



## Carlsbad 5000 – World's Fastest 5K?!

By Brad Zanetti



How many times have you gotten yourself into something or some event and you wondered how the heck this all transpired. Sure it ends up being a great adventure but you still wonder how it happened...and maybe how you could have avoided it?! Through the years I am sure many of you have had a similar experience as mine because as it happens this trip all began with a discussion with Val Sell. Around 8 months ago she asked about 'bucket list' races. Of course the discussion started with the obvious, BOSTON; and included New York, Chicago, Grandma's, Western States, even the Bay to Breakers. There was some discussion time taken up with triathlons- Ironman, Escape from Alcatraz even our very own Vineman. After some lively discussion of some of our experiences, Val got to one of her 'bucket list' items that she needed to get to soon... THE CARLSBAD 5000. She very energetically impressed me that there is a very narrow window to maximize a chance for a great result(an 80 %er).

8 months ago while we were discussing this I was listening but I wasn't really feeling it, if you know what I mean. I didn't particularly like 5Ks. I didn't run them particularly well. My mile, 3K and 2 mile times were improving but I hadn't figured how to maintain the 2 mile speed for another 1.1 mile. 5Ks seem like a particularly hard race unlike the 10K where it is a given that you are going to be pacing a bit more; well at least that is my take on that distance. Again as I know many of you have

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experienced, Val continued to bring up this Carlsbad thing and with such enthusiasm that I was feeling bad that I couldn't latch on to her excitement no matter how hard I tried. Well as fate would have it I PR'd big at the Harvest Fair 5K(19 low), the day after a tough XC race at the Presidio. I was pretty excited and Val called when she found out my time and said how about Carlsbad. Well I don't know(I was thinking of every excuse in the book). There is the travel- all the way to New Mexico. Yeah, I know, somehow I have watched this race multiple times on OLN/VERSUS and somehow missed that body of water along the race course. Well you know, Carlsbad Caverns. Carlsbad 5K. Super FAST course, maximum amount of negative elevation gain allowable for certification. I heard all of the stories. I've been to New Mexico. It has hills and a lot of flat, I mean a lot of flat. Seemed like a perfect place for a course like that. Well it appears that was mistake #1. I went on the internet; googled Carlsbad 5000 and was surprised to find out the Carlsbad 5K is in San Diego County, so I guess the travel excuse was a bit weak.

At the next Thursday nite run Coach congratulated me and then asked, "think the course was a full 5K?" (thanks for keeping me grounded, Coach). The doubts resurfaced but at the Run to Feed the Hungry I PR'd again(sub 19) and I started to pick up on Val's window of opportunity theory(I know coach, not sure if that course is certified either) and I figured if I ran well at Valley Ford I was gonna go. Another significant PR at Valley Ford iced it. Next year may never come around so it is now or never...I am going.

I guess that is part of the bucket list theory. Don't just go do these runs, but try to run them well. So I tell Val we're going and now she has cold feet. She's been injured and not in shape, blah, blah, blah. Well I am going anyway, Val. You have a month to decide no biggie. Well, you all know Val, she calls about 2 days later and says, "I want to go and is there room? Oh by the way I have registered." Is there room? There is always room in the Zanetti Van and time for a road trip with Brad and Bev.

The Carlsbad event began in 1986, and Steve Scott, the great American miler and Olympian, won each of the first three years, giving the race tremendous credibility. It is known as the "World's Fastest 5K" because 16 world records, 8 U.S. records along with numerous national and age-group marks have been set on the scenic oceanfront course. In the weeks to follow all we talk about is the Carlsbad 5K and find out Bryan Porter is going, too, with a big group of friends from Las Vegas. He has run it numerous times and gives us the rundown on the course, the festivities. In typical fashion I plan to drive down Saturday am EARLY to get our bib packet before 2pm, then relax, run Sunday am then hightail it back right after the elite races.

Uh, that would be mistake #2. Bryan is flying down and will be there to meet us. Ahh the best laid plans...Bryan is consumed by the Southwest Airlines Debacle of 2011 and his flight is cancelled. So now Bryan must drive down.

As smoothly as we 'fly' down to the San Fernando Valley traffic turns into a quagmire of crashes, headturners, upside down cars and cars just broken down. Stressfully, we barely make it down to packet pickup before it closes . We are all trashed and decide to go to the hotel which allows to



peruse the course(along the Pacific Ocean) and nap before dinner with Bryan and his group.

We had a great dinner and lively conversation. Bryan's group is great and much like our running group. In the space of an hour or so we were all quite comfortable and spent Sunday racing, yacking and joking it up. It was a bit like the Bizarro world episode of Seinfeld where each of Bryan's friends kind of fit counterparts of our group.

Early to bed, early to rise because the masters mens race was the first race of the day @7:05am, followed by Val's masters womens race at 8:00am.

A 6am check out the window and we were tickled to see overcast skies and predicted Low 50's. PERFECT. We get our stuff together, a small snack and water, then head to park and warm up. Warm up surprisingly was just that. I was sweating at 6:30am after only a half mile and suddenly it didn't seem perfect. I cut the warmup short and just sat in the car and chilled, then headed to the start. I set up viewing spots for Bev to video the start and finish then went looking for Bryan. Our race had about 1500 participants yet I found Bryan and his group pretty easily and we started pretty much together.

