

On the run in Mexico

Tangamanga Marathon, Mexico. 25 June 2006

A letter from a Mexican runner:

Today's the day. I'm going to run the Tangamanga Marathon, my first ever. Last night my nerves woke me up and I looked out over the big colonial square. The university buildings were bathed in the glow of street lights. It was a beautiful sight, and I wanted to see more of this city of San Luis Potosi.

As I pin my number on, I think of my training but it is too late for second thoughts. I arrive in the square at 06.00 to see everyone warming up. Conditions are good – 19C. My family are waiting for me, and I want to brave the race so that they can see me come through the finish. We gather at the start in front of the 350-year old Government Palacio.

I start at 06.50, 10 minutes in front of the main group. We are in wheelchairs, blind or partially sighted, or, like me, on "muletas": crutches. My leg is shaking, I am so excited. I am determined to finish and see my children's faces. A huge group from Monterrey, 450km to the north, lets out a great cheer as the start gun is fired. We begin to run, as the sound of the motorbike security escort mingles with our claps and shouts. My heart races as I think of my family, but I see only the cobblestones of the road, as I take care of my own steps. The next street has big square flagstones, which are more comfortable for me.

We reach a park, and the lead runners pass us. Nine Kenyans are accompanied by two Mexicans, but all of them look so strong and fast as they chase the lead car bearing the clock and emblazoned with logos. The grass in the Park looks so inviting that I want to lie down, but no – I am running! Then we reach the main street, with people cheering from every corner "Vamos, vamos, tu puedes". I know that I can, but at this moment it is helpful that they remind me. We come to the first hill, and I have to concentrate, looking down at the road. As I realise I have got to the top a child hands me half an orange. It is a delicious reward.

We approach a big colonial building, maybe a high-class hotel – but it is the House of Culture. We passed Morales Park where people were running - they should be with us - and canoeing on the lake. But families got up to cheer the runners on, offering encouragement and soothing words. Then an aroma of cooking



enveloped us, coming from a local restaurant. It smelled so good, but I can't think about that. Maybe I will go back there later. With all these sights, sounds and smells to distract me, I was surprised to find myself at 23km. Here I was, more than half way through my first marathon but so far mostly enjoying a scenic tour of San Luis Potosi.

We come to an enormous park, Tangamanga Park number two. I have never been here, but it is immediately my favourite. The trees are tall, thick, and everywhere around us. The air is fresh, I feel alone and free – as if I were ruler of the earth. Black and white ducks swim on the lake, with the entire scene surrounded by palms.

But we are running a race. I am reminded of this by the aid station. I take a small sealed plastic bag containing just the amount of water I need, as we approach another hill.

From here we see the city spread out in front of us, but we leave the park after about 3km. Soon afterwards we pass by the 300-year old baroque Basilica of Guadalupe, with its many carved angels. The pain in my leg is normal, but at the 30km point I feel my back.



After passing the train station, another grand edifice, we run past the Alameda garden with its fountains and flowers. A another impressive sight awaits us at 38km – the old Federal Building,

surrounded by flower beds and flanked on one side by the Teatro de la Paz. As the race nears the end, even these impressive sights can no longer distract me from my own condition.



I notice that my leg is hurting more, and also my armpits. The crutches are working well, they are supporting my body, but I am slowing down. I stop to drink at every aid station, but I don't ask for the doctors. There is also medical support along the course from ambulances and motorbikes. I am tired and thirsty, but I picture my family in my mind, and that makes me stronger. Then I hear the sound of people cheering and clapping – I am nearly there. We

come into a big square, which seems to have something of everything: ancient buildings, a church, a band playing classical music...and the finish line.

It is so close. My dream is coming true. I finish with 6:25 and people are clapping me. My eyes are so wide open that I can't see anyone. I just gaze past the finish line cameras, looking for my family. I pass the line. I have done it! My daughter surprises me, waiting for

me with the race organiser, to hand me my medal. They look proud, and I am happy. I have won. I know that I can do whatever I want to do, if I do it with heart. Even if our bodies are not complete, our souls are. That's what really matters.

With proud greetings,

A Mexican runner

MEN:			
1	Carlos Cordero GOMEZ	MEX	2:19:51
2	Leonard NGIGI	KEN	2:20:02
3	Peter AYIENI	KEN	2:20:28
4	Moses SAINA	KEN	2:20:47
5	Francisco Bautista CUAMATZI	MEX	2:21:41
6	Bob OHYAWCHA	KEN	2:22:05
7	Ignacio MENDIOLA	MEX	2:23:05
8	Armando TORRES	MEX	2:26:20
9	Hugo MENDEZ	MEX	2:27:38
10	Jose ESPIRIO	MEX	2:28:01
WOMEN:			
1	Ma. Elena JIMENEZ	MEX	2:38:12
2	Lucy NJERI	KEN	2:40:38
3	Judith HERNANDEZ	MEX	2:41:23
4	Liliana FERNANDEZ	MEX	2:47:15
5	Karina MOCTEZUMA	MEX	2:58:37

