up losing my rhythm. Its only when I realised the magic of rubbing ice that I got some hope of finishing. I cross the full marathon mark 4hrs 2 min. Not bad, I tell myself. The body at this point is full of aches. No one is talking and everyone is easily irritable. The legs are taking most of the beating. There are still hundreds of runners all around. One thing unique about ultra is that the majority of

runners are 40yrs and above. Maybe it is in the discipline of training which younger guys may not have. Men and women in their fifties are cruising past me like I am not running. Kama nimesimama. It can stop mesmerising me. Your Running Bib has your age category.

At around 48k, I am walk/running. It is allowed BTW. I am icing my legs the at every water station. Grabbing coke, water without fail. The km markers are now taking too long to come. But the cheering as we get close to the stadium is thunderous. 'Kenyans don't let us down'. That must be a Kenyan and I realise, oh yes, Kenyans are not known to walk in marathons. They win strong. The mistake I made was to don a flag on my tee. One cheerer has a placard saying 'you are warriors and worriers don't give up.' Another, 'see you next year, it's just a hill and you are done.'

At 55k mark some strange strength just comes. I can't explain. I remove my flag which I had carried all along and hold it high for the final km. I enter the stadium. Flag high. The wind is helping. 'Kenya Kenya!' The Cheers. I might as well have been the winner. That's how I felt. Closing the line at 5hrs 41 minutes. I am way off being swept by the struggler's bus after 7hr cut off.



I collect my medal and try to walk to the International courtesy Tent. My mind sort of refuses. Tells my legs NO and I can't make it to the tent which is 100m away. I just lie there on the grass. A Kenyan finds me and tries to help me up, but I don't even want to go to that tent. Timothy Macharia finds me seated at some edge moments later. He finished ages ago and seems so fresh but I know why. He had planned himself well right from Nairobi complete with massage crew. Just a few minutes ago I was feeling so good at finishing strong, now I feel bad about everything. I am even saying Never again. I feel nauseated. It took around 30 minutes to recover and get me to even walk to the bus. Nevertheless, I was proud that I did it.

Later when the pain is gone and I start thinking about what I just did, I come with this conclusion. This is going to be for the long haul. I am already looking at the 6 majors to be accomplished in 2-3 years' time, God willing. Thanks to Swaras for fuelling my urge to do more. One year down the line I am happy to have joined this amazing group of Crazy runners.