

Race Report

Coburg/Clifton Hill 6hr Championships By Dion Finocchario

Well, what a day it was.

It was a while in the making as training started in late November after a heavy 2014. Training was going well and I was starting to feel really fit. Then in the last week of the year, I got a glute injury which set me back 6 weeks of running. During of which, I did lots of cycling and swimming on top of my glute activation exercises. Once I started running again, it was easy running to start and then my coach and I quickly started ramping up the kms and intensity. When I started running again, I ran 36km the first week to 4 weeks later running 130km. Soon enough I was feeling even better than before the injury while running more efficiently.

As the year was a slow starter, my coach and I decided that the 6 hour run wouldn't be an "A" race for me and it would be a hard training run only in preparation for the Gold Coast 100 in June. My coach Andy has been doing a great job with building my fitness at a steady rate while listening to my body, races and work schedule. Leading into the event I had already done nearly 96km for the week involving speed sessions, tempo runs and some easy running which would make the 6 hour run difficult on tired legs. I know that I can push my body hard but running an estimated 80km on already tired legs would prove its own challenge.

Race morning came around and waking up to 4am was no problem as I felt relaxed about the race not having too much expectation. I went through my normal race day routine, picked up 3 bags of ice for keeping drinks cold and also picked up my friend and fellow Oxfam team mate David Overend along the way to Clifton Hill. We got to the track and set up his crew table as we planned to be self supported throughout the race. We each had our own purpose for the race as Dave planned to run a qualifying time for the Australian 100km team and I was aiming for 80-ish km's (4:30 pace).

Just before the race start, I realised that I had forgotten my watch as I went to put on my heart rate monitor. This was not ideal as I planned to pace myself for a consistent run. As a extremely kind gesture, David Eadie, one of Australia's best ever endurance athletes offered me his watch for my run. An offer that I should have excepted. However, my pride and stubbornness prevented me from accepting his offer (which ended up being a good thing by race end).

The weather was perfect for running; cool, cloud cover and little wind. As the race started, a group of us runners went out at around 4:30/km for the 1st lap (400m track) and that quickly turned into 4:09/km. There were 2 other runners (Francesco and Barry) in front of me and they were really going for it. As normally happens with the racing atmosphere, I pushed a little harder in order to keep up with the hot pace. The first hour I ran 34 laps and was 1 behind the other 2. I was still feeling good and had a quick toilet stop, which afterwards I felt much better and started picking the pace up a bit in order to catch Francesco who also increased the pace. I realised that to catch him I would be pushing too hard and would struggle towards the end of the race. I slowed down the pace from 3:50/km to 4:10 and by now I had caught Barry who was running 100km on the track and only had Francesco ahead of me.

By the 2nd hour I had done another 37 laps (71 total laps) and soon after I started to feel pretty tired and thinking that I wouldn't make the 6 hours. I was talking to a lot of the other runners, cheering them on, offering encouragement and it felt like we all could draw energy from each other as I passed them. I was well ahead of where I had planned and had to think carefully about how I was running. Everyone else racing was running well too as many runners were trying to qualify for the Australian 100k team.



The 3rd hour was the halfway point of the race and I had run another 37 laps (108 total laps) which is around 43km and Francesco was still 3 laps in front of me. All runners would now switch directions on the track and run the next 3 hours running in a clockwise direction. From here I was in greater need for nutrition, hydration and attention as I quickly tire. It seemed fitting that David Eadie and Stephen Rennick, 2 well known ultra distance runners, came to my rescue handing me water, perpetuem, sunglasses, electrolytes, coke and support in the form of words, hi-fives and advice. Without their help, it would have been a real struggle to keep running while having to stop at my crew table every time I needed something. It was about the 3:30 mark that I knew that I couldn't continue running at the pace I was running at. I needed to re-evaluate my running pace and decided to walk and regather myself before continuing. Once I started walking there were so many great encouraging words from other runners while I was going though a rough patch. I walked nearly 1 full lap before I started running again at the same pace I was running at before I started walking. It was soon after that running started to feel comfortable again and I felt my second wind come. It is at this point where I start to feel at ease with myself and like I can run for a lot loner. It is a part of my racing that I love but also want to avoid hitting the low that comes before it.

The forth hour brought another 32 laps (140 total laps). By this point of the race, there were a lot of people who were struggling with a walk/run approach. Nutrition and the early fast pace were starting to take its toll on all. I was still 3 laps behind Francesco which meant that I hadn't lost any ground and I knew that if I could just hang on to my current pace I would be giving myself every chance to catch him I the later stages of the race. The sun had slowly started to shine through the clouds meaning that it was warming up with top of 26 the forecast. A lot of spectators had started to arrive after finishing their morning runs and/or to support a friend/family member. I was still feeling quite comfortable as my pace had dropped to around 4:20/km.

In the fifth hour, I accumulated 36 laps (176 total laps) and was now only 150m behind Francesco who had dropped his pace just enough for me to get a sniff of belief that I could outrun him. The last hour started to get really hot and I was consuming a lot of liquids. My pacing was still feeling good as I had managed overlap Francesco and having Barry another 1.5 laps behind him. All I needed to do from here was hold on and use all of the energy from all of the other runners and spectators who were offering encouraging words to spur me on. A lot of runners were aiming for a new PB, race record or qualifying time for the Australian team which brought great atmosphere to push hard.

The last 30 minutes, I tried to push and finish stronger than what I was running for the last 2 hours. Once I started running faster, I felt totally exhausted and my hips were feeling extremely tired. I just needed to hold on for a little longer and all of the pain would be over. I continued to encourage other runners as most of the field had slowed down from the original pace. Just trying to get everyone to push that little bit longer or take the first step running again would help the slightest. All runners now received a sandbag to hold as there was only 5 minutes to go so when he 6 hours was up, everyone would drop their sandbag which would be the point at which their last lap distance would be measured. I managed to run 212 laps and 237m for a total distance of 85.037km which was an average pace of 4:15p/km.

I had no idea how far I ran but knew it was well over 80km. But to break an Australian record for a 6 hour run, especially one set by Yiannis Kuoros who has proven himself to be Australia's best ever distance runner, was an absolute honour and something I will always hold dearly.

To all other runners, walkers, friends, family and the other amazing running family. It was a pleasure to share the track with you and watch so many PBs and records broken. Special mention to Holiday XP, everyone from the Melbourne Athletic Club (especially Patrick Ashkettle), my Oxfam team mates (David Overend, Dan Langelaan, David Wilson), Coach Andy DuBois, Kevin Mannix, 2XU Australia, Hammer Nutrition, training mates (Dion Perry, Cam Hall, Mike Manders), David Eadie, Stephen Rennick, Nikki Wynd, Francesco Ciancio, Barry Keem and all other friends and family who have supported me on such an amazing journey through life and fitness.

May the rest of the year bring on many great results for you and years to come.

