

An intoxicating experience

By Melissa Howard



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There are certain activities that can fuel your passion, carry you to limitless places, and stick with you like the very breath of life.

As I write it has been three days, 10 hours and 20 minutes since the horn went off at the start line of the inaugural Kauai Marathon. My mind is still reeling from the excitement of it all. I keep reliving the moments of pre-race joy as hundreds of men and women gazed at one another in the dark at 04.00. All of us silently questioning ourselves on every action: "Drink coffee? No - that's dehydrating"; "Water? No - I don't want to over hydrate"; Ah ha - maybe a half a banana will do.

Men and women, young and old, all athletes standing in clusters stretching gently, breathing in the moist warm air only a place like Kauai can provide. As I look around nervously, it is last call for a short warm-up, a sip of water and a quick bathroom break. At 05.45, almost 1900 runners gather together and head toward the start line. Some arm in arm, some solo, some shifting their fuel belts and gadgets around. They are all preparing to run together, endure together and be together for their own cause in their own way.

What is it about this place? In some ways I feel as if I've known the people standing next to me all my life. There is a special feeling here at this particular start line. Could it be the warm glow of the tiki torches being lit? Maybe it is the sound of the conch shell being blown, or maybe it is just the unspoken magic of Kauai, the Garden Isle. As the trade winds blow and a soft rain moistens the skin, I look around and we are ready. That unmistakable look of confidence and pillar of strength that lives within each of us – it was alive, and ready to roar.

The sound of running shoes hitting the wet pavement together - what a crisp, delightful, unforgettable sound. The first five miles are breathtaking. Mango-colored skies supporting the sun, welcoming us to the challenge that lies ahead. Off in the distance, remnants of old Hawaii as we pass the Koloa Sugar Mill. Lime green cane dances in the wind as if to cheer us at our efforts. At the first aid station we are

actually serenaded with aloha by the dance of the hula. There could not possibly have been any better or more enchanting aid offered than that.

As we all keep pushing forward at our own various paces, we are immersed in our passion, our cause. For this is what life is all about - keeping one foot in front of the other. As our legs carry us down an incline at eight miles, there is a beautiful vibration – rather like the sound of our feet, but different. A line of colorful people pounding their Taiko drums and smiling with eyes bright - for us. Because we run; because we walk; because we are here.

I ignore my troublesome IT band (Note: for explanation, see article on p61) and float along in bliss taking in all the magical offerings of these people and of this beautiful place. This moment was ours. A test of our endurance, our power, and we were sharing it together on this special day. A moment later came the fork in the road:



marathoners to the right, half marathoners to the left. Either way, you continue on as a champion in your own right.

I was captivated by this day, the Kauai Marathon. I watched as a lean, long limbed man whizzed past me wearing shorts, shoes and a vibrant yellow plumeria lei around his neck that smelled sweetly intoxicating. Then a beautiful Hawaiian woman giving it everything she had looked at me and smiled, a smile only a Hawaiian can provide. There was a fair skinned couple from Germany with zinc oxide smeared across their cheeks who popped out of the bushes, hoping to have saved time from the outhouse line.

And then there was me. Completely sold on this experience, hoping that Dean Karnazes would speed past me so I could see him in action with my own eyes. As the tropical trades rush through me and sweat drips down my back, I become aware of my breath and of my body and how we all arrived here as strangers. Emotion got the better of me as a group of women ran past hairless and proud,

running for their cause – survival. They were running because they could. The women gave me an enthusiastic thumbs up and I returned the gesture with a “shaka”, the hand gesture of aloha, and the wind dried my tears.

Some of us run for our health, some of us run to strengthen our minds, and we all run for a cause, a purpose only we need to know or comprehend. On this day each of us crossed a finish line that brought us to a new beginning. Some ran, some walked, and some hobbled. One even crossed on crutches. We started as strangers and ended as friends.

Result

MEN:

1	J T SERVICE	USA	2:44:11
2	Jason FLORIMONTE	USA	2:59:55
3	Michael STREFF	USA	3:00:29
4	David LARA	USA	3:05:49
5	Jonathan SOUZA	USA	3:13:39
6	Adam DANIELS	USA	3:15:23
7	Matthew ENNA	USA	3:21:47
8	Devin HOLMES	USA	3:27:14
9	Geoff WHITENER	USA	3:28:38
10	Marcin KADZIELAWSKI	USA	3:28:51

WOMEN:

1	Colleen LITTLE	USA	3:08:30
2	Becki L LASSLEY	USA	3:21:56
3	Megan WILLIAMS	USA	3:23:26
4	Jenn HALL	USA	3:36:24
5	Sally MARRACK	USA	3:41:39
6	Julie DOHENEY	USA	3:42:34
7	Sarah HORNSBY	USA	3:45:03
8	Janet SNYDER	USA	3:45:08
9	Lynne DALY	USA	3:48:49
10	Dara ONO	USA	3:49:14

HALF MARATHON

MEN:

1	James BRESSETTE	USA	1:20:56
2	Frederic DUPRAZ	USA	1:21:42
3	Alan RYAN	USA	1:23:53

WOMEN:

1	Lisa POLIZZI	CAN	1:32:20
2	Jennifer DEAN	USA	1:32:50
3	Theresa GONZALES	USA	1:35:37

The awards ceremony was lined with vibrant colored hibiscus cradled by lush green mountains and the crashing blue Pacific Ocean. We were all heroes on this balmy September day. Hawaiian music, laughter and scented ocean air filled our hearts. Strangers now united by the act of running embraced in salty hugs, and engaged in triumphant conversation.

We all grinned confidently, knowingly, that we'd be back for more, for this was an event of a lifetime, a memory etched in our souls. This was, and always will be, the magic of Kauai.

RACE CONTACT DETAILS

KAUAI MARATHON AND HALF SEPTEMBER
 Bob Craver – Jeff Sacchini, P.O. BOX 573, Koloa, Kaua'i, 96756 Hawaii
 Tel: 1 808 283 2078 Email: info@thekauaimarathon@yahoo.com
 Web: www.thekauaimarathon.com
 Full race contact listings start on page 70