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ING MIAMI MARATHON

Downtown Miami becomes marathon mecca

Downtown became a marathon mecca, drawing more than **10,000 runners**. Guatemalan Jose Amado Garcia won the 26.2-mile race in **2:17:43**.

Posted on Mon, Jan. 28, 2008

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BY SUSAN MILLER DEGNAN
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Kelly Lijebblad gazed at the giant digital clock above the ING Miami Marathon finish line and saw she still had several seconds to fulfill her dream of qualifying for the U.S. Olympic women's marathon trials.

Her mind said yes. Her quadriceps screamed no.

"I saw the clock and I was fighting," said Lijebblad, 35, one of more than 10,000 runners of all ages, shapes and abilities charging down Biscayne Boulevard on Sunday. "But my legs just wouldn't go. I was trying. And once I saw the clock turn 2:47:01, I said, 'Well, [at least] I won the race.' Then I kind of switched over -- because you can't be a crybaby."

"It's always great to be the champion."

Lijebblad completed the marathon in 2:47:13, 13 seconds shy of her goal but good for \$5,000 and enough inspiration to try for the trials again another day.

Guatemalan Olympian and Pan American Games silver medalist Jose Amado Garcia, 30, also won \$5,000 with his 2:17:43 victory.

"Very beautiful course," the beaming Garcia said through an interpreter. "Being on top of the [MacArthur Causeway] bridge and seeing water on either side -- fabulous! If they invite me again, and God permitting, I'll be back."

In the half marathon, 2008 U.S. Olympic marathoner Brian Sell used Sunday's 13.1-mile as part of his Beijing training -- then obliterated the course record by nearly 3 1/2 minutes, in 1:03:46.

Yolanda Fernandez, 26, of Colombia also set a course record in leading the women half marathoners in 1:16:01.

"It was 8 degrees when we left Detroit," said Sell, 29, who wrapped himself in an American flag after the victory. "We got down here this week and it was about 80. This is really nice, but I'm glad I didn't have to do the marathon."

NICE DAY FOR A RUN

The 26.2-mile race, in its sixth running, had a glorious day weather-wise. The colorful event began in 62-degree, predawn darkness outside AmericanAirlines Arena, a half-lit moon shining above the Freedom Tower. The temperatures stayed in the 60s for much of the race as a cloud cover shielded participants and a cool breeze made the miles more bearable.



CHARLOTTE SOUTHERN / FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

The ING Miami Marathon and Half Marathon on Sunday morning. Runners cross the Venetian Causeway from Miami Beach to Downtown Miami.

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Even an intermittent mist-like rain was a gift for the thousands of recreational runners who plodded through the streets into the late morning.

The race wound its way through downtown Miami, past the cruise ships over the MacArthur Causeway, along the ocean on South Beach, over the Venetian Causeway and back downtown, through Coconut Grove and after a jaunt under the Rickenbacker Causeway bridge, back down Biscayne Boulevard to the finish at Bayfront Park.

"It turned out to be an excellent day for running," said Eduardo Martinez, a University of Miami critical care physician who serves as the co-medical director. He said his volunteer staff of 90 doctors and nurses from UM and Jackson Memorial Hospital treated "no significant injuries" Sunday.

Of the 2,666 marathoners, 7,729 half marathoners and 57 wheelchair racers, only 48 didn't finish.

"That's amazing," race spokesman Danny Elfenbein said. "In the six years we've had this race, we've never had a better one."

Garcia was pretty happy, himself, even if he was substantially slower than his 2:13:53 best in 2006 in South Korea, where he was beaten by a Kenyan in the last 300 meters. On Sunday, he defeated runner-up Samuel Kiprotich of Kenya (2:18:14) by 31 seconds.

TAKING THE LEAD

"This race was very slow at first," said Garcia, who trains in Toluca, Mexico, and is married with a 6-year-old son and 1-year-old daughter. "The first five miles were confusing because we couldn't tell who was in the half marathon and who was in the marathon. It took until Mile 10 to be in control of the situation and know who the competition was.

"At Mile 21, three Africans and I broke free. At Mile 25, I broke free and the last mile was just me. Nothing better. It's the best. God has been too great to me."

Women's winner Liljebblad, who was an All-American 10,000-meter runner at the University of Massachusetts, defeated runner-up Nadezhda Tuptova of Russia (2:48:09) by 56 seconds. She took the lead at about Mile 17, and thought she might make the Olympic trials -- to be run in April in Boston -- until her thighs began to ache at Mile 20.

NO PAIN, NO GAIN

She said she was sick with bronchitis and a sinus infection over the holidays, and hadn't trained enough.

"I was really hurting," said Liljebblad, who also does triathlons. "My quads started to give out really bad, cramping and completely straining. I know coming in that it was going to be a pretty painful race, and it sure was."

But after it was over, Liljebblad chose to be optimistic.

"I went next to the crowd and gave people high-fives," she said, "and enjoyed the fact that I won."

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ran all six full marathons,this was the best of all.good job...

This is my 2nd INGMiami and my wife and children's first to come...

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