The TCS 10km Bengaluru this year was the eighth edition of the race in my home city. It had started back in 2008 as the running movement began to get established in India. I became swept up in that movement a little later. But somehow life had moved on since then: work demands grew and after doing a half marathon in Mumbai my running stopped. When the TCS World 10km registrations opened in early April this year I knew it was the time to re-start my running story.

The 10km was always my first step to running longer distances. I knew once I got another 10km under my belt I could again push myself to a half marathon and beyond. Bengaluru seemed like the ideal place to start afresh: 10,000 metres through the heart of the city and past its iconic landmarks, yet still running in my own backyard.

It’s not called the World 10km for nothing. There are two elite races run on very nearly the same course which attract the world’s best. World record holder in the half marathon Zersenay Tadese set the inaugural course record of 27:51 and this year former world record holder in the 10km Micah Kogo could only manage fourth place. The women’s race is just as fierce a contest. There was a dead heat in the first edition and photo-finish equipment has been used ever since. Sitting up in the stands, watching runners enter the stadium for the last 350m, I have on occasion seen four or five of them come onto the track together and battle it out right down to the line.

The event’s different race categories give young, old, differently-abled... everyone a chance to cross the finish line. For some it’s about health and fitness, setting personal goals, determination and triumph; for others it’s about charity. The event is one of the largest charity fundraising platforms in South India and has generated over US$2.5 million by more than 180 NGOs since inception.

The elite races used to be an inspirational curtain-raiser for the mass 10km race that followed, although until now I never quite found enough inspiration to toe the line myself. But now it’s the mass race, starting at 06.00, that precedes the elite. This gives us better running conditions: the early-morning cool lasts for the entire race.

Indeed, the Bengaluru climate is tempered by slight elevation (around 900m) which makes it easier to train here than in most parts of India at this time of year. It’s also a green city with a lot of tree cover. The shade makes for pleasant running especially in Cubbon Park, a spacious oasis in the centre of town which runners pass through in the final part of the race.

A week before the race, the event’s running partner, Nike offers a familiarisation run over the race route. This can be more intimidating than confidence-building as it is done in open traffic. The air feels heavy and the roads are at their worst. This time around it was compounded by the stifling weather; we were all waiting for it to break before race day. My confidence began to sag as the days ticked by.

On Friday night I attended a race function “Beyond the Finish Line”, intended to Recognise, Reward & Reinforce catalysts of Indian Sport. Hosted by Bollywood star and running enthusiast Rahul Bose, his main interviewee was three-time Olympic gold medallist Marie-Jose Perec, in the role of international event ambassador for the race. Listening to her story, of how she persevered and got out of herself what she knew she had within, provided the inspiration I needed.

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Then on the eve of the race the weather broke: the rain came down in torrents. It would make for fresh conditions on race morning but in the meantime would it wash away the race itself? The stadium, I later discovered, had been several inches deep in water and final preparations were precariously delayed.

At 04.30 I washed up at the stadium gates ready for them to open. All was on track for the race as I entered the holding area. I stood among a crowd of 11,000; we were all in it together, and if they were going to enjoy the run, was I not supposed to as well? I was doing this for me. I am not an elite runner but I remembered the words of Marie-Jose Perec about getting the best out of yourself.

When the start gun went there was no more thinking to be done. I was swept up in the occasion and once again being part of this mass movement where we all draw energy from each other. We eased our way directly out of the stadium (the elite runners first do two laps of the track) and up the gentle climb of Kasturba Road. At 2km we reached Cubbon Park, a long tree-lined boulevard that faces two of the city’s main sights: the blood-red painted High Court and the looming domes of the Vidhana Soudha State Legislature.

A quick left-right brought us through the gates of Cubbon Park. Having been distracted from our efforts by the sights of the last couple of kilometres the rest of the route is so pleasant and gently downhill that it is almost effortless. Sweeping left under the spreading boughs of flamboyant trees to round a waterfall fountain we doubled back past the Library. We descended further to enter the final kilometre between a tall colonnade of palms before exiting the Park, taking a left and starting our final sprint through the finish line outside the Stadium gates.

Past the finish line we enter the Volini recovery zone, with massage and a stretching area and professional trainers and physiotherapists on hand. Then comes the medal collection and the refreshment counter. The elite runners sweep past on their way back onto the track for the stadium finish while I am busy with all of this, but the faster finishers in our race have enough time to find themselves a grandstand seat to the spectacle.

The World 10km Bengaluru has got me back on my track. Next year I’ll do it again; and fast enough so I’ll be able to see fastest of them finish.
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