

# Race Report: Winning Cash at My Hometown Marathon

## Prelude

The inaugural [Broomfield Trails Marathon](#), my hometown's very first marathon event, was my "A" goal race for my most recent training cycle. And that training cycle has been my most consistent ever. I started running again last summer when my sister and brother-in-law invited me to train (remotely) with them for a marathon in Missouri, and culminated with 24 weeks of [Jack Daniels Plan A](#) this Fall (though I took most of the winter off). I averaged 85k (53 miles) per week for the 16 weeks before the race, and peaked at 113k (70 miles). Following the Daniels plan is the first time I've incorporated so many tempo runs and marathon-pace long runs in my training.

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Back in 2008-2009 I set most of my existing PRs and ran my first marathons. I wasn't sure if I'd ever really run that much again, so it has been a happy surprise to find myself making so much progress again and moving beyond old plateaus. ["I always wanted to die young. / Now I feel younger every day, / I only](#)

hope I die younger than I am.”

## My long-distance hobbyjogger cv

Mostly to refresh my own recollection, here is a quick rundown of my past marathon+ races.

- [Boulder Backroads Marathon](#) (2009) - I have no memory of why I decided to run a marathon in the first place. But I remember I trained for it using one of [Hal Higdon's plans](#) (I probably peaked around 40-45 mpw). It was unusually hot on race day, and the race had a late start. It was close to 90F on the shadeless course by the halfway point. I failed to adjust my goal pace or hydration plan for the temperature (I was aiming for 3h45m, which may have been ambitious even in good weather)—and I'm not even sure if I ate ANYTHING. I hit the wall hard at Mile 20. I walked the last 10k to finish in **4:37:44**.
- [Denver Marathon](#) (2009) - After the disappointing finish in Boulder I found another marathon 4 weeks out to run in Denver in an attempt to redeem myself and my training. It ended up being another unseasonably hot day, but not as bad. I made myself walk through the water stations to drink, and finished close enough to my goal to be satisfied: **3:49:48**
- [Marin Ultra Challenge 50K](#) (2014) - One of my sisters decided she wanted to train for a 50K over the winter and asked if I'd do it with her. I had not done any long running since my 2009 marathons, but I had been doing [some long-distance hiking](#). Unfortunately it was a very snowy and icy winter, so we trained less—and trained on trails much less—than we should have. I started way too fast, fell *twice* in the first miles

cutting my knee, and the last 10K of the race involved lots of walking. But we finished! **6:22:08**

- [Mo' Cowbell Marathon](#) (2017) - The marathon that got me back into running. I had no goals going into it. I roughly followed the plan my sister and brother-in-law were using which I think they bought from *Runner's World*. I felt very good for the last 5 miles (which I think were my fastest) and ended up with a 45-second negative split and 9-minute PR. Much better pacing than my first marathons: **3:40:54**
- [Ragnar TN](#) (2018) - This is a relay race from Chattanooga to Nashville (~200 miles) I did with two of my sisters and three of our friends. I think it was more of a challenge for our driver than the runners, but it is one of the few times I've traveled more than 40 miles by foot in a 24 hour period. Somehow one of my sisters managed to lose her shoes in the middle of the race, but she finished her legs on Walmart shoes and our team got 2nd place!

## Strategy

Four weeks before the marathon I ran the [Louisville Trail Half](#) as a tune-up and finished in 1:29:04. Jack Daniels' VDOT calculator gives an equivalent marathon time of 3:05:45 (just shy of the Boston Qualifier threshold for me). But even though I felt good during the entire half, I knew that was an overly optimistic prediction based on my mere ~53 miles per week. Instead, to find a goal pace, I put my 1:29:04 finish time into the more conservative [FiveThirtyEight marathon calculator](#). It gave me an estimate of 3:13:60, which is very close to 3:14:00. I decided to aim for 3:15:00, or about 4:37 min/km (7:26 min/mile).

