

THE NAPA VALLEY MARATHON: BAUMANN VS. BEARDSLEY

Not to be confused with the epic duel between Salazar and Beardsley in the 1982 Boston Marathon, this battle was initiated at the 24th annual Napa Valley Marathon College. This roundtable discussion is traditionally held on Saturday the day before the marathon. Professor Richard Benyo invited another All-star Cast of marathon experts to discuss "THE MARATHON; why do we love it so"? Joe Henderson acted as moderator saying, "he who runs one marathon is wise; he who runs another one is a fool."

Dick Beardsley stated, "I'll be running the marathon tomorrow in just under three hours." In his recently published book *STAYING THE COURSE: A RUNNER'S TOUGHEST RACE*, Beardsley and co-author Maureen Anderson begins the introduction with Beards stating, "I've won every race I've ever run."

He gave his all; everything he had to running his best. Through hard work, Dickie Beardsley rose up from a small farming town in Minnesota to dreams of running the Olympic Marathon to the Keynote Speaker the day before the Napa Valley Marathon on March 3, 2002.

I heard Dick Beardsley speak after Grandma's Marathon last summer. He is so dynamic that I was anxious to hear him speak again. With incredible sincerity, he shares his life story interwoven with marathon challenges and blended with a persistent faith. His re-enactment of the '82 duel with Salazar is filled with emotion. The audience, sitting on the edge of their seats laughed and cried. Read the book and find out how Dick Beardsley is such a winner!

I decided then and there to duel Beardsley along the Silverado Trail from Calistoga to Vintage High School in Napa. At the very least, I hoped to "keep him in sight" on my 38th marathon excursion.

My head ached from too much grape juice tasting followed by hops sipping and excessive carbohydrate loading at Uva's Restaurant on Saturday night. Jeff Row (3:45) and Bobby Coburn (3:45) could not contain my pre-race excitement. Craig Newport (3:42) began his ritual preparation with Vaseline. I gathered other Visalia Runners, Yvonne Jessup (3:41), Craig Wheaton (3:25) and Race Director, Richard Benyo for a picture under the

banner. Michael Auchter (3:48) eased in to the competition. David Cartwright and Harris Goodmann were there to celebrate the finish soup.

At the starting line, Beardsley was wearing number 2. John Keston sang the Star Spangled Banner. It was chilly and the horses were getting restless in the adjacent meadow. I yelled down the line, "hey Beards, good luck!"

We started fast on the downhill section. I settled into 7th place until Beards goes flying past me. "Oh-o! This is gonna be a long day", I thought. I hung on to 6:33 pace for the initial easy miles. I was instantaneously rejuvenated by Joe Henderson at mile four jumping and kicking his heels.

At mile seven, I see Beardsley limping along on the right shoulder and periodically reaching down to massage his calf muscle. "Beards, come with me; don't stop," I yelled. I had hoped to hang with this famous guy and now I'm trying to encourage him to "stay the course".

I kept my pace going through mile 10 in 1:05 and half way in 1:25:00. Suddenly, here comes Dickie recharged. He cruised by while explaining that he had to work out some serious muscle cramps. I let him go and focused on the beautiful mustard foliage carpeting the acres of vineyards. The meadowlarks sang sweet music reminding me of the theme song from "LUCKY by Dick Beardsley".

As the sun rose and filled the clear, blue sky, the competition warmed up. I noticed course record holder, Dick Beardsley (2:16:04 in 3/8/87) slowing under the stress of this extraordinary event. This was my defining moment! I put the slight wind in my sails and kept moving forward. I felt too much respect and admiration to say anything to my hero, Beards. Without a word, I forged ahead to mile 20 in 2:12. This was my 7th Napa Marathon and I knew the wineries and daffodils along the final stretches.

As they mentioned at the Marathon College; "the marathon justifies the effort". This issue of the Napa Valley Marathon contained 2200 registrants and over 1700 finishers. I slowed to 7:30 pace the last 5K, but vowed to give Joe Henderson some vintage "jump-heel-kicks" as the time clock read 2:56:28. I met this significant challenge in 24th place overall and 4th in age division (45-49).

After receiving the traditional finishers medallion, I recalled the words of Mark Winitz; “enjoy the marathon while you can”. There was Dickie Beardsley finishing in 2:58:06. I congratulated him for reaching his sub-three-hour goal. Here’s how we finished in the duel of 2002.

We shared the excitement of “doing something significant” all the way to bag pickup. I was able to get a couple photos of my nemesis in the race and my best friend in the chute. I warned Beards that I would see him and Alberto Salazar at the 106th Boston Marathon on April 15th where the whole world will be celebrating the 20th anniversary of the DUEL in '82.

Dick Beardsley is a tremendous person. I enjoyed listening to him share his story. His enthusiasm is contagious! It was a blast running in front of, beside, and behind a truly great runner. I’m glad to have finished ahead of a winner; he won his own race and met his sub-3 hour goal. Considering all the trials he has endured throughout his life, this was “the race of his life”. I was fortunate to have Dick autograph my new copy of his story.

Jan Seely (publisher of Marathon & Beyond) was correct in stating, “once you start reading STAYING THE COURSE you won’t be able to put it down.” Reading was the best muscle recovery program I have ever felt. Since runners always look forward, I hope many Visalia Runners decide to run next year’s 25th anniversary of the Napa Valley Marathon. It could be your race of a lifetime.

Written by: Michael Baumann