

A Tale of Twin Cities
By Jack Moran, Race Director

The inaugural Twin Cities Marathon has met with a fantastic reception. The sponsors and I have gotten countless fan letters, phone calls, and face-to-face thank yous, which we really appreciated. The day after the marathon, all the excitement is over, but there remains an awful lot of work to be done, and those cards and letters gave us the energy we needed.

It's hard to believe The Twin Cities Marathon was just an idea a little more than a year ago, and an idea born out of desperation at that. For 18 years the Minnesota Distance Running Association (MDRA) had been putting on a marathon, and for at least 10 years the event was held in the fall. It had a variety of names and courses, but most recently was called the City of Lakes Marathon and consisted of four laps around Lakes Calhoun and Harriet in Minneapolis. Flat and fast, it was a great race when there were just a few hundred runners, but couldn't begin to handle the running boom that hit here a few years ago. The Garry Bjorklund Sports stores organization, a relative neophyte in race direction but much more aggressive than the volunteer-run MDRA, sought to take up the slack with the Saint Paul Marathon, which was run for the first time in 1981 on a single-loop course along much of the St. Paul park system, and had a downtown start and finish.

The upshot was the Twin Cities hosted two marathons in 1981, one in Minneapolis and the other in St. Paul, and on consecutive weekends. As president of the MDRA, I found this embarrassing at best, and also threatening. The number of races these days makes it impossible to avoid some scheduling conflicts, but back-to-back marathons in one area looked like war. And I seemed to be one of the combatants.

Getting the two running organizations to come together on a single city-to-city race was not really that hard. Steve Hoag, a partner in what is now GBS Sports and director of the St. Paul Marathon, deserves a lot of credit. He got tremendous applause for his race, but was willing to concede that a Twin Cities Marathon had more potential, and was one of its early backers. I was in a good position to push the idea with the MDRA Board, and did so.

A much more formidable obstacle was the City of St. Paul, which had also received much praise for its race, and was very reluctant to give it up. Among their "compromise" proposals was letting the Twin Cities and St. Paul marathons run one or two weeks apart. Enter Bruce Brothers, the Minneapolis Tribune running writer, who gave the idea a big play while the issue was still very much in doubt. His article was spotted by Dr. Glen Nelson, a marathoner from Minnetonka. Glen's wife, Marilyn, is the dynamo behind the Scandinavia To day celebration, which has been bringing a king a week into the Twin Cities of late. He suggested that, given the excellence of Nordic marathoners, The Twin Cities Marathon might fit very well into a celebration of contemporary Scandinavian culture. Marilyn bought the idea, and made several phone calls on the marathon's behalf to various civic authorities

in St. Paul, as did Bernie Friel and Dick Rohleder, two well-placed St. Paul lawyers and runners. In the meantime, Mark Kaplan, Minneapolis's marathoning alderman, put us in contact with some key officials from his side of the river, and later set up a meeting with aldermen through whose wards the race would go. St. Paul demanded one route change, to gain more mileage in its city (that's why we run the hills of Highland), and Minneapolis another, to keep 34th Ave. open (which accounts for our detour at Nokomis Ave.). Otherwise, both cities went for the idea of a big, splashy marathon which might draw in droves of runner-tourists, and The Twin Cities Marathon had its basic civic permission.

Now, we needed some money. Scandinavia Today had offered to pick up the travel expenses of up to seven world-class marathoners. To get them to run The Twin Cities Marathon rather than the lucrative and well-established races put on by Chicago, Columbus, and New York, we decided we should offer the runners two tickets each, and would also offer a prize-money purse. This led to a budget of \$125,000, including a \$50,000 purse. Dain Bosworth and its parent, Inter-Regional Financial Group, gave us \$10,000, an excellent start .

