

# **Riyadh Marathon – March 2010**

## **Race Report**

### **By Mukhtar Murtaza**

This was my third consecutive marathon in Riyadh & like previous year I dedicated this run to raise money for the charity.

After an anxious night sleep I woke up around 4AM on the race day. The day before the weather was awful so I was concerned so immediately had a peep outside, I could not see much out of the window, it was just dust everywhere. It was quite tempting just to call it day but the blank faces of those blind and deaf children I visited came rushing back and I was determined that I have to do this, just for them.

Anyway drive to Dirab Golf Course took 40 minutes and arrived at course around 5.40AM. After the usual chit chat with fellow runners and last minute top ups and toilet breaks etc we formed the starting line around 6.40AM and the count down began at 6.55AM. The only thought I had at that point was that I have worked hard for this day and lot of people have sponsored me to complete the marathon, so I am just going to enjoy it, sand storm or no sand storm. Off we went, the spectators cheered us for initial 200 meters or so and then on we all set our cruise control to desire pace.

The first half the race went uneventful but according to my plan. I do recall at some point my friend Tariq Sardar (playing golf) saw me and shouted 'go young man go', I looked around and there was no one near me. After the magic of crossing the halfway mark (21K), reached on target at 1:57. I was delighted to achieve my first 'mini-goal', from now on its going to get shorter and shorter, I was convincing myself.

Around 30K mark, while in my cruise control mode I heard hissing sound coming from behind, before I could figure it out, a runner passed me at speed, I knew that this guy is going to win and no doubt he completed the race touch under three hours.

Around 31K I started to feel stabbing pain under my right foot, I was not sure why but did not let me bother, in fact I decide that now on I am in a 10K race and during the 10K race there is no pain in the foot, I was doing my best to fool the brain.

I pressed on and around 35K mark I saw my wife, kids and friends when I passed them I could see the smile on their faces, they were shouting 'go Mukhtar go' that just gave me burst of energy, I knew that now I am going to nail this race. At 40K mark the pain under my right foot increased tragically, resulted me getting cramped in my right calf muscle, it was as though that my calf muscle will snap any minute. I wanted to stop and walk the rest to ensure a finish, I glanced at my watch, I could sense that if I stopped now I would not be able to break that 4hour magic barrier, again emotion took over & I carried on like a wounded warrior.

I slowed down a little and passed the 41K mark but the pain remained unbearable, couple of hundred meters later I could see the finishing line in the distance, I could see Maleeha, Saher and Ayman (my kids) jumping with joy and as I got closer they started

running towards me, they were shouting, 'go papa jan go, you could do it, you could go under 4 hour, come on.'

I was almost in a trance did not know where I was, I just had to put remaining few ounces of energy together for the last push and I crossed the finishing line in the magical 3:57, beating my last year's record by 17 minutes. I was pleased, I was emotional, I could not stand, my legs just felt like jellies, I need someone to poke with a needle to say you have done it, I have broken my record, I have achieved what I set out at to achieve at the beginning of the year.

But let me make this clear, I could not have achieved this without the support and encouragement of my wife, kids, family and friends home and aboard, without their encouragement and financial support for the charity, I would not be writing this success story. Well done all of you and hats off to IIm-oAml and Saif Manzoor in particular for providing me the platform to launch this project. Last but not least the IIm-oAml technical team for keeping the website up and running, thanks guys.

Would I do again? Well, after the race a fellow runner mentioned to me that now I am a seasoned marathoner so I should venture out of Riyadh/Saudi so who knows, perhaps London , Rome , New York , or even Dubai , sky is your limit!

I would also take this opportunity to thank individually each of you for providing me the support, I really appreciate that. For those who were unable to pledge before but still like to do it for the charity then please do so via website or by emailing me - thanks. I noticed that some of you made pledge anonymously; I respect your decision to remain anonymous but please ensure your funds reached the cause somehow.

Best bit: Around 100 meters before the finish line, Ayman (my son, age 6) ran towards me and while running alongside me he said 'papa jan do you wan to race with me?' I did not have energy to answer him let alone race him, he just took off and later he tells everyone that he beat me in the marathon.

Worst bit: When I got the calf muscle cramp, I feared that I would not be able to finish the race.

The key to my success: Lots of training, to be precise 1100 miles of training for this marathon and support/encouragement through out the year from my wife and kids. On the race day sticking to my race and fuelling plan, even when some runners of similar ability overtook me, but got my reward when I overtook a few during the last 10K.

Sincerely  
Mukhtar Murtaza