

# Marathon

## *Running my first full marathon*

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Last Sunday I completed my first full marathon, covering a distance of 42KM in and around Amsterdam. An idea that started in a bar with some beers and concluded with a finish in the Olympic Stadium. What a journey, what an experience, well worthy of a blog post.

About a year ago, I was having some beers with my buddy Niels who just finished the New York City Marathon. After his passionate recollection of *his* experience he dropped the bombshell question: "Why not join me next year in running a Marathon?!"



*How great ideas are created: some guys with some beer*

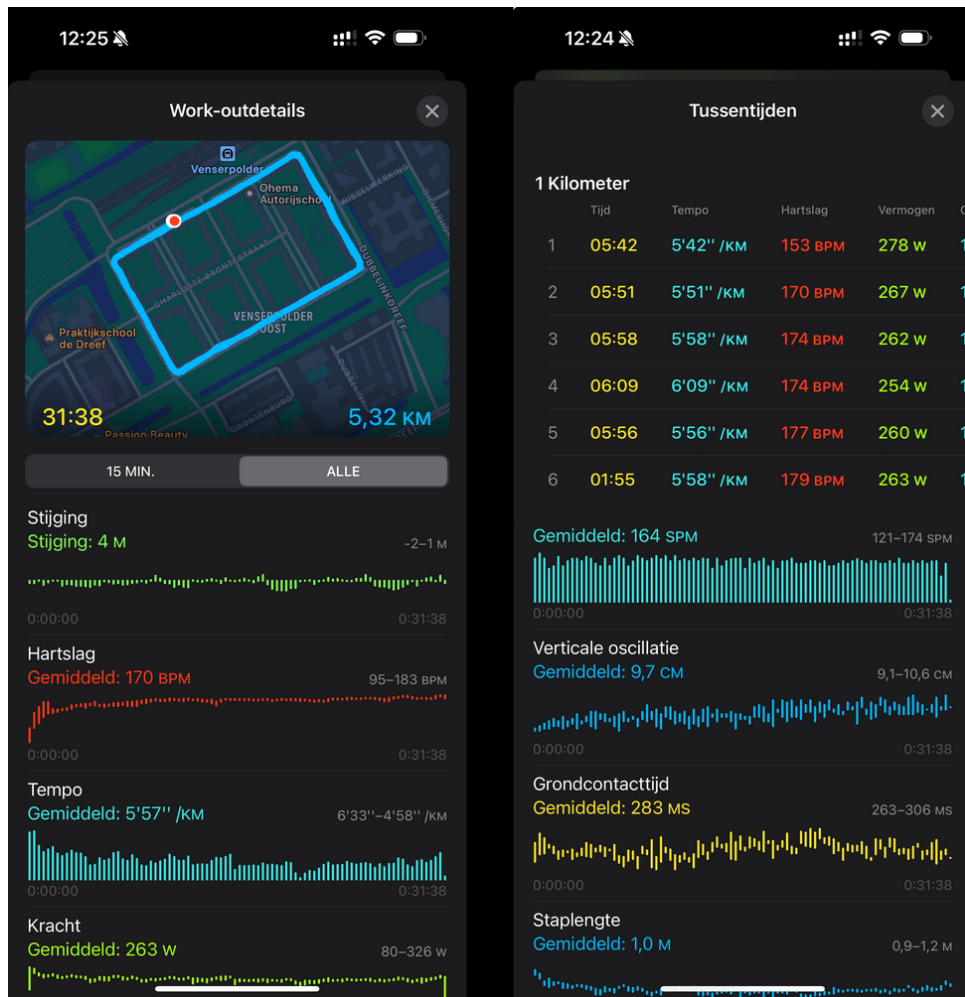
Maybe it was the lovely brew, maybe it was wisdom, but the idea seemed great from the get go! The only (minor) problem was that I had never done any serious running. Could I turn my experience in [cycling](#) into anything useful for running?

