

THE RUNNING MANN

Humorous Anecdotes, Observations & Accounts of Marathon Running & Agile Adventures.



20TH APRIL 2024 BY STUART MANN

“Worst thing I have witnessed in 20 years of running” says International Runner with 418 marathon finishes in 77 countries

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Danish runner, Tor Rønnow, travelled to Cape Town especially for the 2024 Two Oceans Ultra Marathon. Rønnow is an accomplished runner with 418 marathon finishes in 77

different countries across all 7 continents. He's run all 6 world marathon majors but, surprisingly, the Two Oceans was his first ultra marathon.



The calm before the cutoff controversy storm.

What was supposed to be a momentous occasion on Rønnow's impressive running CV instead turned into "easily my worst race experience ever". He was well ahead of the required running pace of 7:30/km when he arrived at the marathon cutoff just 30 seconds after the gates were slammed shut. Rønnow pointed out that the official race app was predicting a finish time of 6h45, a full 15 minutes before the final finish line cutoff, as he was getting pulled off the road.

He summed up his experience saying that he's seen many things on his travels but, "This cut off scandal is the worst thing I have witnessed during 20 years of marathon running."



Rønnow relaxing on his trip to Tanzania for the Mount Kilimanjaro Marathon.

There was mass confusion on the marathon cutoff times with 10.46am and 10.50am being listed on different sections of the official website. The website also said, "If you do not reach the cut-off points within the required time (at an average pace of 7.5 min per km), you will be asked to retire from the Race and leave the road." This implies that the cutoff should have been set at 10.54am.

With stereotypical Scandinavian logic he posted on social media:

"Please, Two Oceans Marathon, take us through the calculation of the marathon cut off time. You reached the result 10.46 which I believe is false.

My calculation:

Start last batch: 05.39

End of race: 12.39

Marathon cut off must be $14 \times 7,5$ mins before this time if day = 105 minutes before, equals 10.54

Calculated the other way: $42.2 \times 7,5 = 316,5$ minutes, equals 5,275 hours, equals 10.54 time of day.

In other words: you have calculated the marathon cut off 8 minutes wrongly!!!

How is the above not correct and how is this not a huge scandal?"

Meanwhile the Two Oceans organisers issued a statement after the race clarifying that the 10.46am cutoff was correct. The marathon cutoff is 10 minutes stricter than it was in other post-Covid events but no special communications were made to ensure that the runners were aware of this change.

The Two Oceans announcement seemed to try to transfer accountability for the cutoff confusion to the runners, "The cut-off time of 10:46 was listed in the final communication to all runners through the official digimag, which has the latest information regarding race details. This is sent to all participants directly via SMS days before the race. This format of communication is widely used across the world on all big sporting events, as details sometimes change at the 11th hour. This information is regarded as full and final."

Tor Rønnow has run more big city marathons than most people have had breakfasts. Therefore, he is someone who should know what the standard international protocol is and disagrees, "Besides, the whole mechanism of adjusting the cutoff within one day to go for the race is unheard of! You cannot expect 14000 runners to browse the internet during race weekend, where people are out to get their numbers, hotel rooms, tour the city, etc."

When I spoke to him, Rønnow used the example of Tokyo Marathon which has a marker board every five kilometres clearly informing runners of the exact time of the next cutoff point. Whilst there were warning marker boards 1km before the cutoffs in previous years, these were absent in 2024. What would a seasoned world marathon traveller expect? Rønnow reflected that Two Oceans delivered the opposite, "On race morning there was no sign of the cutoff times in the starting area and there were none on the route."



Even in Japanese the Tokyo cutoffs are clearer than those at Two Oceans (photo credit Gabi Runs)

After each race, Rønnow publishes a race report with photos taken along the route in 10 different languages on this blog <https://www.temperance.dk/blog/>. He sent Two Oceans three emails before the race requesting a better seeding on the rationale that, "I come a very long way from Denmark and starting mid-field will increase both my likelihood to complete the race AND to make a more spectacular race report." None of his requests to start in a higher seeding batch were acknowledged by Two Oceans.

Rønnow also highlighted the water points as being well below international standard. Many athletes complained after the run that the water tables were not able to handle the volume of runners, which resulted in further delays as runners waited 30 to 60 seconds at each table to get a cup of water.

Rønnow drew comparisons to the 2023 Shanghai Marathon which had "prefilled cups, razor sharp staff" at every table. He also pointed out that they had 400m long water tables on both sides of the road followed by energy drinks for another 400m. Commenting on the overall organisation at Two Oceans he was scathing, "In terms of race organisation, for an event of this magnitude, Two Oceans Marathon is not even in the top 50. I could in my sleep name 50 large marathons with better organisation and double so for smaller scale events."



Tor Rønnow gives a talk at the international athletes dinner before the Shanghai Marathon.

