

A 'blistered' account of NYC's marathon

By PATRICK GRISKUS

LIFE IS full of disappointments, excuses and blisters. New York gave me a fair portion of all three. In a year in which I had run in three other marathons, six triathlons (including an ironman), up Mount Washington and the Empire State Building, I looked forward to the New York City race as my best effort yet. Instead, the best that could be said for my eighth marathon was that it was my eighth marathon.

It could be that my ambitions were unrealistic, at least that is one of the things that I have been told. But my initial goal to run a sub-3:40 race here was, to my way of thinking, almost conservative. And earlier in the year when I had first put New York on my schedule, I delighted in its late October date, so close to the cusp of November. It was sure to be cool and maybe even cold. But what do I know? The temperature at street level that day, taking into account the congestion of the runners, was in the mid-80's and, even worse, the humidity hit the 96 percent mark. I knew that I was in trouble.

The numbers themselves give some indication as to the kind of day it was. For example, in the 1983 NYC Marathon just nine participants were taken to the hospital. In this year's race more than 200 made the trip. Also it appears that more than 4,000 runners dropped out and the number of people treated at the medical tents in the finish area topped 1,100. Most unhappily, there was even a fatality among the runners when a 48-year-old Frenchman was stricken by cardiac arrest on the Queensboro Bridge. He died and soon after.

Compared to the latter, my problems that day were slight. My time of 4:47:57 was a personal worst. But even in retrospect, I can almost say that I don't care because the reasons for my failure were honestly out of my control.

During the first 13.1 miles of the marathon course, I could never comfortably hit the stride I knew I needed to break 3:40. After a frustratingly slow first mile that took me nearly 12 minutes, I had all I could do to run at a pace of eight minutes plus. When I hit the halfway split, the clock read 1:53. I had planned on being there at 1:45 or less. I was still on a sub-four hour pace with minutes to spare, but I was beginning to feel a sharp amount of pain in my stump. Ordinarily this kind of thing doesn't really begin to bother me until after 20 miles. Also, and this I couldn't believe, I was starting to get dizzy from the sun and humidity. I don't know why, but I told myself that once I reached Manhattan, all the peo-



NEW YORK MARATHON winner Orlando Pizzalato, above, is applauded as he nears the finish line escorted by city police. Below, Adel Solbakken, 69, of Norway, on the right, is applauded by a marathon volunteer as she is the last person to cross the finish line at 9:55:35 — more than seven hours and 40 minutes after Pizzalato crossed the same line.

ple's cheering would make me feel better. I wish that I could have said that it did, but all that I got from the noise was a keener edge to the ache in my head. It was around this point that I began to think about dropping out, but when I noticed Bobby D'Amico in the crowd. He asked me if I was okay. At first I didn't recognize him and told him yes. And then I realized that I hadn't recognized him and told him no. Either way, it made no difference as I continued running and falling further

behind even the revised schedules that I kept setting for myself.

It began to dawn on me that I wasn't going to break four hours and that maybe I really should quit. After all, I rationalized, what was there to prove and there would always be other marathons to make things right. I mulled this over as I ran until a little past the 18-mile mark and had to stop and remove my prosthesis. The water accumulation inside its socket was finally too much to ignore. I took the leg

off and poured out a good cup of water. While I was standing there on one leg, a member of the marathon's medical staff came by and told me not to move, that he would be right back with a stretcher. I told him that I was alright, but he didn't appear to be interested. While he was gone, I put my leg back on and took off. For the remainder of the course, up until the last mile or so, I continued to dabble with the idea of dropping out, but while lusting in the heart may be a sin it's not against the law.

With a little over a half-mile to go, my stump was bleeding in three places, my hamstrings and right calf were cramped up, and I had what was euphemistically referred to as a digestive problem and I wished I were back in my hotel room. I was probably past caring what happened when some guy ran by me and said, "Hey, why don't you try finishing with some style."

Reconsidering his words, I think they were meant to impress his woman companion and as such were not meant unkindly. At that moment, however, they enraged me to run. I can't say if I actually finished in style (something any punk can do — the trick is to run the rest of the race in style) but I did finish substantially in front of him, the 10,491st finisher out of an original field of more than 18,000. I had a little victory and a big defeat.

Patrick Griskus, 36, of Waterbury is a triathlete who has given a personal account of his athletic adventures in this publication — most recently his effort in the Cape Cod Endurance Triathlon, where he swam 2 1/4 miles, biked 112 miles and ran 26.2 miles. Griskus lost his leg in a motorcycle accident in 1967.



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326 Highland Avenue, Waterbury, Ct. 06708

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Registrations: 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. day of race

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