However, we soon discovered 1982 was not a good year to try to launch a major extravaganza. We had excellent contacts in just about every major firm in the Twin Cities, but our dozens of proposals fell on deaf ears. As late as May, I wrote a story for the Minnesota Distance Runner in which I predicted a \$10 entry fee unless one last proposal came in.* Naturally, the purse would have to be dropped, and getting any Scandinavians (or Minnesotans) of note to run was very doubtful.

However, our luck was beginning to change. Larry Haeg, an assistant producer at WCCO Radio, wanted to get involved with running. He found out about The Twin Cities Marathon from Michael Fedo, who does a Sunday morning show on running for WCCO. He contacted us, and liked what he heard. Larry was able to persuade Phil Lewis, the station manager, that WCCO should go ahead and start promoting the race, even though, without a major sponsor, the race didn't figure to earn the station a dime.

Fortunately, Bill Spoor listens to WCCO. He was intrigued by WCCO's claim that the marathon would be "a major regional sporting event", and asked the advertising department of The Pillsbury Company to look into it. Since Mr. Spoor is the Chairman of Pillsbury's Board, the department was glad to do so. Pillsbury liked what it heard, especially WCCO's involvement, and we had our major sponsor, just days before the deadline we had set for going to press with our entry blanks, sponsor or none.

Unfortunately, in order to make this last-gasp proposal more attractive, we chopped our budget to \$75,000, by cutting out the purse. Since we felt obligated to Scandinavia Today to try to get the best Scandinavians we could find to run the marathon, we now decided to put the purse back in. We hoped that, with Pillsbury providing what we needed to put on a first-class race, it would be possible to find a number of smaller donors who would collectively put up the purse.

First we had to deal with another obstacle, just getting out invitations to the runners. Such invitations have to be sent to the

athletes' national governing body, and should come from that of the United States, The Athletics' Congress (TAC). The rules governing prize money in athletics have been changing rapidly. I thought I understood them nonetheless, and so was surprised when TAC flatly refused to transmit my invitations to the athletes, with the claim that there is no such thing as prize money in an international race. This flabbergasted me, since I had been reading of the Avon International Marathon for Women's plans to offer prizes. Ollan Cassal, executive director of TAC, told me I was mistaken. I checked with Kathy Switzer, who had set up the marathon for Avon, and found that I should tell Mr. Cassal we wanted to offer "developmental funds" rather than "prizes". I called back Mr. Cassal, and, sure enough, it worked. A few more rounds of revisions were required, but, eventually, our invitations did go out. And with a very strong covering letter from Ollan Cassal in support of our race.

As the summer drew on, local runners started getting really excited about the race. We had our first 1,000 entries by the end of June, and our second 1,000 less than a month later. Carlson Companies and St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance each gave us \$1,000, Minnesota Mutual Life Insurance offered to print our results magazine for nothing, Northwestern National Life did the same for a program, in which we were able to sell \$1,750 worth of ads, we got donations of 5,000 bananas, 3,500 apples, and 5,000 cups of yogurt, and it was beginning to look like we'd be able to have at least a \$25,000 purse. Projecting 7,500 entries, I decided to guarantee \$20,000 in prizes (whoops, developmental funds), and to make a final decision at the end of August.

Almost immediately, to my surprise, we started to hear from Scandinavian runners. Sissel Grottenberg, who had run the Avon Marathon, had been contacted while she was here and already accepted. Now we also got acceptances from two other Norwegians and a Dane, with maybes from three other runners. Our promise of two tickets per runner now was a problem, since Scandinavia Today decided it would help us only with the runners' travel.

Well, we ended up \$17,000 in the hole. In retrospect, I based our offer of a purse on overoptimistic projections—we ended up with just about 4,500 entrants—and I suppose it should be called a mistake. But I confess to no regrets. We had one heck of a race, for a first annual, and our sponsors are allowing us to carry forward the deficit into next year's budget. If I work things right, I might even get paid next year!

*The entry fee ended up at \$6 on or before Sept. 18 and \$10 Sept. 19-Oct. 2, the day before the race.