

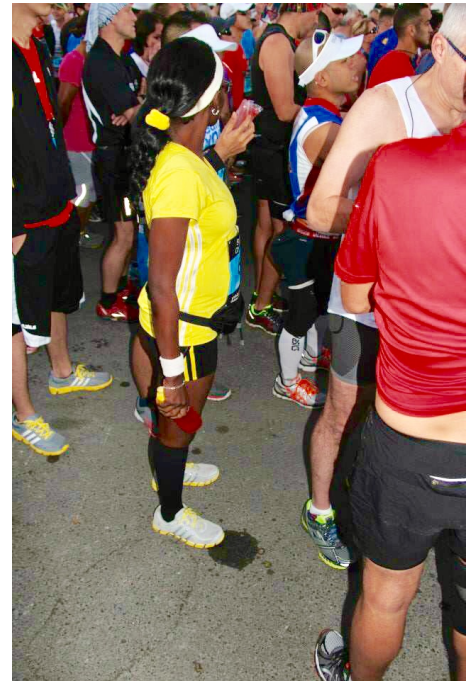
## My First Marathon

My first marathon was a little over four years ago but the memory is still very vivid. Racing and finishing the 2014 Dubai Marathon was a huge accomplishment for a small fry like me and I am not ashamed to say I am proud I registered for that race, ran the race and finished the race.

A runner friend and I had spoken a lot about the race, the terrain, my fueling strategy and lots more. She had assured me the race course was fast, easy and friendly and I would finish in good time. She had also told me I will not be able to sleep the night before because I will be too excited but alas I went to bed early and slept like a baby. Proper fueling was my number one priority so I got up at 4am on race day to have some oats sprinkled with chia seed. I reckoned I needed 2 hours to get the food digested and into my blood stream. I had also started hydrating about 3 days before the race.

I left my apartment at 5:30am for a 7:00am race, better too early than late I thought. The events ground was already brimming with people, lots of people. And guess what? I had hardly settled down before I realized I needed to pee. So I looked for the conveniences and was surprised to find a long queue of people waiting to use the loo. I went back to use the loo twice in the space of about 10 mins, that was unusual for me but was assured by other runners that using the loo several times before a race was the norm. Then I realized that I had either taken too much liquid or I was full of nerves.

I was in for a rude shock when I tried to put on my phone to set my Strava and Nike Plus Apps and the phone refused to come up. I began to panic because I was also going to use that device as my source of music Luckily my coach was there to calm me down and remind me that I had trained both with music and without music. His last words after the gun was shot were "You have trained hard and you can do this marathon. Trust your



training. Don't start out too fast. Don't get sucked up with pace of other runners, find your own pace and flow with your body rhythm. Just keep putting one foot in front of the other and enjoy the scenery and appreciate the experience.”



My friend who had previously run the marathon had also told me never to ignore a water station, I should at least always take a sip of water. I stuck by the rules and advise.

No sooner had we started running than I started to see men veer off to pee on the roadsides.....yuck! And then I needed to pee at about km 3. I did a mental analysis, should I wait till the toilet at km 5 or should I pee as I go? I quickly decided for the former option, after all I am not trying to beat the world record. I am just a social runner. I arrived km 5 and there was another long queue of runners waiting to use the porta potty. I decided to stretch my tired muscles while waiting for my turn. I entered the cubicle and I almost threw up. The biffy was DIRTY. Omg, I had no choice but to use

the wretched toilet considering the fact that I had already wasted about 5 mins.

So the journey continued and I had to make the best out of my situation without music. The streets were lined with people, men, women and children. I was grateful they had come out to cheer us on, so I started responding to them by saying "thanks guys, thanks for coming out" At a point, a little child wanted to touch me so I veered to give a "high five". That felt good! Her touch re-energized me and I decided to give every child lined up a " high five". After all I was running for a cause. I was running against sicknesses in children. That brought some spring to my feet.

