



After having been refused on the Berlin marathon due to bronchitis and still under antibiotics during the Munich marathon, it had to be a final marathon race this year. The objective of 3h15 was focused since weeks and months of hard training following Herbert Steffny's specific plan ...

The choice of marathons in Europe in the end of the year being rather limited, passing by indoor and underground races (help!), finally the marathon of La Rochelle came into sight. My running friend and former coach Norédine already participated and I remembered his stories from the head wind, rain, cold, lonely docks ... Let's go! No risk, no fun, and my very best (runner) friend Betti was in. Perfect.

#### **Departure**

We picked up our cute Citroen C3 Picasso that I lovingly baptized dog-catcher at 4pm at Gare du Nord and after 5 hours of driving we arrived at Ile-de-Ré. Being hosted in one of the best B&B I ever had ("Maison des Algues"), we spent Saturday on the island to explore the beach in the morning by running and, after an extraordinary breakfast, the villages, markets and lighthouses by car.



At 7pm we arrived at the exposition center of La Rochelle for picking up the race package. As usual, I am known for it, passing by all stands where something can be won, or grabbed for free or at least negotiated ☺

## Pasta Party

This was really worth it. The only slightly negative point was the 20 minutes queuing before entering, but what a party: All volunteers where welcoming every single runner with applause and a rose for the girls. We had taboulé, pasta Bolognese (special thanks to Betti here for organizing some vegetarian organic tomato sauce for me), red wine, cheese, dessert, fruits ... and very nice table neighbors to talk to.



Back to the B&B by 9pm, I organized my **equipment** for the big race. Due to my upcoming excitement, it took me something like 1,5 hours for finally this:

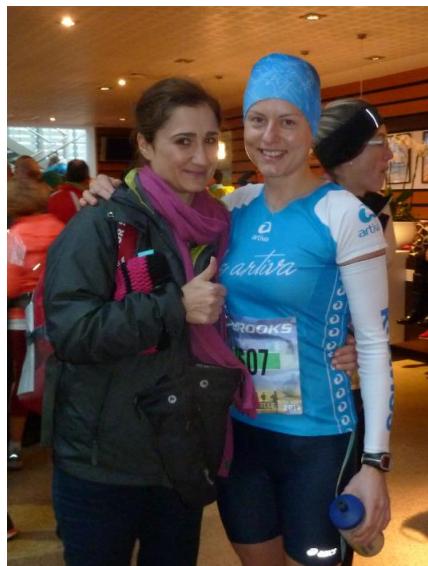
- Asics DS Trainer
- 2XU compression stockings
- running short
- T-shirt
- sorry Matthieu, no details on underwear
- Buff
- oversleeves
- plastic bag
- 4 Ultrasports bars
- Nok crème

After a short night of 5 hours, as typically one CANNOT sleep before a race, wake-up at 6am ... No, I do not mention here that we slept only by 1am as Betti had to finish an important presentation for her management ;)

## Race Day

Despite all the delicious things from the breakfast, I limited it to some bread, jam, orange juice, coffee and yoghurt. At 7h30 we hit the road and to our surprise found a free parking 200m away from the departure line. Unfortunately, one cannot insert videos here, because Betti and I were singing Careless Whisper in the car for warm-up in our own special cover version.

After 20 minutes waiting for a last visit of the pipi-room, we moved to the departure line. Betti, being an exceptional supporter, was with me until the starting shot was given. She encouraged me by saying: "Steffi, if you feel exhausted and you slow down, do not forget, everybody is suffering, everybody hurts, nobody is having fun here, so get up your butt and run as fast as you can!"



The overall 5.000 participants on the marathon started at 9am. All senior men started in another place and women and veteran men started in front of the expo center. At km3 both groups joined.

The first 2 kilometers were quite slow, as the track was narrow and especially around the harbor, loads of spectators where standing. The weather was still quite cold with around 5°C, but dry and only light wind. At km2 I threw away the plastic bag, took up pace (4'36) and the race could start ...

Fortunately, there were the 3h15 pacemakers joining with the second starting group and I was staying right behind them almost all the time.

I was not hungry at all, but I remembered the serious words of Betti that I have to promise to eat and drink regularly. So, at km5 I started chewing the first small piece of energy bar. Overall, I had 2,5 during the whole race and some water at each refreshment point, which were perfectly organized by the way. As agreed, Betti encouraged me at km15, 20, 36 and finally at km41, where she even ran a little bit with me (she is pregnant!). Later she told me that she panicked at km36, because I was not right behind the pacemaker, but fortunately I appeared short after.

The track is divided in two rounds and basically flat except for some very light elevations. The sun came out after 30 minutes of race and the weather turned out being just perfect. Nevertheless, on the second round, the wind was blowing and made it a little bit more difficult. Otherwise, certainly, there are some lonely parts on the track with only few spectators, however, in the city center and around the harbor the streets were packed and the ambiance was just great.

I did not really feel a weak point during the race, just a hint of it at km30, but certainly more in my head, however the last 4 kilometers became a little bit long because I was missing water. It came at km41, far too late!

After a last tour around the harbor, lots of encouragement and some aching cobblestones, I crossed the finish line at 3:16:08 and had tears in my eyes. The lady giving me the medal kissed me, as I was the first women this day she gave the medal to (actually, I arrived 21<sup>st</sup> women). I had a rose, a wind jacket and a box of oysters that Betti gave later so somebody in the street, as we could not take it all the way to Paris.



As the finish line is 2km away from the departure and the bus shuttles could not pass through the running track, I walked a while and joined Betti at the car. We passed the afternoon in the city, attended the very well organized price ceremony, had dinner at the harbor and were back in Paris at 11pm.

So, to sum up, this was a wonderful marathon weekend, accompanied by the world's best supporter and a race that I can highly recommend to every runner.

Cheers,

Steffi

