

FRIENDS OF EUROPE SPORTING IN PRAGUE

I have good memories of the “Small Meeting” in May 2010 in Esch, The Netherlands. It has been special to do the preparations, but if the guests finally arrive and the programme is about to start, only then you’ll find out how special and unique Friends of Europe is. We had Czech lodgers, Tomas and Eduard, who were surprised about my running activities. When “by chance”, they visited the shop Runnersworld in Den Bosch and saw a photograph of me running in Paris, they accepted the challenge to run the Half-Marathon in Prague! Thus, the challenge was made.

So I started training and training. It was great to do and hardly punishing. In the event I secretly would like to beat the Czechs.

Finally the day arrived: Wednesday morning 30 March we left for Prague. After about 11 hours we arrived in Vinor, a suburb of Prague, where Tomas booked a hotel. It was very easy to go to the centre of Prague, using the bus and underground. This beautiful city, with its magnificent buildings, bridges, squares, shops, restaurants and pubs is really to be recommended.

This time accompanied by their wives, it was a heartfelt reunion with Tomas and Eduard. We clicked with each other immediately.

Normally when you run a half-marathon you make sure you get a good night sleep, but that went down the drain: exploring the city, having a beer/wine, in the evening an excellent dinner “all inclusive”. Suddenly it is late in the evening.

Finally it was Saturday 2 April: the day of the half-marathon. We had trained for this day for months, and now it was upon us.



We felt no nerves; we only hoped that we would end the race without injuries. We started running relaxed, each of us in our own speed. It was extremely hot that day - the first day of the year like this, but it sure lightened things up. About 10.000 competitors showed up at the start, from all over the world. This is wonderful to see and it gives an enormously good atmosphere. When the starting shot went off we were unstoppable and started in good spirits.



A wonderful track, straight across Prague, the greater part went along the Vltava. A lot of encouraging spectators, a lot of bands with motivational music, but also a lot of people who dropped out, probably caused by the unexpectedly hot weather. The track was heavy, very heavy, a lot of cobble stones, tram rails, upstanding kerbs, hidden gradient, and even drains without lids. But it was great to run this race. When the finish was close by, I even had enough spirit to put on a final sprint and I crossed the finish euphorically. You cannot describe the feeling you have at that moment. And another nice adjunct - the little lady from the Netherlands beat the Czechs!

This will definitely be continued: so.... which Friend will compete next year??

**Regards,
Anita Verstijnen
Esch, the Netherlands**