

★ **MINNESOTA** ★

---

**DISTANCE RUNNER**



**Spring 1986**



# Flack From the Back of the Pack

by Phil Hodge

The doctor was very specific. "The body does not replace cartilage. Your knee has damaged cartilage, and the jarring motion of running will increase that damage. If you insist on continuing to run, in five years you may not be able to walk without pain." "How about walking fast?" "Walking at any speed is fine. Bicycling, cross-country skiing,—anything that doesn't jar the knee."

When he put it like that last August, the decision was obvious. But not easy to accept. All summer long I'd been looking forward to the Twin Cities Marathon in October. Could I salvage anything of my life as a runner?

Well, a problem stated is a problem half solved. I would **walk** the marathon and would try to do it within the 6 hours before the course closed. Here, then is an account of the 1985 Twin Cities Marathon from the viewpoint of someone who finished number 3800 out of 3844.

**Date:** Sunday, October 6, 1985  
**Place:** Minneapolis to Saint Paul  
**Weather:** Start about 38°F, finish mid-forties. Clear to partly cloudy.  
**Time:** 5:18:23 (PR at this same race in 1982 was 3:16:01)  
**Locomotion:** Walking, every step of the way.  
**Pace:** First mile 11:33.  
Next 15 miles average 12:00.  
Next 8 miles average 12:30.  
Last 2.2 miles average 12:20.  
Overall average 12:09.

First of all, let me say that it was a wonderful experience, and I enjoyed every minute and every step of it. I'd do it again and I hope I will do it again. From my viewpoint all of the important things and most of the unimportant things were perfect. Every water stop was still operating. Traffic control was almost complete. The finish line was in complete and enthusiastic operation. The course workers were everything and were still cheering. The weather was brisk, but not too cold. The wind was mostly at my back.

Because of my three-year old record and my advanced years, I was given a "seeded" number which started me near the front of the pack. I hugged the sidewalk for several blocks until most of the runners had gone by and the pack had thinned to where the remaining ones had no problem passing me. However, thanks to my starting location and my adrenalin, there were still a lot of runners who didn't

pass me until the second mile; in fact there were a few who never passed me.

Going up the hill from Hennepin Avenue in the second mile I was actually gaining on a young woman wearing a bright yellow shirt. She pulled slowly away when the ground leveled, but was never totally out of sight for the next 8 or so miles. Meanwhile a few other runners passed us both, but the positions seemed pretty stable. Although over 4000 runners had already passed by, the volunteers at the barricades would give me a rousing cheer as I strode by. I could tell I wasn't last because shortly after I'd hear another cheer for someone behind me.

After the water stop at Mile 10, yellow shirt was running slower, and my walk overtook her. As I did so I could see a couple ahead of me who were interspersing walk breaks in their running, and I eventually passed them.

About mile 11, I heard that Coppess had already won. But I only had 15 miles to go, and for the rest of the race there was always someone in sight who was going slower than I. At first it was only one or two at any given time, but I counted about 30 still heading for the turnaround at mile 19 while I was on my way back, and for the last six miles, I seemed to be passing slower walkers in droves. Final results showed 44 people who officially finished behind me, but I suspect that most of those I passed early either missed the 6-hour deadline or didn't finish at all.

As I turned on West River Road about Mile 16, son Phil was waiting with camera flashing. He walked along with me for a quarter mile, but that was all he could manage at my speed. He did relieve me of my Lifa undershirt which I no longer needed. Then, at the turn onto Lake Street, wife Thea greeted me with a big smile and another camera. I remembered the wonderful support they'd given me during my fiasco at Boston in 1981.

The three-mile out-and-back portion along East River Road was great. It was really fun seeing some of the slow but steady runners on their way back, and the not so steady ones that I could think about maybe passing before we reached the end; and when I was heading back I could sympathize with the ones still heading out.

Summit Avenue was fantastic. I didn't believe there would still be spectators, but there were, and they were cheering and clapping. One little girl, about 3 or 4 ran off the curb as I walked by and handed me a flower. I've had a few medals when I ran races, but this was my first flower; I wore it

proudly, and showed it to Phil and Thea when they unexpectedly cheered me again from Mile 24.

On Summit, the marathon was even better than promised. We'd been told that traffic control would end at noon, i.e. after 4:45 of running. However, the St. Paul police were doing an excellent job of letting cross traffic through in gaps, but still giving marathoners the right-of-way.

The announcer at the finish line who'd been spotting runners for over 3 hours recognized me (or my number) in time to give my name, my age, and the fact that I'd walked the whole way. He incited the considerable crowd to give a bigger cheer than I'd gotten three years before when I'd won my age group.

Now, although my primary purpose was to enjoy the marathon as a walker, I also tried to view it critically as a member of the Marathon Committee. However, I only found one small thing to seriously criticize in the whole 26+ miles. That was at the intersection of Cedar and East Nokomis where the policeman at the corner was neither stopping traffic nor giving firm instructions to marathoners. This is not only annoying when we've been told that the course will be open, but it is potentially very dangerous. This marathon I was feeling great and was in complete control of myself, but I've been in races where I'd taken on too much and was hurting and thinking only of finishing with a stubborn pride; where any obstacle had better get out of my way, be it a two-year-old toddler or a Mack truck. And I suspect that some of the people I passed about then may have been in that state.

If I really wanted to be picky I could note that although all of the water tables were still in operation, two of them had run out of ERG. But they hadn't run out of enthusiasm—and that was worth far more. My vote for the best stop was the NorthWest Airlines. Not only did they have plenty of water and ERG, but they practically deafened me with their cheering. One guy promised me 26 miles Frequent Flyer credit if I finished! Come to think of it, that's pretty reasonable. My body may have been walking, but my spirit was flying the whole way. Thank you, Twin Cities Marathon.

## THANKS KDWB!

KDWB Radio aired a public service announcement featuring the MDRA. KDWB has become involved in various races and has been very supportive of the running community. We appreciate the help!