At about km 9, the professional runners were already on the other side of the road racing back from the first turn around point. They were at km 21 and going strong!!!

At km 10, I had to use the bathroom again, I didn't want to waste time on the queue to the female toilet so I dashed into the male toilet. The men were not using toilets by the way, they were doing their thing like animals on the roadsides.

I stayed by the sidelines so I could continue slapping "high fives". Somewhere along the course a fellow runner started shouting behind me that I should run back. "Run back?" I ignored him. I thought he had gone bunkers. When he finally caught up with me, he told me I didn't cross the timing mat at km 10. "You would be disqualified" he said. Omg, I was so engrossed in slapping "high fives" I had veered off to the sidelines. I did not know I needed to cross the mats. I did not even know the mats were placed there to verify times. I quickly turned round, ran back about 500m, saw the timing mat , ran over the raised surface of the mat and continued the journey. I didn't want to think about the time I had lost. Or the energy I had lost. I was just so grateful that I didn't have earpiece that would have prevented me from hearing that man shout at me. I was also very grateful that he noticed I didn't cross the mat and took upon himself to tell me. I didn't see him again. He was my angel on assignment.

At km 15, I had my first energy gel. The bio-fuel goes straight into the blood and releases energy, I am told. Then I had a cup of Gatorade from the aid

station. I was still going strong and I thanked God. This is easy. A third of the race was done, I was still slapping hands.

And comments like "617, you rock" and "617, you look great" from the sidelines were welcome comments that kept me going. 617 was my BIB Number.

I had conversations with different people as we journeyed and I was always quick to let them know it was my very FIRST marathon. The response was always "ah, you are doing good for a first timer, you will finish strong" and that for me, was good feedback.

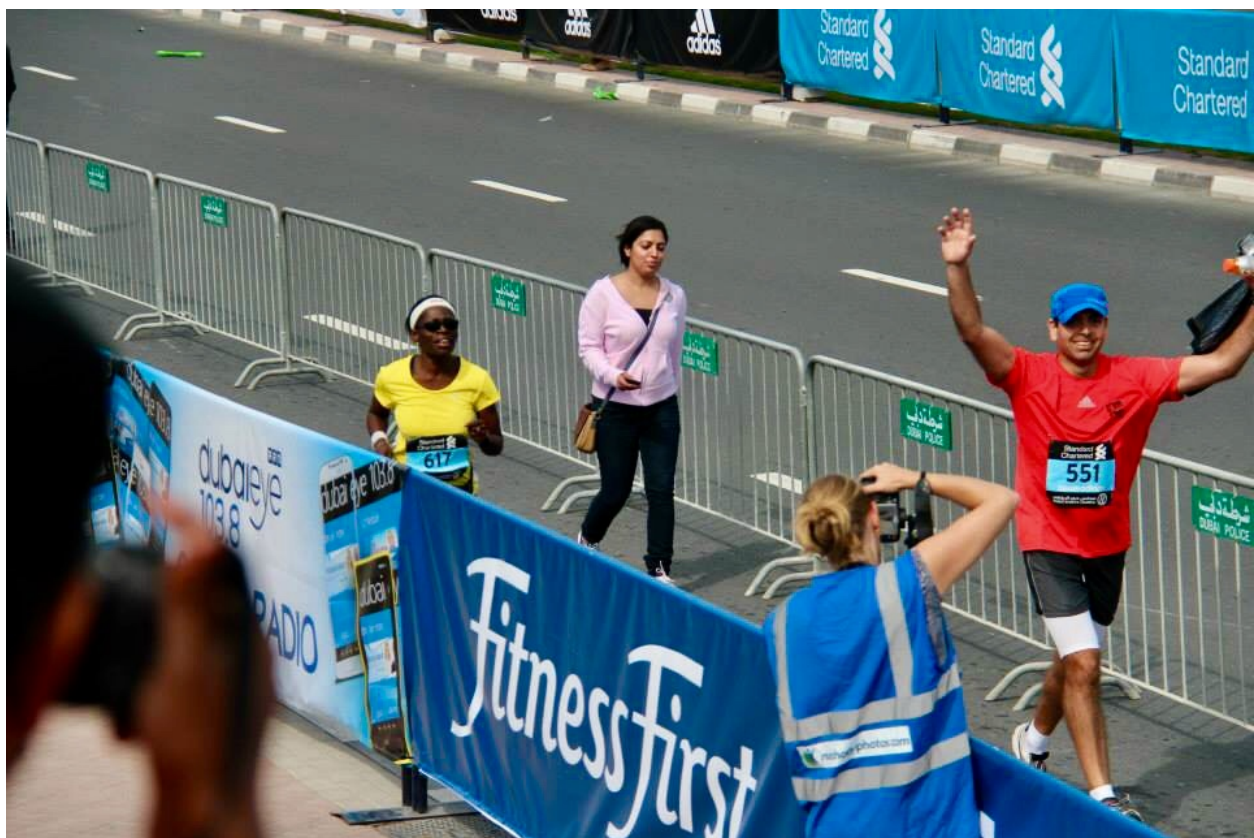
I made the turn at km 17 and started running back on the other side of the road. I was amazed at the number of people still running down the road. So I said to myself "you are not even near the last pack of people."

