AIMS For a better birth...

Greater Manchester Marathon

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In September 2012 I was drawn to an advert in a running magazine, for the Greater Manchester Marathon. After a short investigation of the website, I had suddenly committed myself to six months of tough training. I'd only ever run a half marathon before and quickly realised that this was a very serious challenge. I was keen however to set myself a target of sub 4 hours, which is regarded as amateur runners' nirvana. By the time I joined the other 7000 entrants at the starting line, I had completed over 560 miles of training in wind, rain, snow and more snow.

The day itself was perfect, dry, not too hot with little wind. The course started and finished at Manchester United's Old Trafford ground, taking us for 26.2 miles around south Manchester, through Sale, Timperley, Altrincham, Carrington and Flixton. My plan was not to set off too quickly and to pace myself for the first eight miles, put in some hard work up to 20 miles and then hope I had something left for the final six.

The crowds of people all along the course were fantastic, they seemed to carry us mile after mile, past Salford Quays, Media City and Brooklands. Before too long I realized I was half way and still feeling good, my confidence started to soar. I pushed on harder as the course thinned out as the groups of runners got further apart. At 18 miles I was starting to wonder if I had used up too much energy too quickly but got myself to 22 without too much bother.

Suddenly around the next corner everything started to hurt, by 23 miles my body was starting to tell me it didn't want to go on. But what I noticed was that whilst the crowds had cheered us all the way round, in the final three miles it was the runners pushing each other to the line through gritted teeth. A great shared experience, despite the pain. When I finally crossed the line, so many emotions and feelings passed through me, relief, pride, excitement, a wave of tears and cramp. My wife tells me this is a bit like child birth, much like my statement, 'I'm not doing that again.' I'll take her word for it. I was even more thrilled to learn my official time was 3:50:56,which was a huge surprise, given my struggle in the final few miles. But a just reward for all that hard training, early nights and good diet.

I'm delighted to have also raised £217 for AIMS over the last month or so, an important organization very close to my wife Sam's heart, and now a week later I'm starting to wonder if I do fancy giving it another go!

Stuart Farmer