The cutoff delays and related turmoil took their toll on his performance, "The whole thing spoiled my race". However, Rønnow persevered and managed to secure the dignity of crossing the finish line at the University of Cape Town, albeit as an unofficial finisher. For the first time in 419 attempts, Tor Rønnow returned to Denmark without a medal.

However, Rønnow is still able to see the positives. Despite doing all the normal tourist activities like Table Mountain, Bo-Kaap and beating the street hustlers at chess on the Victoria and Alfred Wharf, he lists the highlight of his trip as, "Being able to cross the finish line and complete the race!" Food for thought to those who would prematurely rip runners from the roads.

How does Two Oceans compare in terms of scenery? Rønnow admits that he is something of a mountain man listing the Zermatt and Jungfrau Marathons in the Swiss Alps as the most scenic he's run. However, he says that, "If coast line is your thing, the Two Ocean Ultra Marathon surely delivers! Wow! The scenery of the route is at parts simply breathtaking."

I can't argue with his route highlight being Chapman's Peak, which he calls, "Two Oceans' diamond above all, a daunting challenge in terms of climbing meters but rewarding with an outlook unique to all other marathons."

Perhaps this international visitor best sums up the lack of logic with the whole cutoff debacle when he lists his greatest regret, "It is a shame there was no time to enjoy the views a bit more. What is the idea of having 'the most beautiful marathon in the world' if there is no time to actually see it?"

Afterword

Sometimes people question why making a big deal of illogical cutoffs is important. There are many reasons but here we have an international tourist who is not going to return because of something that should never be an issue. He's going to tell his friends, social media followers and the other international running travellers he meets on his adventures about the terrible experience he's had at Two Oceans – all because the basics are not done properly. Tor Rønnow was not the only international runner that was impacted.

I also think that Tor Rønnow's story provides a good perspective on just where our big races are on the world scale in terms of organisational prowess. Rønnow's perspective counters the parochial South African view that we are 'hot shit' – the unfortunate reality is that our shit is tepid at best.

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2 OCEANS, ALL RUNNING

CHAPMAN'S PEAK, CHAPPIES, CUTOFF CONTROVERSY, CUTOFFS, DENMARK, TOR RØNNOW, TWO OCEANS

6 Replies to "“Worst thing I have witnessed in 20 years of running” says International Runner with 418 marathon finishes in 77 countries”

**Norrie****20TH APRIL 2024 AT 4:46 PM**

What's even more frustrating is that many of these aspects have been discussed or mentioned before — but it seems people have an ear full of wax!!

There is nothing wrong with trying new things and just because they have done it 'that way' in the past doesn't mean it's the way for the future

And Shanghai that he refers to is not a special example – it's more or less the same for all 200 events in china 🇨🇳

And as for medical in china there is a first aider EVERY 100 metres A professional every km and scooters / bikes every 3-5k section with AED and typically 2 paramedics. Then medical stations with 3 doctors and 5-6 nurses every 2.5k

This for 20,000 runners – the size of comrades —

Time we in SA woke up

**Greg****20TH APRIL 2024 AT 6:24 PM**

All very nice Norrie, but who will pay for it. It is already an expensive event to get to. You will be charging double and triple the entry fee.

**Juzza****21ST APRIL 2024 AT 10:31 AM**

I think runners should train harder so that cutoffs are not such a tight issue, particularly if travelling from abroad. Don't quibble about a few minutes because you weren't in a condition to beat the cutoff. As well as organiser responsibility, there is responsibility on the side of the runner to get themselves into the right physical shape to finish.

**Mark****21ST APRIL 2024 AT 12:59 PM**

Stuart, I was part of the race and managed to finish. Unfortunately your article only shows 1 side of the story. It was a wonderfully organised race, spectators were supportive and brilliant and the water points were decent (even though some lacked water and only had

coke and powerade). I did not stop for pictures, I ran the race as my goal was to finish. The times were published as the race directors statement. My opinion, but if you just make a cutoff, then I don't think you will finish in time anyway.



Stuart Mann

21ST APRIL 2024 AT 6:45 PM

This article is admittedly just showing one runner's perspective (but one that I would consider important based on his international experience). I thought the some part of the organisation were poor this year (the water tables especially could not handle the volume of runners). The marathon cutoff was 10 minutes earlier than normal which definitely resulted in many runners being denied a medal (I am busy analyzing the data). I will be doing a full article on the cutoffs in due course. I am waiting for responses from TOM to detailed questions which they have promised on Monday.



Khaya Nunu

21ST APRIL 2024 AT 6:57 PM

My cry with the Cape Town races specifically TOM and Cape Town Marathon is the inefficiency of using cups. Granted, those are not going anywhere. Then, why not have water tables on each side of the road and then prefill the cups so runners don't waste time?