

Connecting the twins

Twin Cities Marathon, USA. 2 October 2005

By Sergey Porada and Yelena Kurdyumova

Minneapolis and St. Paul are cities both connected and divided by that great natural symbol of the American nation, the Mississippi River. Locals just call it "The River". There is friendly rivalry between the Twins, going back to the 19th century when each city padded the 1890 census report in an attempt to be bigger than the other. But the Twin Cities Marathon undoubtedly draws the rivals together in a common cause. For the 15th year in a row the Twin Cities Marathon hosted the US Marathon Championships and the US Masters' Marathon Championships.

In 1860-1900 immigrants from Sweden, Norway, Denmark and northern Germany poured in to settle the Minnesota Territory. St Paul became the capital of Minnesota State in 1858. Minneapolis has emerged as the more 'modern' of the twins, by razing most of its old buildings. The Downtown area contains many striking contemporary buildings designed by leading architects. St Paul has more of a preservationist instinct, with many restored 19th- and early 20th-century buildings. Scott Fitzgerald

and Sinclair Lewis, the first American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, lived in Minnesota at different times. Today, with a combined population of 2.9 million, the Twin Cities form the 15th largest metropolitan area in the United States and their world-famous "Mall of America," is the largest in the US. On any given day, but perhaps especially on Marathon day, you find visitors there from all 50 states and nearly every corner of the world.

The Twin Cities Marathon has become a festive weekend, catering to people of all ages and abilities. On the Saturday a 5km race and several shorter runs were held alongside a relay race featuring popular area mascots. Various entertainers and exhibitions from the Minnesota Transportation Museum and St. Paul Fire Department kept everyone engaged. There were free tours of the State Capitol, which celebrates its centennial this year. Its extraordinary dome echoes both the US Capitol in Washington, DC, and St. Peter's in Rome. The dome is smaller, but like St. Peter's it has stone ribs, deeply pierced windows on its surface, and a drum with pairs of columns separated by window openings (see picture below). The Capitol's interior is one of the grandest monuments of the "American Renaissance," that era of classical elegance at the turn of the 20th century.

At 06.45 on race day the Interfaith Worship Service for the marathoners started in the Lutheran Church of Minneapolis. For many athletes it was a good way to deal with the challenge ahead. By 08.00 excited runners gathered at the start line in Minneapolis, near the Metrodome Stadium. Some were equipped with headphones and water packs, some dressed in Batman costumes and pumpkin suits, wearing frog hats, bird masks and butterfly wings.

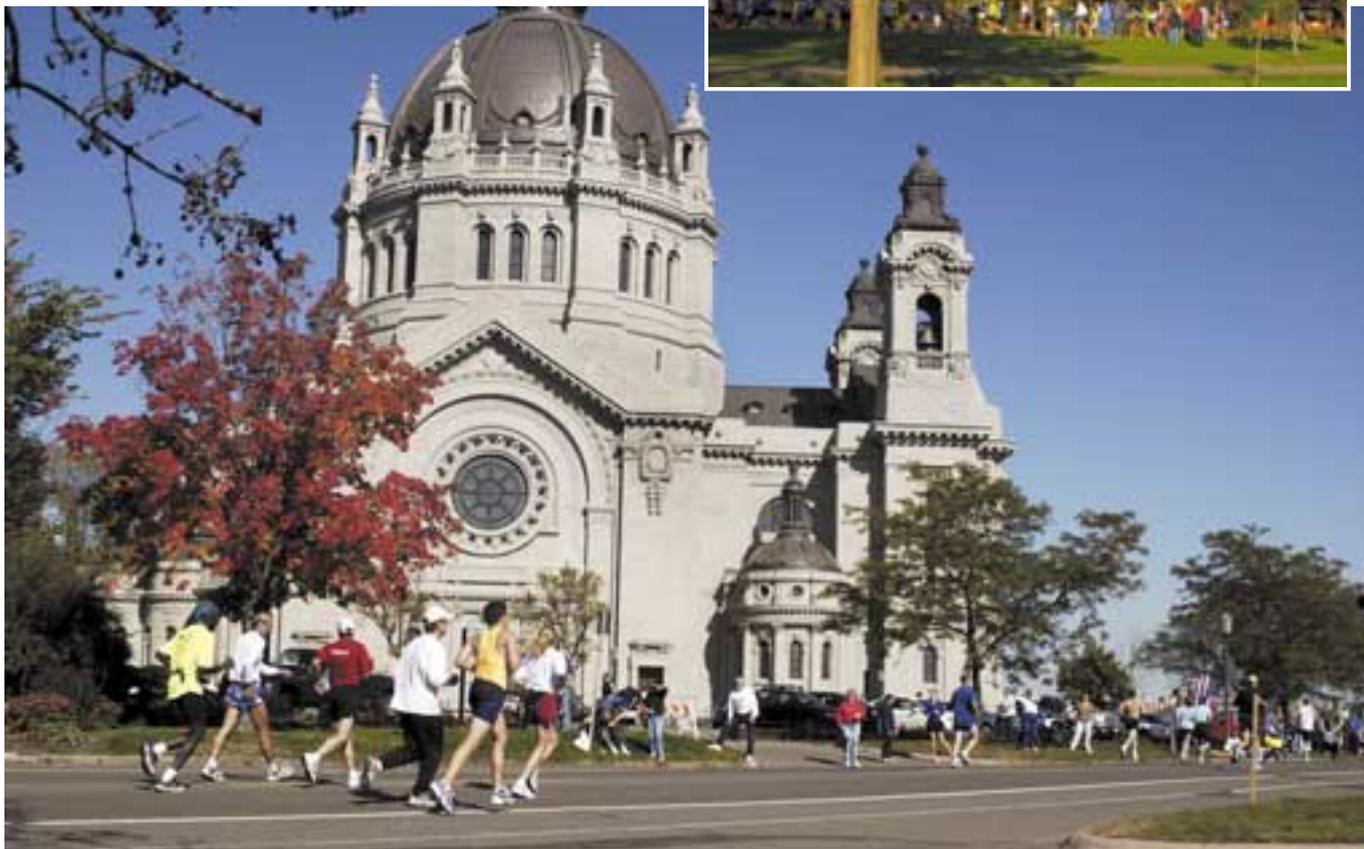
Bands and individual musicians lined the course and entire families came to spectate and cheer on the runners. The country-blues tune "Everybody Looks Good at the Starting Line," blared out. At 40km the St. Catherine Choral Society sang a doctored version of Handel's Messiah, cheering weary runners with: "But you won't run forever and e-ver... Halle-lu-yah, Halle-lu-yah."

