

Run from the Sun

Run Barbados Marathon
1 December 2002

There is often an *Alice through the looking glass* quality to pre-race press conferences. Animated pressmen jump up and ask questions while sleepy-looking athletes mutter monosyllabic or misleading responses, trying not to give the game away.

At the St Lawrence Beach Hotel on the south coast of Barbados, the scene is even more unlikely. The terrace bar, where the press conference takes place, overlooks the brilliantly sunny beach. Those guests without athletic purpose lounge indulgently under languid palm trees, providing a corrective demonstration of why any sane person normally comes to Barbados.

This year was the 20th running of the Run Barbados series, which over the last three years has added a half marathon and a 4km walk to the Marathon and 10km races staged since 1983. Over 900 people from 30 countries had come to take part.

Determined fugitives from mainstream activity, runners awake in the very early hours of



race morning to prepare for their ritual. Buses pick them up and ferry them towards the airport startline. Other buses pass in the opposite direction, returning party revellers home (the day before was Barbados Independence Day).

Even the airport, though brightly-lit, is a place still in slumber, until the buses disgorge and activity begins. To start with it's more akin to a party as runners meet up again, some for the first time since the year before.

Chat is the first phase of warm up and in this pre-dawn heat it doesn't get much more strenuous than that before the gun sets the marathon runners off at 05.00.

They loop around the airport car park, a kilometre each time, before, on the third lap, disappearing up the road towards the island's east point.

From the neon lights and the impressive noise of supporters at the airport, all becomes suddenly dark and quiet. The steady headwind is cooling, and provides

the only sound other than the slap of runners' feet on the tarmac.

Back at the airport the half marathon runners wait until back markers have cleared the circuit. After one lap of their own they set off westward, directly towards the common finish line at Bridgetown's Garrison Savannah horse race course.

The marathon's peaceful procession doesn't take long to liven up. After 5km there's a new race leader. The sedate police escort is outflanked by a pickup truck piled high with speakers. The volume, if not the pace, is picked up to great intensity, and rouses a few innocent residents from their darkened, shuttered houses beside the route.

The course goes east for 12km as it heads for Sam Lord's Castle - an impressive pile reputedly built by Mr Lord on the proceeds gained by luring ships on to the nearby coral reef of Long Bay. We runners turn left before the gates and avoid prematurely wrecking ourselves - we're saving that for nearer the finish line.

We negotiate the turnaround and re-trace our steps. Now, instead of running lemming-like into the Sun, we will have it at our backs as it begins to rise. Four leaders are still together at 15km with the rhythm still being beaten out by the speakers a few metres in front.

Trinidad's Cantius Thomas, signalling his friskiness, waves jauntily at each of the groups of roadside spectators and during the intervening sections stabs the air like a professional rapper. It doesn't take long for him to apply



Pamenos Ballantyne, winner of the Half Marathon



Barefooted 14-year old, Jennifer Chichester (2nd in 10km/6miles)



Wesley Worrel, Barbados' only wheelchair athlete



his excess energy to more purpose, and by 19km, on a long haul up past St Martin's Church, he begins to forge a lead.

The course comes back past the airport at 22km and then follows the paper cup-strewn trail of the half marathoners. We scoot around the western end of the long airport runway (Concorde comes here) and drop down the coral wave-cut terraces towards the south coast.

Never far from the Caribbean Sea, the first time we see it close up is at 29km as the road dips down to a strand with a few landed fishing boats. We clamber sharply back up a kilometre later at St Christopher's Church, where the early congregation's rousing song wells out of the open wooden shutters.

A few kilometres further on we pass the fish market in Oistins, and from here the road clings to

the coast. At times the sea almost laps our feet, as we pass on the roadway within a few metres of the gently breaking waves.

By now the half marathon runners were mostly in – although we had been passing tail-enders since before St Christopher's. Pamenos Ballantyne maintained his undefeated record since the event was instigated, cantering the final furlongs around the Garrison Savannah to finish a nose ahead of his Vincentian stablemate Campbell Richardson.

Denmark's Gitte Karlshoj won the women's race, but the 10km runners – set off on a figure-of-eight loop through Bridgetown at 06.10 – nipped in front of her. Second place went to Jennifer Chichester, a barefoot 14-year old from Guyana. It turns out that a police mis-direction in the final stages cut about 350m from the course, making it a six-mile race for most finishers.

If only some kindly policeman could do the same for us marathon runners as we struggle towards the finish. Those opening miles, where we kept our cool as the wind rustled through the sugar cane, are long gone. The sun climbs ever higher. Even the pace of the effervescent Cantius Thomas is now slowed considerably. We have the consolation of passing a trail of even slower-moving half marathoners.

Kim Goff, women's winner for the tenth consecutive time, stays ahead of her nearest rival by a mere minute. Everyone slowly comes in, lured towards the finish by the shady avenue of trees and the idea of a deserved recuperation.

The steel band strikes up after the first of the 4km walkers are in, finishing alongside the 5-hour marathoners, and at a similar pace. Then the under-sixes perform the toddler's trot, at a significantly faster pace. People walk around and talk, and normality gradually seeps back into our consciousness. The overseas runners slowly realise that their real holiday can now begin.

It starts later on the same day, as runners reconvene for the awards ceremony. By then we have emerged from the looking glass. Recovered and well feasted, we are treated to a slide show featuring our day at the races. Nearly all of those participating are captured in their efforts. We laugh at our earlier selves, and that strange strain within that drives us as runners.



The 'Toddlers Trot'

Result

MARATHON

MEN:

1	Cantius THOMAS	TRI	2:38:13
2	Hugh JONES	GBR	2:40:18
3	Andrew GUTZMORE	JAM	2:50:34
4	Adalbert BROWNE	BAR	2:55:38

WOMEN:

1	Kim GOFF	USA	3:24:16
2	Sarah WILLIAMS	GBR	3:25:24
3	Sarah McLOUGHUN	GBR	3:30:24
4	Liliane JEAN-ELIE	FRA	3:34:27

HALF MARATHON:

MEN:

1	Pamenos BALLANTYNE	SVG	1:08:14
2	Campbell RICHARDSON	SVG	1:08:17
3	Jefferson RIVAS	VEN	1:08:59

WOMEN:

1	Gitte KARLSHOJ	DEN	1:18:34
2	Arieta MARTIN	JAM	1:34:58
3	Fidellia RAMIREZ	TRI	1:47:02

10km (6 miles):

MEN:

1	Joseph KARIUKI	KEN	28:41
2	Joseph NDERITU	KEN	28:47
3	Moses MACHARIA	KEN	30:32

WOMEN:

1	Lioudmila KORTCHAGUINA	RUS	34:50
2	Jennifer CHICHESTER	GUY	38:22
3	Solange GRIFFITH	TRI	39:03



8km into the 10km race, on the Esplanade by Government headquarters, with the bandstand and Carlsile Bay in the background