

Wednesday, December 14, 2011

2011 USATF XC Champs

What a weekend! Atlanta Track Club won the Master's Team Championship with 22 points and I won the Overall Title in a kick finish.

Coming into the race I had put together a pretty good training cycle after recovering from The Twin Cities Marathon ten weeks prior. I had trained pretty hard but had not benefited from that one race or session that said "I'm ready". In fact, the week before the race I actually felt a little tired mentally.

On race day I kept telling myself that I had put in the work and actually felt quite confident. The race started in cool temperatures but no wind. I immediately went to the front to ensure a steady pace. We split through the first 3 Miles in 5:05, 5:10, and 5:14. Even though I was predominately leading, we still had a decent size pack so I decided to drop the pace a little by inserting surges. The result was a 4th mile (5:06) and 5th mile (5:04) which set-up a thrilling last 2km lap.

Approaching the final lap Sandu Rebenciuc (formerly of Romania, who made the 2005 & 2006 U.S. Team for the World Cross Country Champs) made a move with Tracy Lokken (US Masters Marathon Champion in 2011 and USATF XC Champion in 2009) and I covering. There were an additional 4 or 5 other runners, including my team mate Chad Newton, fighting to stay in touch.

As we pushed up the small hill with about a mile to go Tracy took off, but the move was quickly covered. We pushed the pace down the back side of the course before I made another move with about 1km to go. Sandu made a very good counter move with 800m to go that seemed as if it might be enough. However, I had trained too hard to allow my lack of concentration to cost me the win.

As we approached the last 600m I clawed my way back to Sandu. We came through the 6M (4:58) mark and I started to close pretty quickly, then with about 100 yards to go I opened it up. I have always tried to have a good kick and now I had a great opportunity to use it. With 50 yards to go I caught Sandu. I saw him look over his right shoulder as I passed him. Coming into the line I continued to push, finishing in 32:13 to win by 3 seconds. It was a wonderful moment to realize you have finally won a US title after 4 consecutive 2nd place finishes.

I had a microphone put in front of me as I tried to catch my breath. While doing the interview I was trying to watch the finishers to see if we won the team title. After watching the first 20 or so runners I realized we must have as we placed 6 in the top 13 team scorers. What a moment. We were so happy as a team. That was a moment I will treasure for a very long time. It is so nice to enjoy personal success with that of other team mates. All ATC runners appeared to run very well, especially Robin Rogers who really only started to train seriously 5 or 6 weeks out.

That night we had a lot of fun reliving the race, where the 'kicks' got a little better and the 'surges' more devastating as the night wore on. However, I'm proud to say that at 6:30am there were 10 ATC'ers in the lobby ready to do a recovery run.