Broadway Ultra Society 6-Hour Pajama Run
July 30, 2011 – Race Director: Rich Innamorato
Race Report by David Ploskonka

The 6-Hour Pajama Run, put on by the Broadway Ultra Society, in Astoria Park in Queens, NY (so-called because it starts at 6 p.m. and ends at midnight) was a "spur-of-the-moment" decision for me. I felt like this was a good weekend for a long run, and so on Thursday night, I looked at the ultrarunning.com website, and lo and behold, a race that was relatively close, time-limited, and only $50 to enter on race day. Sold.

The drive from Baltimore that Saturday afternoon was well-timed, with minimal traffic and only one wrong turn, and I arrived there in about 5 hours, right at 5 p.m. . . . only to find that they were waiting to let "post-entries" (i.e. race-day entries) in, because they had only 6 volunteers, and probably no extra pajama pants. I waited for about 20 minutes for them to let me enter; in the meantime, I made small talk with a long-time internet-only acquaintance who lives in New York, and who, via a series of Facebook posts on the drive up, I conned into running the race. Definitely an odd time to be meeting somebody face-to-face for the first time.

With 40 minutes before the race, this gave me just enough time to go to the bathroom, change into my shorts and singlet, set up a bag to put near the one aid station at the start/finish, and meander about for a few more minutes before the pre-race briefing.

At this point, I should mention that I did absolutely no research on the course prior to driving up, and, as it turned out, it was a paved path (good), but under a noisy bridge, in a crowded park (which meant dodging and weaving between people the entire race), and on a hill. Over the course of the 1.27-mile loop, there is a little over 80 feet of gain/loss, which doesn't sound like much, but adds up, lap by lap, until you're not really running a very flat, fast course anymore. To add to this, the temperatures at the start were in the mid-90s, and humid, thanks to our proximity to the water (and never dropped below 80 as the night progressed). None of this boded well for a 6-hour PR for me (my previous best was 44.4 miles, set in the fall of 2007 on a much more forgiving course), but nevertheless, since I figured I was in much better shape now, and my Nike LunarGlides seemed to have an extra spring in them today, I thought, why not go for it?

The race started exactly at 6 p.m., and the "lead group" of 4 or 5 of us (consisting in part of Phil McCarthy, who holds the US 48-hour record, Byron Lane, who usually wins the Staten Island 6-hour race, and is capable of running around 50 miles in 6 hours, and Tommy Sung Pyon, the heretofore unknown Asian) ran tentatively through the first loop, since the race director had only been allowed to mark the route lightly with chalk. Once we made the circuit, it was time for everybody to take off and settle into a pace. Tommy led, with me close behind. We were hitting low-9-minute laps (or high 7-minute mile pace), which was pretty fast, especially considering the hilly course and the heat. I decided not to push the pace too hard, and diligently took my Endurolytes (one every 20 minutes or so) and my cups of water/Gatorade/Coke at the aid station after each lap.

Things were feeling good, and everything was clicking, but Tommy had run off. I was slowing to a walk through the aid station at each lap to make sure that the fluids wound up in my stomach, and not on my singlet, but I never heard footsteps behind me. With no idea where anybody was, I decided to continue to run conservatively, in the hopes that Tommy would blow up, and I would take the lead by default. I was worried about an epic-cramp repeat in these temperatures (similar to what had happened at Badwater a

little over two weeks ago), and I felt as though I was running on the edge of what my nutrition would allow. (Several people later told me after the race that they didn't think I was going to last, because I was sweating so hard at the beginning.)

This all proved to be a tactical blunder, as somewhere around 2 hours and 45 minutes, Tommy lapped me. Now I had pretty much no choice - I had to sit in second, keep up the pace, and hope that he would blow up, because it was far too risky at this stage in the race to mount a charge to make up the 1.27-mile gap. So I sat where I was, running around 10 minutes per lap (or just under 8-minute mile pace), and it felt pretty good.

I was in such a good groove, in fact, that the rest of the race hardly felt like a struggle at all. There were a few points where I thought my stomach would rebel and ruin things for me, but as it turned out, 4-6 ounces of water every 10 minutes or so seemed to be just the right amount for things to stay steady. The fact that I had to re-adjust every 10 minutes was also helpful, as I spent a fair portion of my laps (when I wasn't dodging pedestrians or gawking at the gorgeous sunset over the New York City skyline) deciding exactly what would be the appropriate nutrition the next time I passed the aid station.

The crowd, as it were (minus my internet friend, who, somewhere between two and three hours, left, as it probably was not all that fun for her at that point), was starting to get excited, seeing that I was cranking out the laps with hardly a sign of exertion, even if they weren't sure exactly what place I was in (these things are confusing in a short-loop race with 70+ people running). The race directors had me run the "big loop" all the way up until about the last 6 minutes of the race, at which point I switched over to the "small loop" (a 0.323-mile loop, divided into 17ths, just to make any kind of mental math virtually impossible).

At that point, I was solidly in second, and the only question was whether or not I would PR (as it later turned out, I had run 36 large loops at this point, or 45.72 miles, already a PR). Not having any idea how many miles I had run, I dropped the hammer on the small loop, and, in the last 6 minutes, made it around 2 and 11/17ths small loops, finishing with a heroic dive for the "11" marker, in part because I wanted every last bit of distance that I could get, and in part because after all that running, it seemed like fun to dive in the grass. 46.81 miles, a 6-hour PR by over two miles, and good enough for second place . . . because Tommy kept on rolling, and ended up with 48.34 miles), about a mile and a half ahead of me. He must have slowed in the second half, which of course makes me question even more my tactics in the first half (especially since early on, I was gaining on him on every hill), but, oh well . . .

The real point of all of this, though, is that there was free pizza and soda after the race, I got a nice plaque for my second-place finish, and the race director was even nice enough to give me a pair of pajama pants, after I thanked him copiously (and genuinely) for allowing me to enter the event last-minute, and he found out that I had driven there all the way from Baltimore to run the race.

Overall, this was a fun, challenging race, or a solid training run (depending on your personal goals coming in), staffed by top-notch volunteers whose attention to detail was second to none, all of which was aptly commemorated with the handsome finisher awards and the stylish, functional plaid pajama pants. If you're a runner, and you find yourself in or near Queens at the end of July, this low-key event may be just the thing to scratch that late-night urban running itch.