Almost half of the marathon course runs along the shores of several beautiful lakes and the

banks of Mississippi, which earned the race the title "Most Beautiful Urban Marathon in America." There are 12,000 lakes in Minnesota, and the name means "sky blue waters" in the language of Indians from the Dakota tribe.

At dawn, an hour earlier than the marathon, 4,500 participants set off in from the Metrodome in the opposite direction, in a 10-mile race which took "A Short Cut to the Capitol". After three miles it runs into the marathon course and brings runners to the joint finish line between the State Capitol and St. Paul's Cathedral. The Renaissance-style Cathedral is situated on the highest point in town and dominates the St Paul skyline. Once runners pass this point it is all downhill to the finish. The 10-mile race has been growing in popularity over its seven-year history, especially among women who make up 61% of the field.

This 24th running attracted a record 10,500 runners from 23 countries and all 50 US states.



Photographs courtesy of Paul Phillips.

MEN

1	Mbarak HUSSEIN	USA	2:18:28
2	Ben ROSARIO	USA	2:20:43
3	Wynston ALBERTS	USA	2:21:42
4	David ERNSBERGER	USA	2:22:05
5	Brantley LUTZ	USA	2:22:34
6	Brandon LESLIE	USA	2:22:54
7	Mark PILJA	USA	2:22:56
8	Michael LITTLE	USA	2:23:00
9	Chris LUNDSTROM	USA	2:24:04
10	Michael RENEAU	USA	2:24:12

WOMEN

1	Nicole AISH	USA	2:40:21
2	Zika PALMER	USA	2:41:06
3	Susan LOKEN	USA	2:43:10
4	Nicole HUNT	USA	2:43:25
5	Johanna OLSON	USA	2:44:09
6	Christy NIELSEN	USA	2:45:19
7	Jennifer DEREGO	USA	2:45:22
8	Jill BOAZ	USA	2:45:34
9	Sopagna EAP	USA	2:45:57
10	Mary Kate BAILEY	USA	2:46:03

The first of them was Mbarak Hussein, 40, a naturalized US citizen originally from Kenya. The warm, sticky humidity and windy conditions kept him to a slow 5:20 pace at the head of a large lead pack. Leaving behind the skyscrapers of downtown Minneapolis, and the scenic neighborhood of five lakes, the lead pack thinned out to a group of eight at the half-way point at Lake Nocomis, and passed through in 1:08:27. Crossing the Mississippi in the 20th mile, Hussein, the younger brother of three-time Boston Marathon winner Ibrahim, pulled away from James Carney and Brandon Leslie. Despite the slow pace over the next two miles (5:40), Hussein's advantage grew to 300m. He went on to win in the second slowest winning time ever, but well ahead.

Nicole Aish, a marathon debutant from Colorado, remained the sole leader throughout the women's race. By halfway she was 3.5 minutes ahead of her nearest rival and by 18 miles had increased this to 5 minutes. Her early pace had consequences, and leg cramps made Aish stop twice in the last

five miles. She also finished in the second slowest ever winning time. Both winners became first-time US champions and qualified for the 2008 US Olympic trials along with another three men and twelve women finishers.

American marathon icon, 48-year old Joan Benoit Samuelson, 1984 Olympic Gold Medalist, was second master and 11th overall in the women's race with 2:46:27. "My last goal is to run a sub-2:50 (at the trials) when I'm 50," she said.

In January, Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty declared 2005 as "The Year of Fitness in Minnesota." "We want 2005 to be a year when Minnesotans make the personal choice to give fitness a higher priority in their lives. Marathons and other fun family activities are a great way to stay fit together," he said. He finished in 3:43:34, and First Lady Mary Pawlenty in 5:05:08, among 7765 marathon finishers.

Minnesota runners Moses Waweru (51:12) and Katie McGregor (55:11) led home 4090 finishers in the 10 mile race.

Commitment to the race, from both cities, is clear and exemplified by the 75 Charter Club members from different parts of the state and the country who completed their 24th consecutive Twin Cities Marathon. They are already looking forward to their 25th anniversary race.