Following advice from different people with more running experience, I went to the local [running store](#) for some guidance on shoes. The store's friendly staff made me run on a special test track equipped with sensors that profile the pressure of your feet landing on the ground while running. The aim is to have a smooth transition from step to step. From this test it became apparent that my left foot behaves a little different than my right one. That's funny, as it is something I have noted from data of my bike's [power pedals](#), too. Fitting the right shoes is very important to prevent injury and to maximise your enjoyment while running.



*My Asics GT-4000 in mako blue/black, extra wide (2e)*

My first training was a 5K around my office block in Amsterdam. Many professional coaches would advice a novice runner to start with a shorter distance, and gradually build up... I wanted to understand where I was, ignored any advice and just went full pull to see how 5K would feel - given my experience as cyclist. *Boy, that was bad.*



*Data from first raining session 5K - note the slow pace and high heart rate*

One thing you can clearly see in the data from the first training, is that my pace was relatively slow, and yet I experienced a very high heartrate right from the start. This is because my body was *totally* not used to running; it operated in a kind of shock. This is why you should take it easy: give your body a chance to adapt to the new kind of strain.

Following my initial round, I continued to train, multiple days a week in various degrees of intensity. Because I personally liked it as a benchmark, I always took the 5K as minimum - playing with different paces to eventually balance on a rhythm that I could endure a little easier. It didn't take long before I started to enjoy my new hobby, making it even easier to keep the training sessions going.

After just a few weeks, I started to see some real progress in pace and endurance; my body was clearly adapting. To keep things interesting, I set some smaller goals: registering myself for local running events in Horst aan de Maas: [10K Rundje um ut Hundje](#) and the [21K Venloop](#) in Venlo. I wrote a blog post about [running the half marathon in Venlo](#).

During the rest of the year I continued my training sessions, I even took my running shoes along for the summer holiday to Italy. This is one of the things I enjoy of running, you can easily bring your gear with you and go out for a run wherever you are.





*Out running in the rain at Lake Lugano in Italy*



*Training for a marathon: no mountain too high - just go through the tunnel... :-)*

