

## Athens to Atlanta 2004 (140km)

**Name of Race:** Athens to Atlanta

**Date of Race:** October 1, 2004

**Location:** Atlanta, Georgia, USA

**Distance:** 140km

**Series:** NAIMS

*Hey all, I have been in and out of exams this week, so when I could (during study breaks) I put this little story together. It was written intermittently, so you'll probably notice that the style shifts about as my interest, mood, etc. changed each time I started. But I hope you enjoy it.*

My Summary of A2A

Man, what a long race. 87miles, 140kms

### BEFORE THE RACE

Well, after completing the 16 hour drive with friend/skater Petey Light, we arrived in Atlanta sleep deprived, and achy. On the bright side, we didn't get lost once. Not one turn around, or panic for map... A great over night drive as far as they go...

It was 9AM and time for breakfast at the house of our superb host family The McCalpins.

John, Lisa, and son Daniel greeted us well. In fact, the first Time John saw Petey, Petey was already finishing the last of a box of "Life" Cereal. John was on his way to a doubles tennis match, but took time to welcome the half conscious stranger in his kitchen. I was unpacking the car, and reuniting with Daniel and Lisa. Anyway, the plan was to go to the expo In Athens (about 87 miles away \*wink\*), register, and hang out. There was going to be a BONT booth there, so I would just hang out there and talk shop, maybe sell a few things. And there it was, Fabulous Debbie Rice and the BONT booth. To my surprise, she was surprised to see me... but we were to man the booth like the teammates we are... Within minutes, I think, the amazingly personable Petey knew everyone there. haha, then we drove my car into the expo and parked it inside the building. We ate lunch with some friends from all across the US. I had two burritos. They were good. It was great to have some time to chill with friends from all over the nation. Just one thing I love about racing. HI EVERYBODY!

Back at the expo, there was an announcer. He was hilarious. We called him "Captain America". He was wearing an "America!" hat and vest with sparkly sequins. He was the baddest MC in the state of Georgia. Much happened at the expo, and then we went home. What a disaster the ride back into Atlanta was. ... Then we had a big Jam session with guitars, drums, piano, and some singin' too. Then some Sleep, followed by an early wake up.

### RIGHT BEFORE RACE

It had rained the night before, and it was starting to dry up, the crowd gathering for the 87 mile (140km) start was beginning to seem very positive about the weather, hoping for a sunny, warm afternoon... until the sky let go into a sudden heavy downpour of huge heavy raindrops. The kind of rain that saturated what you were wearing in seconds. You should have heard the crowd go in unison. It was kind of funny, actually. The rain did lighten some for the start, but everything was soaked, and there were deep puddles everywhere. Petey was getting ready for the start in slow motion, so I hurried him to the start. We arrived at the front of the line just in time to hear "3... 2... 1.. wang!"

#### DURING THE RACE

...and we were off. With the wet pavement and puddles, it started off nice and slow, but the strongest were all filing in right up front, with some big names, and Petey was right up at the front. Things stayed pretty quiet as the start of the race is in the dark, and many were concerned about staying on course. Once we got out of the city (5km into the race) things began to open up. Guys were sharing the lead, and keeping things steady. The pack was already beginning to become smaller. Petey was hangin' in there, which was great since this was his first big race. The first small climb saw a few little slips, and caught falls, and the pack was very slowly thinning. The pace was increasing to what I found to be more and more comfortable. We then hit the first big downhill. It was pretty

big. The pack was still enormous, so the push from behind was immense. Some of the guys in the pack made me anxious. I think going fast down hill as a skill that can be developed, and needs to be practiced here and there. It's fun too. Anyway, I pulled real easy a few times, and then checked out the field from the back in a nice open section. It was now past sunrise, and the scenery was quite nice. Still lightly raining though... I took a few k's like this, to think about where I was, how long the race was etc. and to say hi to some friends. Randy Bowman was there. He's cool. He makes me laugh. He told me that I was just a sprinter and didn't belong in this race. Hahaha. That guy is strong. Anyway, things stayed pretty consistent with a few small attacks that only affected the stragglers. By now there were very few left, and the pack looked strong and confident. A few more attacks on some of the up-hills, nothing to worry about. We then went by a checkpoint/water station -I can't remember if it was the first or second- a right turn, and onto some of the roughest pavement I've skated on in a long, long time. It was nasty. I said:

"Hey Jono!" (Jono Gorman, terrific skater from Georgia (GT Speed) US Jr World Team)

"I'll take it THIS is the Gatorback!?"