At km 21, I wanted to use the damn toilet again. There wasn't going to be any official toilet till km 25. Can I wait or should I veer into one of the restaurants on the street? I decided to veer off but there was a problem. The race day was on a Friday and most places were not opened because Fridays are work free days in Dubai. Finally I see one with lots of people seated on the terrace. I dashed in, they hailed me, I felt important. I asked for the toilet. "Upstairs" they pointed. I dashed to the ladies which was not vacant. "Use the gents" said a waiting lady. So, I went into the gents. What a relief to see a clean toilet. I took my time, inhaled, sat and relieved myself! I even did the big one, washed my hands properly, checked my hair in the mirror and dashed back to the street. Another 5 mins lost. I ran doubly hard to catch up with the people I had been running with before my potty stop. I was surprised I could still catch up!

I decided to do a brisk walk between km 27 and km 28 so I could eat my bread and peanut butter. That's how I trained. My coach was waiting at Km 29. He told me I was in good shape and my time was good. He asked if I was tired to which I responded in the negative. I thanked God for Grace and strength and kept going.

I reached 32km which was the furthest I had gone during training, now I knew I was on unfamiliar terrain after 32km.

The first signs of tiredness set in at Km 34. Coincidentally, on the other side of the road was the sign, Km 40, for people who had reached the second turn around and were running towards the finish line. I began to cry. Sighting the 40km sign just opened the my waterworks. I wasn't hurting and I wasn't sure why I was crying. I stopped for Gatorade at km 35 and they asked why I was crying. I told them I didn't know why. They said 7km to go. I decided to eat my banana and walk 1km. The brisk walking was so enjoyable that I walked till 40km. The aid table at 40km had bananas, oranges, watermelon, Mars chocolate, Gatorade and water. I opted for watermelon and good old Gatorade.



I remembered that nobody walks to the finish line so I ran the rest of the way smiling and looking good for the cameras. I couldn't believe I had run that far. Arms in the air, tears streaming down my face, I was shouting " I did it, I did it". Spectators replied "you have done it girl." This was a moment I will live to remember. My coach was on hand to hand me my Nigerian Flag. I had told him I wanted to lift that flag at the finish line. I

crossed the line. The 5hours 14 mins race was over.

Then I went numb!  
16 weeks of training!!  
The feat had been accomplished!!!  
What next?

Oh, the Kilimanjaro marathon was on the 2nd of March, 2014.  
And that was how I got hooked on running marathons.  
4 years, 7 Continents, 35 countries, 45 marathons and still counting.

Respectfully submitted by Dayo Akinbode,  
Race Director Ile-Ife Heritage Marathon

