

STORIES FROM THE VAULT: 1995 BEPPU MARATHON

by Pat Carroll

When I was progressing through the ranks in the early 80s I spent a great deal of time training with Lawrie Adams who inspired me to contest a marathon in Japan. Lawrie had a personal best of 2.15.59 which he clocked at the Beppu Marathon. I eventually discovered the country had five elite marathons: Tokyo (January), Biwa (March), Hokkaido (August), Fukuoka (December) and of course Beppu (February).

TURN the clock forward to the first Sunday in February 1994 and I am at the start line of the Beppu Marathon. My USA-based agent, Derek Froude, arranged a deal for me to run in the race. I had been running track for a few years and from a race organiser's perspective, my 1988 2.10.44 Gold Coast performance was appearing a bit stale. I still had confidence in my ability to run well at the marathon and was keen to see what I could manage in one of Japan's most famous races. Derek managed to secure a start in the race along with airfare and accommodation and a few extra bucks. There was one proviso though - I had to be a pace runner for part of the race.

My pace runner duties involved running as the B pacer and reaching 25k at 2.10 marathon pace. The A pacer's task was to run 2.08 marathon pace to 25k. I accepted the offer, however I advised all concerned that once I completed my pacing duties I had every intention to finish. I managed to finish fourth in 2.11.51; my second fastest time ever.

Turn the clock forward another twelve months and I am back at the Beppu Marathon yet again, my bunny ears firmly locked in place. I was contracted to run as the B pacer (rabbit) for the second year in a row.

I had come to the conclusion that the B pacing role worked well for me for it ensured a start in a race I would have had difficulty gaining an entry in otherwise, the pace I was expected to run was the same pace I would be attempting had I not been a pacer, and all expenses were paid with a few dollars up front.

The field was a great deal tougher than the year before, notably including the then world

record holder, Ethiopia's Belayneh Dinsamo (whose 2.06.50 mark stood for ten years). Also running was Germany's 1992 Olympic Marathon Bronze Medallist, Stephan Freigang.

The race was being televised live throughout Japan. Pace runners were never revealed as such in the press because the Japanese depicted the race to be strictly amateur and free of any monetary reward. Pace runners were asked not to reveal their role to the press and to portray at all times that they were serious contenders. Once pacing duties were completed pace runners were asked to either slowly

fade into the distance or to possibly fake an injury. Times have now changed and pace runners are now openly discussed in Japan.

Conditions on race day were difficult. It was snowing and the temperature was well below 10 degrees, a far cry from the Canberra summer I was experiencing 48 hours earlier. The A pacer took the lead pack through halfway in 64.15 and I passed the same mark in 65.20. I must have had 20 Japanese runners feeding off me and Stephan

Freigang was also along for the ride. Given the fact that Freigang had a PB of just over 2.10 he had decided to take the safer option and tag along with me.

My race plan was identical to the year before; to fulfill my pacing duties up to 25k and to complete the race from there. The race organisers along with all of the invited athletes were aware that I had every intention to finish. As we approached 25k I noticed we were catching the lead pack, which still included Dinsamo. A few kilometres later I finally bridged the gap and found myself leading the race.

At the 30km mark Dinsamo stepped off the course totally exhausted and the lead pack was now down to Stefan Freigang, Dos Santos (Brazil), a handful of Japanese runners and me.



At the 30km mark Dinsamo stepped off the course totally exhausted and the lead pack was now down to Stefan Freigang, Dos Santos (Brazil), a handful of Japanese runners and me. From 30-35km the course is open, with the ocean on the left, and also involves a long, gradual hill. The wind at this point was gusting and made maintaining just under 20km/hr pace a difficult task. As we leveled off at 35km, Dos Santos and the Japanese had dropped off and it was down to the German and the Aussie! By now, I was hurting badly and momentarily, I doubted why I was there and thought about the possibility of using my pacer tag as a reason to ease back. With the course lined five-deep and the crowd full of encouragement and waving their little Japanese flags, I somehow began running each kilometre faster than the previous. My 5km split from 35-40km was run under 15 minutes and also saw me break clear of Freigang.

Like all great Japanese Marathons, the race finished in an athletics stadium. As I entered the stadium well clear of Freigang the race organiser cheered me and yelled "Sub 2.10", for a winning time below 2.10 would significantly add prestige to his event. I crossed the line in first place in a career best 2.09.39 and was followed some 30 seconds later by Freigang, with Dos Santos taking third. Of particular satisfaction was the fact I had run the second half of the

marathon one minute faster than the first (65.20/64.19).

I am fortunate to have experienced running in a number of events throughout the world. However when it comes to hospitality, the Japanese races and their organisers are second to none. I will always treasure the memories of my travels to Japan and I will never forget my Beppu win. **RAYL**



Claiming his prize