The question was of course rhetorical. It was indeed the gatorback, and it lasted about 10kms. I lent my water bottle to a guy who missed one at the station.

...Can you believe that some guys were attacking on this sh\*t? It was kind of funny. They would swing out onto the turning lanes (which were smoother)

accelerate, and attack. Of course, the still large pack would (needlessly) panic and chase them down in a near sprint, with about 100kms still to go. This rather comical process continued for about another 20kms, slowly dropping 1-2 skaters each time, including the guy who had my water bottle. The marvelously large pack that was sure to drag us around was wittling away. I suppose that at this point there were about 20 skaters still hangin' in. BTW, before the race, my suggestion was that we all skate in one big pack, and we could change leads 280 times, at each 500m mark. I guess things weren't going to plan.

Oh well. Okay, this was funny: A car that looked like a taxi pulled up and passed the pack. A guy hops out holding a water bottle and a banana, and looking very excited. He starts to run along the side of the road, along side the pack, holding out the "meal". So a bunch of arms go out to try and grab it, no luck. Finally, the meal is snatched up by the rightful owner and intended 'recipient', Eddie Matzger. So this is the funny part: a few seconds later, I hear (in a very stern, angry voice) "WHO WAS THE RECIPIENT OF THAT WATER BOTTLE!!!!!!?" hehehe, apparently he was quite annoyed. Apparently, on-course support is not allowed in the race outside of water stations and checkpoints for safety concerns. Good rule, I think. Anyway, things slowed down again for a while, and we hit this big downhill with a left turn at the bottom. Funny, I remember that hill well. Eddy was attacking on the pack in his usual way, apparently in an attempt to soften the legs of Italian Mauro Guenci, who was chasing hard. This continued, including a few light attacks from others. The pack was pretty stable now, and was beginning to work well as a unit. The little breaks were beginning to do nothing. Things were calm for a while, and I could feel a big attack coming. 50kms into the race... I could smell it. I surveyed to see where everybody was. Most of the strong guys were near the back. So I was going to be in on this attack. The five of us; Eddie Matzger, Mauro Guenci, Randy Bowman, Carlos Luis Mejia, and I (top 5) attacked from the back, and caught many by surprise. It looked strong enough to stay out, so we kept the pace high, and we were changing leads quickly and efficiently. We were working well together for the first while, but the packed looked like they were as well. So it was decision time. Looking back, I could see a strong field of skaters, including Jono Gorman, Scott Swany, Dennis Humphery, Lenny Wilcox, etc. and main pack looked pretty big, strong and organized. Over the course of the next 10kms or so we decided to put a lot of distance on the pack to keep it safe. ...I believe this is where I made my biggest mistake. I know now that I did far too much work in this area of the race to make sure we stayed out. I mean, would it have been all that bad for us to get caught? How valuable was this energy going to be? How far do we have to go? Race and learn, I suppose. ...Once we felt we were safe, the trouble started. We began to get competitive amongst ourselves. This was about 15kms beyond the halfway point. The attacks began. Mauro looked very strong. One of his attacks lasted about 3kms, and to my surprise, when we caught him, nobody countered. I thought about it, but Mauro looked too strong to make him an enemy. ...That guy can climb hills like crazy! And, I was sure someone else would counter on me if I did... I was content to just stay in, pull my share, chase when I needed to, and hang on in the late sections. I figured any alliance would serve me better than an

