

January 10, 2010 – Disney Marathon – Perfectly Goofy

Central Florida is in the midst of its most extended cold period in decades and just in time for the 2010 Disney Marathon Weekend. But do 23,000 entrants in each of the weekend's main events – Saturday's half marathon and Sunday's full marathon mind? Maybe a bit, but at least



dehydration would not be an issue! I've raced the Walt Disney World Marathon eight times and the half marathon three or four times, but this year was content to spend the day training and thinking about my friends who were touring the Walt Disney World parks on foot.

My friend, Don Gworek, is one of slightly over 100 assorted runners, joggers and walkers who have completed all of the previous 16 WDW marathons. He has also done the 'Goofy,' which combines

both the half and full marathons, since this became a possibility with the half's switch to Saturday. The local radar did not look promising as runners prepared for the pre-dawn half marathon start. Twice the temperatures have been in the mid-30s when I raced at Disney, but this year it was slightly colder and windy.

Don was prepared for a trip to the North Pole. 'I dressed and brought lots of clothing options for cold and rain including a poncho, throwaway hooded jacket, Tyvek jacket, throwaway knitted shirt and a synthetic long sleeved shirt. I also wore Tyvek pants, an old pair of pants, tights and shorts.' The weather was nasty. 'Icy bits started to fall when they opened the walk to the start. Oh boy! Not snow. Ice fragments. They melted on asphalt, but accumulated on fabrics.' Years of racing prepared Don for the cold temperatures as he waited for the starting gun. 'I broke out the poncho after entering the corral. Icy bits accumulate and melt, and the poncho also had wind protection.' He sat on the old pants and a trash bag and kept the Tyvek pants and throwaway jacket on until race start.



The run started out uneventfully, but something odd happened when Don approached the two mile point. 'To me in the darkness it looked like we were approaching Spaceship Earth, which couldn't be possible. Then it took on the appearance of projection. I wondered how they were projecting Spaceship Earth. Was it a water screen like in the Epcot night show, a fog screen like in the Pirates of the Caribbean or was it being projected on the rain/ice? Then I recognized flames near the ground. It was a hot air balloon! The glow of the flame and translucency of the fabric made it appear like a projection.'

Exiting the Magic Kingdom was very dark but running with the wind toward the Grand Floridian was much more comfortable. Don noted, 'I took off and held the Tyvek jacket, knowing that

wind would be back at the 10 mile turn into Epcot. Back on World Drive south I was amazed at the continual flow of walkers in the opposite direction on the other side of the road.' Don was almost at mile 10 before the last participant passed on the other side at something like their 1.2 mile. He ran past the start area and saw clothing everywhere. 'The debris field along the Epcot area roads was amazing! Never have I seen so much discarded clothing before.'

The weather cleared up for a couple of miles, but rain began falling as Don got into the Epcot parking area. 'My Tyvek jacket was gratefully worn again. About a half mile before the finish I



realized one of my best friends was just ahead so we ran to the finish side by side for the finish line photo. It was fun, although there was nothing fun about the conditions.' Don chatted with a few other runners who shared a common thought, 'Aren't we idiots?'

As the thoughts of the half marathon were related Don was eating all the food he could and started on his second frozen pizza. I think he cooked it first!

The next morning Don was at it again with another group of 23,000 runners. There is a fine line between heroism and insanity which runners sometimes dare to tread. With a temperature of 29 degrees or so at the starting line it seemed that today was one of those occasions – especially for the 7,000 participants who ran the previous day's half marathon and now were running the full marathon to get their Goofy medal.

Don ran slowly to conserve energy and also ran with an extra shirt around his waist until the half way point. Then he changed into the dry shirt to reduce heat loss. 'Depending on sunshine, I slipped in and out of a Tyvek jacket during the second half, though I had it on all the time for the first half. I walked a few times in the second half, but not nearly as much as I thought I would and finished way better than I expected around 3:48-ish.' Don's last sub-3:00 marathon was in 2004 and fastest ever was a 2:41 back in 1999.

As a 17-time finisher, Don received a special lanyard. He also earned a special lanyard as a five-time Goofy finisher. The Goofy started five years ago, where you can run the half marathon on Saturday and the full marathon the next day. Less than 200 people are five-time Goofy, which sounds funny to say. Finally, Don got an amusing sash, "Perfectly Goofy", which he planned to wear to work!



So what do you do after running 39.3 miles over two days? Microwave some more frozen pizza! And Don says with joy, 'I love you, pizza.' The guy is 'Perfectly Goofy.'