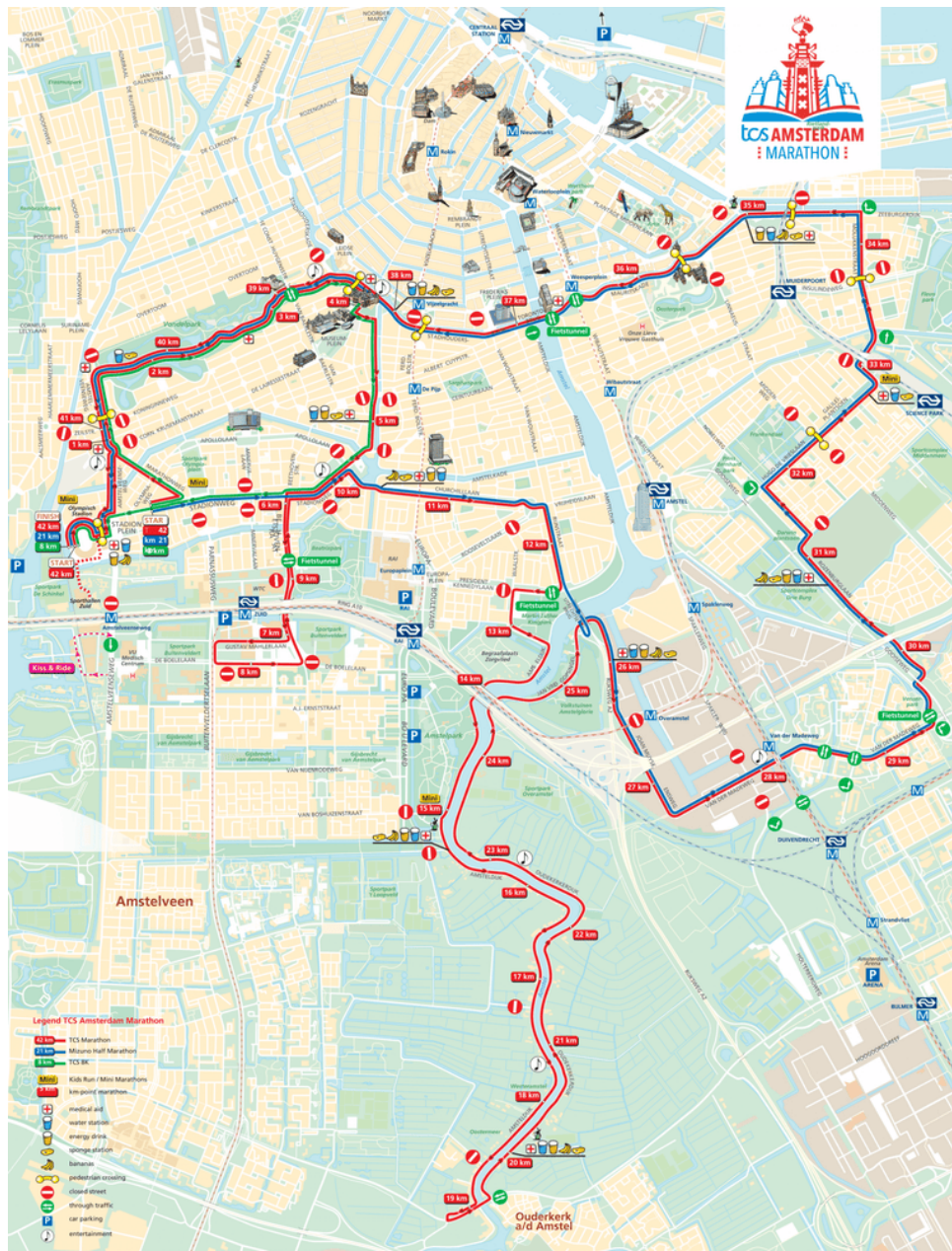


*Waking up early in Tuscany, to go for a run before sunrise (escaping intense heat)*

## **TCS Marathon Amsterdam**

Fast forward to October 20, 2024... time for the [TCS Marathon Amsterdam](#). I figured it would be a good idea to run my first full Marathon on [known ground](#). The Amsterdam Marathon, established in 1975, draws around 45 thousand participants each year. The route passes through iconic areas of [Amsterdam](#), including the Rijksmuseum, the Amstel River and the historic Olympic Stadium.





*Route of the TCS Amsterdam Marathon*

In the weeks leading up to the event I paid special attention to my sleep, food and drinking. I tuned down the training intensity, moving enough to keep the body in good condition while reducing the risk of over training. My final training runs went up to a distance of  $\pm 30K$ . I expected the full marathon to be difficult, but do-able.





*Moments before my official start at Stadionweg*



*Lot's of folks on the street, many of them with a healthy tension in their tenure*





*Running in the Rijksmuseum tunnel - that's pretty cool*



*Let's play the game "Where's Willem?" :-)*



*The part of the route following the Amstel River is challenging: you see runners at the other side of the river returning to the city/finish, it's an extra mental challenge*



*At around 25K there are fewer happy faces around you - people are fully focussed on their effort - it gets serious*





*Between 30K and 40K, body and mind are fighting together to reach the finish*



*You finish in the Olympisch Stadion, that's a special feeling adding to the euphoria of counting down the final meters*





*This image sums it up, it is my "endgame" face - a 42K Marathon finisher!*

## Conclusion

Without doubt this was the most difficult thing I have ever done. I finished my first marathon in a respectable 4 hours and 15 minutes. It took 100% of my physical capabilities *and* it demanded a 200% psychological performance. You'll encounter pain, tiredness, emotions and energy from random strangers cheering you up. It's such a weird mix of things, very raw, very demanding. Your experience may vary, but I described it to be nearly spiritual in its deepness - once you've finished you feel different in various ways.

## **Thank you**

A warm thank you for all the volunteers who made the event possible. Thanks to my wife and kids for supporting me from home, during this event and during the many training sessions. Thanks to all the supporters along the road, including my brother, his kids, and the many 'random strangers' shouting my name. Last but not least, special thanks to my buddy Niels for spurring my interest in running - I came to love it!