

Berlin Marathon-the story

My Berlin story cannot be told without highlighting the bit of training. Berlin is truly a place of PRs and I set out on a mission to set one too. This being my second competitive marathon and I was determined to lower my 3.48 to a sub 3.40. A very realistic goal or so I thought. I had trained hard and this goal was in sight but you can never be too sure when it comes to marathons. Things crop up last minute.

Training

I set my intensive training to three months. My compatriot in Berlin, one James Waliaula, helped me set my weekly training to something between 70-80kays per week. Initially I had imagined you could just run randomly when you feel like but boy, there is a way these things are to be done.

First Problem. Where in Nairobi can you train and get something like 80kays per week? Especially if you live in the East of the City. To counter that, I joined a group of morning runners that meet at Heron Portico every morning led by one David thuo and run different distances ranging from 10-20km. This way I was able to cover my prescribed distances per week. The roads on the upper side of Nairobi, kina kilimani, kileleshwa and Lavington have side walks so it is easy to get nice routes. I would also combine with Arboretum and quickly I was hitting an average of 75kays per week. I however shunned speed works in the early days of the training which came to haunt me later. I learnt a lot about marathon training especially about tapering, something I had never heard about before. My trainings took me to Mombasa for a low attitude feel and to flousper with the Swaras for endurance. Towards the end of my training, as I was trying to get some speed works, I sustained a shin splint injury, something that nagged me through to the race day. This was the most depressing of times during my entire prep period. I could even get nightmares, dream myself with a DNF after all the hours I had put into this.

Lesson 1: When preparing for a Marathon, place your speed work trainings in the early stages before your muscles get sore and tired as a result of weeks of high running routine. Alternatively, look for softer grounds to do speed works, never on the tarmac.

Lesson 2: Get your shoes right. It is the most important investment you can have while training. This way you will avoid a lot of injuries.

Berlin



The start of the marathon is very German. From the checking of the bibs to get into the right fold (they group you into corral depending on the timing you gave), or to the queues for the loos was a totally organised affair. I am a bundle of nerves before big races but with 40 something thousand people you don't miss petty dramas here and there and the hilarity of it did help ease some of my nerves.

I was aiming to keep my splits between 4.45-5.10. I was in Corral F, meaning it took me like 5 minutes to touch the start mat. The Pacers for 3.30hrs were right ahead of me. I conversed with my leg, the injured one. We cant come all this way and stumble so kindly know we are crawling to the finish line if we have to.

The swaras well represented



I felt quite claustrophobic in the first few kays, like I didn't have enough room to run. It did get better as the runners spread out further into the race but for most of Majors you have generous company throughout the race.

I hooked up some company at 7k. A Chinese man with a sharp goatie beard. It started funny. I was psyching myself by shouting 'Jack twende, tweendee' then he would mimic me. It became like a war song. I would shout something in Swahili and this funny looking fellow runner would shout back. It was pretty hilarious and it went on for about 15kays. At around 25kay we did not have more energy to shout. He also fizzled

out behind.

All this time, up to 30kay, my pace was abnormal and it kept getting worse in the sense that I knew the suffering one can go through in the last stages of a marathon if you don't plan your pacing correctly. Too much marathon science in my head. I am feeling good, I have the spring and my tank feels like its way above empty, Tweendee, to hell with science. Even my foot is feeling great. What was that injury called shin what? Lets Move Jack! I am maintaining some 4.40 splits on average. I swear they might check me in for some dope testing at the finish line.



My plan, if I had any, was to hit 37 kay at 3hrs. Here I was doing much better. Can you imagine I had even kept the pacers of 3.15hrs at bay up to 35km! That was rude. For a person with a 3.48 PB to run ahead of 3.15 veterans, I had to give way, but someone tell them next time I won't. However 3.30 pacers were not going to be lucky with me.

3hrs come at 38.5km. I could walk home and finish under 3.40, my target time. At this stage everyone seem to have run out of Fuel. You have to keep running because the cheering crowd lined up at the sides wont let you walk. My Chinese Friend shows up at 40k mark. We exchange some knowing nods. No shouting this time. We have no energy. My pace has gone down to an average of 5.45m/k. I was pushing.

I have always said I don't have much talent as a runner, in fact its something I took up to try and push years back (wink), but my mind is what compensates to get the job done. Despite my slowed pace, it felt like people were coming at me, running backwards!

I pushed on, thinking of everyone at home who'd be following, the 4am wake ups to go run and the hard work in general. I also remembered to thank my leg for cooperating. I turned a corner(they are so many on this marathon) and suddenly the Brandenburg gate was upon me. I let it all out. My wife is here (she had mobilised a cheering squad) and she lets out a shout -YOU ARE ALMOST DONE! This must have improved my pace by 5seconds. The final Stretch. The final km of Berlin Marathon is surreal. You can practically taste the alcohol free beer they are serving at the end. I knew I was going to be incredibly close to a sub 3.20. My watch told me so. I instantly forgot about the pain and was hit by a massive wave of pride and accomplishment.

I made it, just 3.21.04, but my Garmin read 3.19.45. I will chose who to believe. I am a sub 3.20, I don't want to know. This was not the race I had planned for. I had smashed the goal that had brought me to Berlin. Running a PB is never an easy task and it takes a lot of grit and determination to push through. It had taken a lot of mental strength and sheer competitiveness to get a PB I had never dreamt of.

If you are looking for an international marathon to run, then Berlin is a must! It's one of the flattest courses around the world so expect to run ridiculously fast. I didn't expect to run a sub 3.30. I shaved off an incredible 27 minutes off my previous PR. I know it will be hard for me to lower this but it will give me the mental boost I require to do more and more running. One Elvis, the very one of swara promised me a Mbuzi if I do a sub 3:30. Now you know, never make bets with Berlin, PRs happen.

Thanks to all of the people who assisted me in my Preps. My family for the space and encouragement. My coaches James Waliaula and David Thuo.

James Waliaula had his share of Drama with this marathon and I believe he is going to share



The alcohol free malt beer they serve at the finishing line feels sooo good