

# 24 Heures de Brive - 2016 Race Report

by Andrei Nana

As part of my family is French, for several years Claire and I discussed a trip to France to visit them as year after year we met them in different countries at different races or post races. Last year, after the Spartathlon we made the decision that 2016 will be the year to travel to France. As life is short, we decided, as many ultrarunners do, to plan our trip around a race. This way, we can justify the time away from work and enjoy as much food and wine as possible ☺

I contacted all my French friends and asked them for suggestions for a race. I knew I wanted a 24H to keep the logistics simple. After looking at time of the year and location, as well as where our family lives we decided for 24 Heures de Brive. The World 24H Championships were hosted at Brive in 2010 and it came highly recommended by all who I talked to. After submitting our applications in December (almost at the last minute) and going through the anxiety of not knowing if we will be invited, finally in January we received invitations. In 2016 Brive hosted the French National 24H Championships and the number of places for the Open was limited. Both Claire and I felt relived and honored to be invited to participate at the French Open.

We purchased our tickets to France with a layover in Istanbul as a great opportunity to see our Spartathlon family in Turkey. This time, we decided to go a few days earlier and relax, celebrate the birthday of our niece who turned two and to just enjoy Istanbul and France.

Our Turkish friend, Aykut Celikbas recommended a great hotel to stay in Istanbul called the Blue Regency. It is near the water in a great neighborhood with lots of students and genuine local life. We had our tickets with Turkish Airlines not knowing what to expect, except for a direct flight from Miami to Istanbul. We were pleasantly surprised to realize Turkish Air is probably the best airline company we have flown so far -- absolutely perfect service and better comfort than anyone else.



The time in Istanbul was magic, seeing Aykut and Suna Altan was wonderful as always. We had dinner at a great kebab restaurant and discussed Spartathlon for hours. Aykut and myself planning this year's race, while Suna and Claire deciding on the unofficial crew pushup challenge. Thankfully, the weather was still warm, although a bit colder than Miami. Next, we made our way to Bordeaux, France. Once there, the temperature was in the mid 50s and cloudy.

I expected colder weather as race reports from previous years indicated lots of rain and at times freezing temperatures. We had warm clothing, however what I did not consider was that coming from hot weather to cold weather, it is still important to hydrate. After several days of walking around and spending time with our family, visiting the wine country, different castles, and a few horse places we acclimatized to the colder weather. However, I dropped my water consumption as I felt no need to drink. That was a BIG mistake.

The day of the race was predicted to be hot. However, this was not what we anticipated when we left Miami and I packed multiple jackets, long running pants, hats, gloves, etc, not thinking that the race temperature would be in the upper 80s during the day. Only by luck I had a pair of shorts with me. In a way, I knew I would have a slight advantage as living in Miami I know to run in hot weather.



When the race started despite mixed emotions I had two clear goals: to reach 220 kilometers and to win the Open. I wanted to run 220 kilometers to insure an automatic qualifier for the Spartathlon 2017 and 2018. I wanted to win the Open for no reason other than pure competition.

The mixed emotions were created by something that happened three weeks prior to the race when an old injury resurfaced. My training was going great and on par with my plan when all of a sudden a faster pace during one of the early morning runs triggered the old injury. My doctor Andrew Farretta attempted last minute treatments however the injury prevented me to run more than a few miles a week virtually making the last three weeks a long tapering period.

I started running a bit faster than my training but kept the pace I had planned. Well, that worked for about 1 hour when all of a sudden my hamstrings started to cramp. I was not sure why, and because of the severity of the cramps I was reduced to walking at times and serious limping. My injury was delivering strong pain as well. I started wondering if I will have to walk the following 23 hours. As a counter measure I started to take S!Caps and drink water. It took around 20 S!Caps (approximately 6000 mg of salt) and a lot of water during the following several hours to finally get my muscles to relax. I then realized that during the 3 weeks of forced tapering my water and salt consumption was reduced to minimum as well as the days before the race I barely had any water due to the cold weather. Also, I realized the course had some very tight turns which, when taken at high speed, put a lot of pressure on the IT band and hamstrings.



It took about 8 hours to feel capable of running well again. At that point I was on the 72<sup>nd</sup> place. I started the “hunting game” where every loop I tried to figure out (from the large electronic display) who is ahead of me and hunted them down one by one. It was a game I kept playing all day and all night. I started to move up to the 60s, then 50, 40s, and so on. I kept the breaks to a minimum where I sat down with my legs elevated on the table while eating croissants, foie-gras, other meats, and drinking cola and red wine. I hope I did not break too many etiquette rules by eating foie-gras with a spoon directly from the can... ☺



While running, my sister Ioana and my niece Elea cheered at every loop making the run seem easier. At night, I was able to move up to the single digit placing and could see the victory in the Open as possible. However, the math did not provide a good forecast for the 220 km I had planned. I was way behind the schedule making catching up almost impossible. I had to accept that 220 km will not happen and my new goal became to stay in the lead in the open and go as much over 200km as possible. Thankfully, the French athletes participating in the Championships were pushing the pace and motivating me as well. They were all very inspirational. The top runners seemed at ease during the day in the heat and very strong at night.



A few pleasant surprises came when I was approached by other athletes in the race who introduced themselves and told me about having read my Spartathlon race reports. I guess it also helped to run in a 2015 US Spartathlon Team shirt. Robert Miorin and Christian Dal Corso, who are part of the 2016 France Spartathlon Team, discussed this year's Greece trip and race. They were both very encouraging and supportive of my effort and Christian put a very strong performance as well especially during the last few hours of the race, keeping me focused the entire time on my goal for the Open category.

A beautiful lady I met at UltraBalaton, Allison Agostini raced as well. She and her boyfriend plus the support team were super friendly and encouraging throughout the race as well as a fellow runner, Susan Serres.



With 2 hours to finish, my legs were done and my energy level low. I looked at the electronic board and realized that as long as I kept moving I will likely be able to stay in the first place. Claire joined me and we started walking together making the last two hours pass easier. As a couple it is hard for us to train or run together, our super busy lives prevent us at times to talk in detail about many issues (that and the fact that I am not a “talker” many times preferring silence to words). So the last two hours we just talked and moved slowly towards the end of a superbly organized 24 hours race. The volunteers and athletes participating were everything you can expect from a top international race.

I ended up winning the Open with a total of 204.4 kilometers. It was the 10<sup>th</sup> place overall and 8<sup>th</sup> male. While not happy with the overall result and mileage, I felt happy about the Gold at the Open.



Following the race we had the opportunity to spend several days with our family in Mimizan and Bordeaux, to enjoy the amazing French food and experience some of the French customs and culture. We also visited with our Spartathlon family in France, being invited to visit Angel Pallaruelo's training gym and store near Bordeaux. Of course we talked about Spartathlon 2016 and the likelihood of Angel, Francoise, and Gilles Pallaruelo competing at Icarus Florida UltraFest in November this year.



We returned to spend another night in Istanbul and experience the wonderful life there with Aykut Celikbas before finally making it home to South Florida. All in all, an amazing trip. Feeling blessed to be able to live the life I have, next to my wife, close to my family and friends. At times it also feels good to win 😊

Next, a small 500 km race in Tennessee in a few days and then the Spartathlon in September.