Despite its name the Broomfield Trails Marathon is not what most people would consider a trail race. It takes place mostly on smooth, crushed gravel and paved multiuse paths. The total elevation gain is only about 1,000ft over the entire course:



*Figure 1. [Click for elevation profile](#)*

I did most of my long training runs on the course. On race day there was only one section — from Mile 20 to Mile 24 — that I had never run on before. I knew the most noticeable downhill and uphill were in the first 10 miles, making it both easier and slightly more risky to start out too fast. There is then a very nice gradual downhill from Mile 10 to Mile 20. The last 10k are gradually uphill (ugh). The course is a single loop, with the finish line right near the start line.

My plan was to end up at the halfway point no later than 1:38:00, and then hold my average pace until Mile 20 (slightly downhill), then hang on for the last 10k. That's pretty much how things worked out!

There would be no pace groups, so I'd depend on my Garmin to let me know if I was going too fast or slow. I'm used to pacing myself by kilometers, but the race was marked in miles. So I set my autosplit to miles but left the display in kilometers. That way I'd know how fast I was going but could still get my mile split times. Unfortunately I messed it up by several times hitting a manual split at signs which ended up not being mile marker signs. I also discovered that my old Garmin 305 only stores complete data for the last two runs — but I've run many times since the race so I lost all that data and can't consult it while

writing this report.

## Pre-race

Almost the whole family came out for the race! One sister and her husband flew from out of state to run the marathon. They had already done [a fast marathon](#) a few weeks prior, but decided to run this one as a training run for their upcoming 50k ultra. Another sister ran the half marathon. My father ran the 10k. Another sister and her boyfriend drove several hours to cheer for all of us. My mother lives near the course and gave us a ride to the start.

## Start to Mile 10

It was a cold morning, around 35F by the start of the race. I wore gloves (my hands still got frozen) and a long-sleeve shirt I planned to take off once it got warmer, but I ended up wearing it the whole time. I also carried a little 100ml handheld water bottle so I could sip between aid stations (which were every 2-3 miles, so it wasn't really necessary).

I ate a gel and then lined up with the sub 3:30 full and sub 1:30 half marathoners in the front group. I asked the guy next to me if he had a goal. "Around 3:10." I told him I was aiming for 3:15 and he said he'd be sure to tell me to slow down if I passed him.



Figure 2. Waiting for the race to start. Sucks to your anthem.

And then we were running!



*Figure 3. Go!*

The first few km are on surface streets. Past my old high school, past my current grocery store, staying at about 4:39/km behind some of the leading half-marathon women. I thought I would go out too fast, because I always do, but I actually had to speed up a bit when I checked my watch.

A bit after 2 miles we turned onto a gravel trail with some rolling hills and then the steepest downhill of the course. After the hill (Mile 5) I caught up with my friend from the start and ran with him for most of the next 5 miles. He seemed to be running a very smart race; he said his plan was to take it easy until the downhill at Mile 10, and then use that to speed up. I was a bit ahead of schedule, but I expected to be after the downhill. My plan was to stay relaxed until the halfway point and then assess my pace.

At around Mile 6 I took my first gel (I think I took one about every 5 miles after this), and my right hip flexor made itself known. It is usually the first muscle to start complaining on long

runs — but not normally until 15 miles or so. I hoped it would go away, but it never did — but it also never got worse. Just a strange thing it decided to do on marathon day.

My mom and sister and her boyfriend and dog had walked down to the course to cheer me on at the 6.5 mile point before we turned and headed up to the bikeway along the freeway!

Running along the freeway is not bad on a Sunday since traffic is light. Some of the cars honked support at us. The uphill to Mile 10 always felt hard during my training runs, but I took it easy and it felt easy during the race. I did get passed by some half marathoners here, including one guy who was loudly singing along to the music in his headphones.