attack here. The pace then was up and down. Down long enough, and I would pull. I figured by now if we get caught by the main pack, I would be in trouble. ...I was "past the point of no return", or something like that... It was becoming obvious that Eddy was not going to pull at all during this point. I tried to give him sh\*t about it so that he would at least do some. It's funny. Some guys are like that. You say you're onto them, and they immediately start doing a share, or the 'honorable' thing to do. I think it speaks of character, and it was my little piece of "intimidation" in this race... Still though, I could tell he was planning a big attack soon, as he was clearly reluctant to do as much as the rest of us. To his credit, I don't think he should have pulled at all since it didn't really matter to him if we got caught or not. He was strong enough to handle whatever would come from it. ...I regret working so hard to stay out... Anyway, the attacks were starting to hurt me more and more, and it looked like a big one was coming. I figure there was about <35kms to go now, and the hills and attacks were becoming relentless. And on the biggest, and widest hill, Eddy attacked like it was the end of the race. He went crazy, and the guy can flat out climb. You have to admit that. The five of us split up entirely. Mauro reacted first, and gapped me right away. I tried to jump on him, but he was climbing a little better than I was, and the small gap was getting bigger. I could see I was also gapping Randy and Carlos. I could see I wasn't going to be able to catch Mauro or Eddy on my own, as the gaps were steadily increasing, and this hill was huge. I thought my best option would be to work with Randy and Carlos. If we could chase together, we might catch, eventually. I mean, there was still like 35kms to go, right? Well we grouped up, but the hills and attacks had taken their toll on us. We were working well together, with short efficient exchanges, but the speed wasn't going to be enough to catch the two of them unless they were slowing way down. We worked together like this for a while. We picked up water and food and I was starting to feel a little better. ...In the chase group, the pace is much more uniform, and easier on the body. I was still sluggish, but my head was still in it. It's tough to stay focused and aware this fatigued. This is when the water and food you've taken on becomes really important, and you have to be proactive. (By this point, I had gone through six Power Gels. I would recommend those things to everyone.) If your head is starting to go, it's too late to react by stuffing yourself with a bunch of food. If you've left it to this, you'd have to take a pretty good rest to recover, but if you're not in too bad shape, a short active one will usually do it... Anyway, we wanted to keep the pace high so we could catch them if the chance was still there. Randy was starting to emerge as the strongest of the three of us. He was starting to get frustrated as he was starting to pull harder than Carlos and I could. So he began to attack. ...I figured he must have thought: "why drag these two bozos around? I can probably drop one of them with a few attacks, and they aren't helping me much now anyways" or at least, this was my assumption... But the three of us stuck together for the most part. I knew that if I pulled the best I could, Randy would not want to drop me so bad, so I did my best to keep the pace high and steady. He calmed down on the attacks in response to my effort. ...At least I was helping him some... A few pulls, descents, and climbs later, as we were rounding a right up hill corner, I slipped on the pavement towards the outside of the corner

and crashed (yes, it was still raining). Sh\*t. This was the last thing I needed. It took me a second to gather myself and get up, but it was right before a nasty little climb. Out of respect, Randy and Carlos didn't attack, but they didn't exactly wait for me either. They climbed, and maintained a moderate pace up the hill, at least giving me the chance to

