This was the first time I participated in the full marathon. It took me almost five hours to complete and I ran the entire race with two training partners by my side. We made a plan to stick together, to encourage each other when times got tough, and to ensure that each of us made it to the finish line. I knew that having that extra support would get us to our goal, and it did.

The three of us are members of Amsterdam Fit, a club that I founded in 2012 to offer structured training programs for marathons, half marathons, and other races. We accept members of all abilities, from seasoned marathoners to complete beginners, and we follow a structured training program together, led by coaches and experts in the field. Each week we meet, not only to train, but to socialize and have fun.

The TCS Amsterdam Marathon was our first big goal and we had a group of 48 runners entered. It was fun, and well worth all the training. The race atmosphere was convivial and relaxed and the organizers do an excellent job of bringing everyone together to make it a memorable event.

The course then winds its way through the city, passing through the beautiful Vondelpark and by well-known landmarks such as the famous Rijksmuseum. Spectators cheer you on left and right with their cups of warm chocolate milk and glasses of mulled wine. A few even follow by bike. Along the way runners get a view of various neighborhoods and—if you look closely—a peek into the lives of the Amsterdammers.

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After the introductory circuit in the city you are quickly swept away to the picturesque Amstel River for a bit of nature and a glimpse of small town Holland. While enjoying the serene landscapes, riverboat musicians keep you motivated and moving to the beat. During this section of the course you will spot livestock as well as some of Holland’s famous windmills. Don’t forget to carry a camera.

As you make your way back to the city you are welcomed by various bands and entertainers who keep the rhythm going. Scattered along this section are a few famous Dutch “brown cafes” as well as a brewery that makes a perfect location for cheering stations, where supporters can take a refreshing drink while awaiting your appearance. The course will then lead you along the canals and back for one last stroll through the Vondelpark before your finale at the Olympic Stadium.

This is perhaps the most memorable moment of the whole race. As soon as you get to kilometre 40 the crowds grow in size and the support is phenomenal. If your legs are tired by this point, you needn’t worry. The cheers are enough to carry you to the grand finish. And when you arrive, no matter your time, the roar of the crowd in the stadium will make you feel like a winner.

All 48 of our runners finished, most of them running this distance for the first time. While some may have been disappointed with their finish time, because it was such a windy day, all were happy to have participated in such a great event. It is definitely a race that we will repeat year after year.

Runners at the front of the race seemed to bear the wind better: Wilson Chebet improved the old record by three seconds and Meseret Hailu sliced almost a minute off the women’s record. Michel Butter became the third-fastest Dutch Marathon runner ever. The crowd exploded when he came into the Olympic Stadium to break 2:10.

The party atmosphere redoubled when Meseret Hailu posted the new women’s record, surpassing the time of Olympic Champion and training partner Tiki Gelana. After taking the world half marathon title on 6 October the 22-year-old Hailu improved her marathon best by no less than six minutes.

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YOUR MASTERPIECE.

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