## **Mile 11 to Mile 20**

At about the 10 mile mark two things happened. First the half marathoners split off to run back toward the finish line. They had to go up a short but steep ramp to do so, and I was actually glad I got to go straight toward the downhill. And as soon as the downhill started the guy I had been running with and the one or two other marathoners I could see in front of me sped off out of sight. I was averaging 4:37/km, right on target, so I didn't try to stay with them. I would be running alone with no other racers in sight for the next 10 miles.

At Mile 13 the course goes under the freeway and onto a path along the Big Dry Creek. The halfway point was very unceremonious. It wasn't marked in any way that I saw. I think I got there at about 1:36:45 according to my watch.



My plan here was to keep up the same pace for the next 7 miles. I ended up speeding up a little bit confident that as long as I didn't blow up before Mile 20 I would at least beat my 3:40:54 PR.

The only people I saw during this stretch were the volunteers manning the aid stations. They had cola, which I tried a few times! But mostly I took Gatorade, or water if I was eating a gel. At one station I tried to refill my water bottle and instead poured Gatorade all over my glove and already-cold hand. I then filled it with water instead but failed to screw the lid on correctly and within a hundred meters it was all over my shorts. So I didn't drink anything for those miles.

Finally I reached Mile 20 where the course takes a sharp turn to the west and gradually runs back uphill to the start/finish.

## **Mile 21 to 26.2**

Maintaining the 4:34/km pace I had averaged so far was now taking some concentration and various muscles were beginning to fatigue. But not 30 seconds after passing Mile 20 I saw someone ahead of me for the first time since the half marathoners split off. He was feeling the miles and I caught up and passed him quickly. He was young. It turns out he was the only under-20 entrant, and he finished less than 10 minutes behind me.

Just after Mile 23 the course crosses a street at an intersection. I must have been very tired here, because I couldn't figure out where the trail continued on the other side. The policeman directing traffic had to point me toward the orange cone

marking the route.

And then the most awkward part of the entire course. Instead of continuing along the foot path, it takes a detour a block down hill to the next street, around a traffic cone, then a block back up before rejoining the trail. It seems like they could have just moved the finish line a couple hundred meters and avoided this bit, but it did add an interesting challenge. Slowing down to turn around the cone and then trying to accelerate back uphill was surprisingly difficult on 23-mile marathon legs.

As I was heading out to the turnaround point I saw my friend from the start walking around the cone. By the time we passed each other, he was running again and waved. However, after I made the turn back up to the trail, he was off to the side stretching.

My own muscles were getting close to their limits—especially my left calf. I took this as a good sign that I had not held back too much, but the question was how hard I could keep pushing for the last few miles without anything cramping.

I saw another runner a ways ahead who seemed to be going about the same pace as me, so I wasn't sure if I'd have time to catch him. But just after Mile 24 he was right in front of me. This is where the course rejoins a path I'm familiar with, and I gained some confidence that I could hold the pace to the end. I decided to pass and see whether I could stay ahead or whether he would go with me. I think he slowed a bit after I passed him, and soon I was well ahead.

I tried to eat a gel around here, just to make sure I had enough energy to the end, but my stomach didn't want it and I ended up

carrying the half-full gel packet the rest of the race.

I couldn't see anyone else in front of me, so I just concentrated on not slowing down too much. Halfway through Mile 25 I could hear the announcer at the finish line. My left calf was about done, and my legs would not move faster no matter how much I willed, but they weren't slowing down either and I knew I could make it.

One fun thing about this marathon, which is a fundraiser for two local non-profits, is that despite being a small-town race they were offering cash prizes for the top three overall men and women. I had some hopes that because it is the event's first year no fast runners would show up and I'd be in the running for a prize. But when I heard the announcement of "the first marathon finishers" (clearly plural) echo over the loudspeaker that seemed less likely.

The last three miles definitely had felt like the longest of the course. If I hadn't had people to pass, I think it is likely I would have slowed down significantly during that stretch. But I *finally* made the final turn with 0.2 miles to go to the finish line. My family was there to cheer me on — and it turns out my legs *were* capable of going faster. They had lied to me earlier.



