
The adventures in Preparation for the Erasmus Team Race at the Prague International Marathon

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When I was younger, I could never quite understand why people who were not in the sporting profession would voluntarily run a 42 kilometer Marathon. That changed today! There are, of course, many other activities I could choose to do in my free time, but I have come to appreciate the desire to prove to oneself that it is possible to conquer such a distance; to improve on previous attempts; to meet new people and exercise together while exploring the city.

In 2012 the Erasmus programme celebrated its 25th anniversary. The participating universities were asked to commemorate the anniversary and make the programme more accessible to their students and the public. There have been international fairs and meetings, conferences, and in the case of Charles University, Prague, a series of Erasmus anniversary articles and interviews prepared and published. In the Czech Republic, the National Agency for European Educational Programmes wanted to promote the Erasmus programme by supporting the “Student Marathon”. The “Student Marathon” was a student team competition at the annual Prague International Marathon on 13th May 2012. The two largest Czech universities, Charles University in Prague and Masaryk University in Brno, were each offered a free start number for one team. This team was formed out of three Erasmus and one Czech student.

Charles University admitted 1206 Erasmus students in the academic year 2011/12. The idea of finding 3 sporty international students interested to take part in the Student Marathon competition seemed fairly easy at first. However things that initially appear easy often prove more challenging than expected...

The obvious choice was to approach the Erasmus students of the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports first when searching for possible participants. Unfortunately, although many of them were initially interested, the Prague International Marathon was scheduled for precisely the same weekend as the Canoeing Course which many students had signed up for. This example shows how difficult it was to find those students who were interested in sports and running, therefore it was decided that all Erasmus students at Charles University would be sent an email inviting them to participate in the Marathon and the trial run for the team competition. This worked well; we received many responses from students wishing to register for the Marathon. However, the majority wanted to run individually for fun rather than compete.

Eventually we found 4 Erasmus students to participate in the 5 kilometers trial run at the stadium of the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport in the beginning of April. Andriy Urodin, a current student at the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics (from Dresden University of Technology), Beth Walsh who studied at Faculty of Law (from University College Dublin) and the last two participants, Vincent Guerin (from Université Montpellier 1) and Bartomeu Riutord (from Universitat de Lleida), both Erasmus students at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport.

Andriy, Vincent and Bartomeu were selected to represent the Erasmus part of the team and Beth was to be the Erasmus substitute. The trial run was prepared and overseen by Dr. Radim Jebavý from the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, who had been involved with the Prague International Marathon since 1998. He was able to give valuable advice to the students. Radim Jebavý was also responsible for choosing the Czech member of the marathon team, one of his students, Honza Zikmund.

One would assume that the most complicated part was over at this point. The Team members had been selected and they started to prepare for the competition. The European Office at Charles University was responsible for picking up their start numbers and preparing the Charles University T-shirts they would run in. However we had completely forgotten to prepare ourselves for one more possible complication – there was no substitute for the Czech member of the team! As it happened, it was Honza Zikmund who twisted his ankle on Sunday a week before the Marathon. Fortunately Radim Jebavý was a life-saver. He stepped in and suggested a substitute member for the team, Honza Škoda.

Finally the day of the race arrived. Each runner was assigned a section of the 42 kilometer marathon. Honza Škoda ran the first 10 km, Andriy Urodin and Vincent Guerin the same distance in the second and third portion of the race and the last 12 km were covered by Bartomeu Riutord. With a time of 2 hours, 47 minutes and 52 seconds, the “Erasmus Team for Charles University” ended up in 5th place in the student team competition. Another team formed by Erasmus students from Charles University, that entered the student competition for fun, “Štěpánská 36” (Evelyne Mertz and Claire Jacquin, both from Université Strasbourg studying at the First Faculty of Medicine, Bernd Mangold from University of Konstanz,

an Erasmus student at Faculty of Mathematics and Physics and their local friend Matej Gaser) finished in 20th position with a time of 3 hours, 38 minutes and 24 seconds. There was also an Erasmus student from Charles University who entered the competition individually; Essi Malin from the Faculty of Arts (University of Jyväskylä) who completed the Marathon with a time of 4 hours, 32 minutes and 23 seconds. All of these times were admirable achievements, especially since many of the students are not sportsmen and are not students of Physical Education and Sport.

So how does one actually prepare for such a challenge? Andriy, Essi and Claire shared with us how they trained for the race.



Andriy Urodin states: *“Being a student in a foreign country for a relatively short period of time requires an accurate management of time, considering the studies, as well as many cultural attractions and events in Prague.*

When I was offered a place in the official Charles University Erasmus Marathon team at the beginning of April, it was clear to me that however strong my desire was to participate and deliver a good performance in the race, there would not be sufficient time for an extensive training programme.

It was clear to me that it would be very important to try and maintain a good physical form, given the circumstances. I was fortunate to be in rather good shape after my preparation for a similar run in Dresden in late autumn of 2011 and I continued to maintain this form through the winter.

My preparation for the Prague International Marathon consisted of rather short runs during the weekdays in the early morning and longer runs at the weekends. I'm used to getting up early, so I always completed a twenty minute run and added to my routine some other exercises, to help with my training.

At the weekends I took long runs in Hostivař Forest, close to my hall of residence, or used the S-Train line to reach Klánovice Forest. I found this forest by doing some research on the internet. This is one of the largest areas covered by wood within the city of Prague. It is very quiet on Saturday and Sunday mornings and the air and terrain are very pleasant for running.

After having figured out on the map the part of the relay I was going to run, I went to the centre of Prague on an early morning when there was only a little traffic and took a trial run there to get to grips with the course.“



Responsible for her own performance only, **Essi Malin** was more relaxed. She described her preparation, stating: *“During the last year I kept a running schedule, and ran about 10 km once a week. Here in Prague I often ran in Hostivař Forest. The weekend before the Prague International Marathon I was “preparing” in Paris: drinking French wines, eating cream cakes and running through Parisian streets on high heels, so I already had blisters on my feet.*

I didn't create any training programme this time, as this was already my third marathon. When I was preparing for my first marathon, I used a similar training programme to the one published on I-Forum.

As to my expectations, my personal record for marathon running is 4 hours and 27 minutes. I didn't prepare as much this time, therefore I didn't expect to break my record. Nevertheless, I still had a lot of motivation to participate in the race because I wanted to feel the unique atmosphere and share my experience with thousands of others.”

Claire Jacquin and her team participated purely for fun. Claire spoke about her experience, stating: *“I didn't actually prepare that much for the marathon. I was only running twice a week for about 1 hour, running about 10 km each time. Unfortunately I have had a big problem with one of my knees for some time, so I couldn't run for more than 30 minutes without my knees beginning to hurt.*

My main motivation for participating in the race? I wanted to run for fun in a team of friends as I really like running and discovering new places. Taking part in a marathon was something I always wanted to try, you could say, it was a dream for me. I was very adamant to run just for fun, and didn't want to run under any pressure. This was why I didn't attempt to join the official Charles University team.

I had no expectations; my only goal was to reach the end of the race.”

We would like to congratulate all of the Erasmus students who participated in the Prague International Marathon 2012 and would like to give special thanks to the official Erasmus team for their great performance in the Student Team Competition.