

## Ten Miles Deep

From where I sat it was just another marathon, but yet, it wasn't. We had a whole new cast of characters to make this the biggest marathon San Antonio has ever seen. The city had solicited bids for a group to organize and market our marathon. Elite Racing, Inc. got the bid and their strategy included lining the course with bands with a rock and roll theme and to culminate the event with a headliner concert. They also got local high school cheerleading groups to have their pep squads around the course to cheer everybody on. At the first meeting which happened last April right as the Final Four was winding down, we were all represented by Teri-KC5BJI. She learned that our main task was to start all the race clocks. They put a clock at each mile point for the runners to use in pacing themselves. The idea was that over our radio net the start could be called out to all stations and the clocks could be started simultaneously. This is opposed to having an ordinary volunteer with each clock and they get a cell phone call with instructions as to the "current" gun time (elapsed time since the starting gun was fired). This seemed like a great amateur radio application.

Our second meeting with the Elite officials came in mid-October. It was at this meeting that we accepted the additional tasking of operating the sag vehicles. Normally we've had operators ride along with their radio gear in the sag wagon, but this time we would be driving the vans ourselves. The new wrinkle to the sagging would be that we would not patrol the course. There would be sag points where the vans would be pre-positioned and the runners would have to come to us. The thinking was to keep the vehicles off the course and runners could become walkers and make it to a sag/medical station. If a runner completely gave out and just could not go any further, then they needed an ambulance ride to an emergency room at a local hospital, not a ride in a sag van back to the dome. This part worked very well, and I was quite surprised at how few folks actually needed sagging in or had any type of medical situation that demanded attention. (Remember we had nearly 25,000 marathoners and 17,000 half marathoners. I just could not believe the turnout.)

My job was to start the clock at the mile 10 marker. We were to be on station at 6:30 AM. I would have to leave the house just before 6AM to make it in time, and that is if I know where I am going and what the best route is to get there. So the weekend before race day I ventured forth and found my exact spot and ascertained where the best place to park would be. I wanted an ingress/egress route that did NOT require crossing the course itself. It wasn't hard to find the painted mile mark on the street, and it afforded me a good parking spot. The published road closure flyer was very helpful; it let me know that I could take South Alamo St. off of Probandt right up to the intersection with South Saint Mary's. It was just that easy.



When I arrived at my station on race day morning it was cold. I did not have to scrape ice off my windshield as I had to do one year, but it was nippy. As I set up my race clock right under the mile marker sign a pickup pulling a trailer pulled up and stopped right where I was. Several guys emerged and began to setup a large mat that went across all four lanes of South Saint Mary's. This mat was really something. It was a timing mat used by the race officials to

record when each “chip” crosses over it. The chips are attached to the runners’ shoes, fitting right over their shoe laces. Then they unloaded a large pelican box with a computer in it and



three 802.11 antennas emerging from it. The mat had a protected channel in it where a sectional antenna array was installed with coaxial cables running back to the pelican box. I asked one of the guys how many chips this could read simultaneously passing over the mat. He said, “Billions.” This type of technology is essential for a race like this. I had not really thought about it taking an hour just to get everyone started on the course by passing over the start line. They had several timing mats setup along



the course and this was the first time I had an opportunity to really look at one up close and personal.

After the start was called nothing much happened at my spot. I was directly across the street from The Amazing Echoes. They were a great band and I really enjoyed listening to their set of songs. Many of the runners cheered the band and could be seen singing along as they passed my location. I did most of my operating from inside my vehicle. I had taken my HT and used it prior to the runners showing up, but once the lead vehicles were within sight the band cranked up and there was no use using the HT. Even with an earphone, I could not hear the radio traffic. By



sitting in my truck with the windows rolled up I could hear the radio over the music and I could feel the music, literally.

I also had a photography crew at my location. There were three guys who were snapping everybody’s picture as they came by. I asked about whom they were working for and what was with taking everybody’s pictures. They told me that the runners could go online and key in their runner number and, of course, purchase their picture running the marathon. The photographers had cameras with 4GB memory cards, each capable of holding about 5,000 pictures and each photographer had a pocket full of memory cards.

It was just about 50 minutes after the start of the race that the lead runners came through my location. Once the runners started showing up it wasn’t long before they were passing my location in droves. At the 10 mile point, the pack is pretty well spread out. It took almost two hours of nothing but a solid stream of runners coming by before the crowd had started to thin out. After six hours of being on station the end of the race was in sight. The sweep vehicles collected my clock and I got permission from net control (thank you, Greg!) to secure my station.

Have you marked your calendar for next year? November 15<sup>th</sup> will be the day, and we’ve already been asked to take part in next year’s race. Could it be any bigger? You bet it could! Be there or be square!

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