*Figure 4. Running to the finish. I'm laughing because my sister was excitedly running along beside me yelling things. I don't normally smile when I run.*

I crossed the line in **3:12:11**, a few minutes faster than what felt like an optimistic goal and almost a 30 minute PR!

I don't know my exact half split, but I estimate I must have done the second half a little over a minute faster than the first half. I'm happy with that pacing — I could have probably even gone a tad harder during the first half.

## After

Immediately after I finished my dad told me I finished in 2nd place! It turns out the announcement I had heard was about the first marathon relay teams, and only one marathoner had finished in front of me. The next thing he asked me is if I had fallen, pointing at my knee. The gel I didn't finish had found its way out of the packet and onto my leg and looked like blood.

I got some Gatorade and food from the food tent; my dad tried to find me something to clean my leg off with and came back with a large piece of gauze from the paramedics. For about 30 minutes I wasn't feeling so good — my head felt tight like I was at high elevation. But after putting a jacket on and walking (slowly) over to where the awards were to be handed out I started feeling better.

It turns out the guy who beat me is ten years older than me, so I got a medal for first in my age group *and* a medal for second overall. The latter medal came with an envelope containing \$200 cash which more than covered my entry fee.

I found out my sister suffered a knee injury (□) during the run (it suddenly started hurting) so she and her husband decided to

walk the last 8 miles. After the award ceremony we walked out and met them at Mile 25 and then took a shortcut back and watched them finish.

## **Afterthoughts**

Finishing second, and winning a cash prize, at my home town's inaugural marathon was very fun. The race itself seemed well-organized, especially for its first year. I liked the marathon course—but I was told the half-marathon runners had to stop for a train. Apparently the organizers anticipated it and had a timing mat for them to cross when they arrived at the tracks, and then cross again when the train had passed. That seems very sub-optimal. I expect next year to be more competitive, but I hope I keep running and am able to run it again.

Holding a marathon in November in Colorado is risky, but the weather was quite nice during the run, just a bit cold for after race festivities. My main fear was that it would be windy, but it was mostly calm until about 5 hours after the start (at which point the food tents blew over).

The local paper interviewed the winner (3:07:31). This was his very first marathon and apparently his only goal going into it was to beat 4 hours. He had an amazing race.

## **Shoes**

I did almost all my training in Saucony Cohesion shoes. They are heavy, but I can reliably get them for about \$30 shipped on amazon and get at least 800 miles out of each pair (running mostly on crushed gravel paths).

I ran the race (and my tempo and long run workouts) in Saucony Freedom ISOs, because they are a bit lighter and supposedly have more energy efficient foam. I chose them because I got a good deal on them (\$50 instead of the MSRP of \$150). They did feel bouncier, but I don't like how narrow and tall and cushy they are. Still, they got the job done, and I'll keep wearing them for my faster workouts and races until I someday get some lighter, more responsive racing shoes.

## Next

My sister's knee injury persisted and she decided not to run the 50k she had been training for, but they let her transfer 50% of her registration fee to me, so I ran the Aravaipa McDowell Mountain Frenzy 25K in Arizona on December 1 (the 50K was more than I felt ready for). I just barely reached my goal of finishing in the top 10 at that race.

My plan for the near future is to focus on the 5K. Now that I'm a professional runner, I feel like I should be able to run one of those in under 20:00 (my current PR is 20:05 from 10 years ago). So my goal is to break 20 before the end of the year. I recently discovered there is a [Parkrun](#) near me, so that should help!

My next organized race is a 5K in January, which I intend to prepare for by following a plan in *Faster Road Racing* by Pfitzinger and Latter (though between my 25K and cold weather I've done a poor job of following the plan so far).

# Other race reports

- Kate Avery of *Kate Runs Colorado* ran the Broomfield Trails Marathon the day after she ran the Rim Rock Marathon on the other side of the mountains! Her race report: [“Double Marathons – Rim Rock & Broomfield Trails Marathons”](#)