The start, a slight downhill for about 600m, was great; getting out easily and smoothly. Then a couple block uphill leads to a left turn onto the main drag and a long flat, slightly downhill section pass the 1 mile, Bryan and I together, around

5:40-5:41. OOPS. A bit fast but on to the first turnaround, where we now follow the ocean on our left. On to the 2 mile split, and a long slight climb back, I hit the mark in 11:40, Bryan a few seconds back. I can't hear Bryan but I know how badly I feel and not sure how long I can persevere(well at least I PR'd the 2 mile). By the way where did all of the downhill go? Well it did come but none too soon nor was I in the least able to recover, then a turnaround back up what we just went down. At this point it is one foot in front of the other and the hope(?!) of a fast finish. Alas, the fast finish never happened even with a downhill finish and as we made the last turn, Bryan came by me like a freighttrain and using his 800m speed he finished in a blur at around 18:40. I 'waddled' in at 18:49 with a certified PR and although I missed my goal, it was an 80%er, and I placed 6<sup>th</sup> in my age group. After recovering, eating breakfast and a long hot tub soak we went back to check out the vendor area and grab all of the 'freebies', killing time until the Elite 5K's.

Bryan will have to tell you his story since we were in the same race. Val, too, will have to tell her side of things but since I watched her race I will give you the fan's point of view. The Masters Woman's race started promptly at 8:05am and was preceded by a wonderful rendition of the Star Spangled Banner(in fact the young man sang before each race). The Woman's race had some incredibly fit and fast over 40 somethings. I recognized a few of the front runners, including Cece St Geme, former Stanford All American and XC coach for Corona Del Mar.

And before I knew it there was Val somewhere in the top 30-40 it seemed. WOW

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All I could muster was GO VAL, and head over to the 2 mile and hopefully shout some 'useful' encouragement this time. Well Val looked strong at the 2 mile @12:47 and I hoped she would persevere better than I. On to the 3 mile and the finishing straight. There is Val at the 3 mile @19:33 and running for all she is worth to break 20:00. That last 0.1mile just wouldn't come fast enough for her even though she passed a couple of ladies and was passed by no one. Her final time was 20:11(79.9%-oooh so close: which begs for a return trip), and she ended up in 30<sup>th</sup> out of nearly 1200.

After recovery and moaning about everything we could have done better we decided we needed to try this one again and it had to be sooner than later(we are getting older after all)so why not next year. Yeah we're in.

Quickly, the Elites race. The fields were smallish but the talent was incredible



The course is one of the greatest viewing courses since it folds on itself, from one spot you can see them 3 times and the finish. By walking a block you can see the start as well. Also, the Elite men start first and the women start 2mins later so both races are going on at once and you can see both races entirely. The elite males went out at 4:06 for the 1mile split, then hit a little headwind which turned the race "tactical"; if you consider a 8:25 2 mile split tactical!! This and the 2 leaders seemed to be talking and jockeying for position. The finishing sprint started from around 0.4mile out which turned into a flat out drag race won by the 21yo Ethiopian, Dejen Gebremeskel in 13:11, followed by

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World 5K champion, Eluid Kipchoge(Kenya) in 13:14 and in 3<sup>rd</sup>, Bobby Curtis(USA) in 13:48. If you get a chance, check out Gebremeskel as his finishing speed is nothing short of astounding. The women's Elite was similar and also ended up as a 2 woman race with the sprint starting a full 0.3-0.4 miles out and with multiple changes right until the last 10 meters, the winners being separated by a mere second.

The woman's winner, too, was from Ethiopia, the diminutive Aheza Kiros in 15:13 with the long and lanky Pauline Korikwiang(Kenya) 2<sup>nd</sup> in 15:14. The crowd favorite from the running group in Mammoth Lakes, Jen Rhimes was 3<sup>rd</sup> in 15:37.

It was worth the trip just to see the Elites and be that close to world class runners.

For the record, the masters mens winner was Christian Cushing-Murray who at 43yrs of age ran, for him, a rather pedestrian 15:04(his best is around 14:40 or so) and has a son in high school with a 9:20 3200 best this year(so goes the gene theory, it's too bad we don't have a chance to pick our parents...just kidding Mom). The winner of the Womans masters race was, Tania Fischer who at age 45 ran 17:24.

This has gone on long enough but let me just finish with a couple of thoughts.

1-DON'T drive 500 miles the day before a bucketlist PR attempt and conversely DO drink A LOT of fluids the day or 2 before said attempt.

2-KNOW the course (driving part of it probably doesn't give you the whole story although running the course a couple of days prior probably would).

3-THEY all start like crazy in SoCal and it might be better to hold back a bit to the first split(...if you can).



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The race was great but the atmosphere was AMAZING. The course lends itself to fast but fair times(it is not all downhill, wind at your back stuff of lore) but its design and the fact that thousands of runners as well as fans line the course and scream nonstop make it extremely memorable and worthy of anyone's bucketlist. I know we are planning to go back again next year and I hope this has piqued some interest for an Empire Runner Group Sojourn. We have already contacted the hotel and they want us back, offering discounts for 10 or more rooms. We can put together teams and run in corporate divisions. There is also a 25K division with its own awards(5 x 5K races, yep you run them all). It is located a short drive from San Diego(Zoo, Sea World, Wild Animal Park, Gaslamp District, etc). Sounds like fun times for all ages(fly out of Sonoma Cty Airport Fri am, back mon). To quote race director, Mr Turnbull. "After Steve Scott won this the first 3 years people wanted to come here. They thought it was the fastest course. I don't think it's the fastest course. It's the personnel that make the race fast as opposed to the course."



Think about it for just a minute then start planning for a glorious bucket list adventure at the 2012 Carlsbad 5000(sign ups are currently open and the earlier you sign up the cheaper- check the website). CIRCLE the calendar, April 1, 2012.

You would be a 'FOOL' to miss it.