

# Eovino Completes Tahiti Nui Marathon

By Don Eovino

Upon arrival at the Tahiti airport, I quickly recovered my memories of how hot, humid, and tropical Tahiti was. My first step from the plane onto the stair ladder greeted me with a wave of heat, moisture, and the faint scent of Tiare blossoms as airport greeters put individual flowers in each arriving guest's hair.

The morning of the marathon, I awoke without the alarm at 3 a.m. for the 5 a.m. start. A local tiki-truck picked up the runners in front of their hotel and transported them to the starting line.

Greased down with Vaseline, sunscreen, racing bib attached, I walked out of the bungalow expecting the cool air I usually experienced at 3:30 in the morning. Instead, I was met with the most humid heated air I could imagine.

Before I got to the pick-up in front of the hotel, my top was already saturated, and sweat was pouring off my legs.

I had saddled myself down with running paraphernalia, anticipating a 6-hour marathon—extra-dry running shirt, 2nd pair of socks, 10 packets of power gel in a flask, sunscreen, and lightweight walkman with extra batteries and half a dozen discs.

The truck arrived as scheduled and the mood was somber as most of the runners inside didn't speak the same language. The event was an international prize winner and many runners were from Europe and one other runner from America.

The number of entries was about 200 even though this was the 14th edition of the Tahiti Nui Marathon. It was an elite event. I started to wonder what I had gotten myself into. Thoughts of coming in dead last crossed my mind.

I told my wife, Hiroko, that I would see her in front of the hotel which was the 18 mile mark, and I could then get her sympathy if any injuries flared up and call it a day with a good run, or get her cheering support to continue on. I estimated that I should be there no

earlier than 8:30 a.m., as that time would be a 5 hour marathon, which in my present condition would totally be out of the question, until about 9 a.m. which would be a 6 hour marathon.

The start was a scene out of Dante's Inferno. Coupled with the conditions of the temperature, was the fact that the drop off point was almost pitch black. The race officials had marked the path to the start with kerosene burning crossed tiki torches. The air was also scented with the pungent aroma of Tiare blossoms, fresh coconuts, mangos and papayas available to runners to satisfy an early morning appetite.

The uniforms were bright and colorful representing logo's and countries that looked like the gathering of the United Nations in running outfits.

At around 6 a.m. the sunrise started to peak over the lagoons and my spirits soared with feeling of freedom, lightness, and beauty. With the sounds of the music covering my ears, I felt as if I were up in the sky looking down. The translucent lagoons were immediately to the side of the course and the striking colors of Tahiti began to appear as the lush towering mountain peaks and sea came into view as the night melted away.

Kilometer after kilometer drifted away, as we turned back around and headed past the two most picturesque bays I have seen in the world—Opunahou Bay and Cook's Bay.

I was used to the heat and humidity at this point, but was aware of the increasing temperature

The approaching contact point was at the tip of Cook's Bay, but to my complete surprise my watch was showing 8:10 a.m. as my arrival instead of the 8:30 to 9 a.m. time I had arranged.

My lightweight Walkman at that point was no longer a minor weight. I had shut it off after sunrise to pay attention to the surrounding scenes. Now it was a water-logged neoprene dead weight dragging me down at each step, including the also soaked extra

running shirt.

Upon arriving at the 18 mile mark early and no Hiroko, I reluctantly dashed into the hotel lobby and threw my walkman, belt, sweaty T-shirt and extra unused sweaty socks to the poor shocked receptionist, yelled out my name and hotel bungalow number and said that I would be back later to retrieve them.

Committed now to finishing the race, I jogged on ahead much lighter, but the overhead sun was making up for the weight I had just dropped. At around 9 a.m. The sun was now in full scorching mode and about 92 degrees. The trees no longer shielded the sun and I found myself dodging from shaded spot to shaded spot to protect my skin.

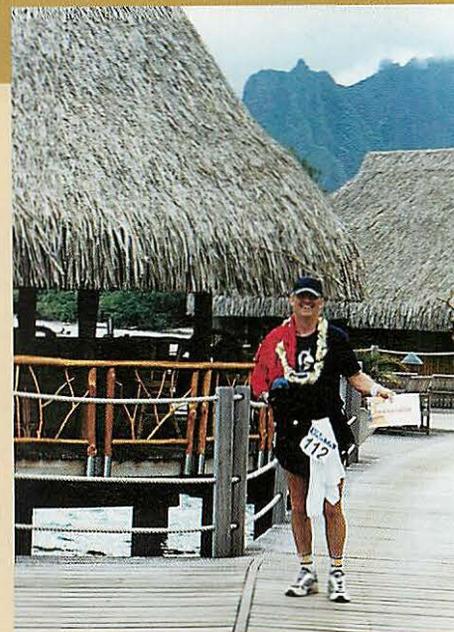
From 9 to 10 a.m., I swore I was in Hades. I stopped at each water station staffed by the locals in their colorful pareus and flip flops offering fresh coconuts, pineapples, mangos and papayas grunting in English, "Water, Water, Water". What I didn't drink I poured over my head and body as I could see that under the melting sun block, my skin had turned a bright red.

I crossed the finish line in the sand next to the beach and was shocked to see the clock face showing 5 hours 8 minutes. I had beaten my previous 2001 Honolulu Marathon time of 5:10.

My only comfort was my heart rate monitor that showed a slightly above normal 110 beats per minute, and that I was still alive.

As it was, I felt proud and enthused at my accomplishment. I had garnished a pearly medallion as a finishers' prize and I had passed 25 other runners out of the 160 who finished. I hadn't finished last, and I knew I would have a good sleep on the plane that evening.

P.S. By the way, with 99 other things to do before I die, I competed in the Great Wall of China Marathon last month. Stay tuned for the story of that adventure.



Don Eovino

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