catch back up. But, getting my speed back up to chase on this uphill was a killer. I could see that at the top of this hill was a downhill, and I knew that with the two of them, I would be chasing for a long while if I didn't catch them before the top of this hill. I climbed about as hard as I could to catch them. I would say it was about 400m@14% or so. ...I remember thinking, "F\*\*\*! Can't they just stop for a second? CHR\*ST!" hahaha! No chance... I caught them just at the top, but now, I was really exhausted. At the bottom of the following downhill, we started skating again, trying to maintain pace, but after a few km's my fatigue wasn't fading away like I'd hoped. My head felt swollen and was still pounding hard. My jaw even ached. My legs felt sloppy and heavy. When it was my turn to pull, I was slowing the guys down. So almost immediately there was another attack. ...Thanks Randy. (All's fair in love and racing) I can't blame him. He doesn't owe me a favour... I chased his attacks, each one hurting a little more, and I was becoming unable to hide my fatigue. I was in trouble. I was going to have to try to hang in as long as I could, and it didn't last long. A few attacks later, and I found myself fading behind, and the gap was growing. I just tried to hold a pace, but it wasn't going to be enough to catch the two of them together, unless they wanted to let me. I was dropped. "No man's land"... I figure there was about 18km still to go, and one last water station. I also had the chase group surely closing in on me. ...I wondered, at this point, how Petey was doing, and I hoped that he was not skating alone. Being alone in A2A is especially terrible... Okay, so I wasn't about to roll over and let the other chase pack catch me. I was going to stay as steady as I could until the next checkpoint. ..."One small goal at a time" right?... Staying on course by following the road markers and saying hello to each traffic official kept me going steady. Luckily, the final checkpoint came up pretty quickly. I took on double water, and double banana. Rather than hurriedly rushing pieces of the banana, and taking brief gulps of water, this time I gathered myself, stayed moving, but ate and drank calmly. I kept one water and one banana with me. I figured there was still about 13kms to the finish. It was 13km time trial of sorts. And, that's how I was going to treat it. After the meal and "rest" I started feeling a lot better. The pavement was smooth in this part of the city, and there were people watching me, so I started to feel relatively 'great'. I was moving along nicely. In a long open section along side a highway, I looked back to see no one for quite some distance. I thought I could keep this spot. Now I was feeling fast. I had a good pace and flow going, and my head was in it for sure. The traffic on the road was steadily increasing. I was approaching the finish. Way in the distance at one point I could see Carlos and Randy! I must have made up some time on them. They were probably getting ready for a sprint (lucky them). Maneuvering through the traffic was actually motivating me, and I was feeling

good. I could tell the finish was soon. I remembered in 1997 (the last time I did this race) that there was a left turn through a small gap between two buildings, and I was watching for it. A wrong turn here would be a complete disaster. There it was; an “S” with a “left” arrow. Now the finish was really close. A few straights, a few turns, and I was into Piedmont Park. A sharp right turn and I could see the finish. There was a very small crowd, and they cheered me across the line. Woo hoo!

#### RIGHT AFTER THE RACE

Randy was sitting about twenty feet past the line, and he looked spaced. My head was really cloudy. I needed more food. I grabbed something and ate it. I don't know what it was. I drank something too. Did someone hand it to me? Thank you, if that happened. I for some reason found myself very emotional. It was weird. I was very upset, but still happy and satisfied. Oh, here's a real kick in the balls, about 15mins after I finished, the sky opened up and the sun came out. Ouch. I congratulated the guys who finished in front of me. Top five, huh? Not bad, I can now say that about all the big races this year for me. !!MESSAGE TABLES!!! Eddy was already receiving his massage, and I was going to be next. I hobbled over to the tables, as there was one available. I gingerly sat down on it and started to take my skates off. My feet were throbbing. It took me a few

minutes to get them off, and my feet were completely swollen. I couldn't put weight on them now. The therapist didn't massage me at all, he just helped me stretch the best that he could, and helped the muscles relax. It was great. When I was done, I went to get off but collapsed right next to the table. I could not put any weight on my feet. They were WAY too swollen. The first aid table was right there, and I asked if they could bring me some ice. They weren't busy... yet. I was going to stay put for some time. With the ice on my elevated feet, I could see others beginning to come across the line. It was great to watch everyone finish and naturally enjoy the moment. Everyone was hugging each other. It was truly fantastic. I saw many familiar faces and friends, and cheered from my “seat” as loud as I could. ... I was getting cold fast. First aid gave me a blanket. My feet were throbbing less now... I can't tell you how great it was to watch everyone finish. One after another, the finishers crossed the line in sheer triumph. This really is a challenging race. Then I watched GT Speed's Daniel McCalpin cross the line in the front of a field sprint. Way to go Daniel! hahaha... I was going to try to get up now. It wasn't too bad. Most of the swelling had come down, and I could walk around okay. It was great to chat with everyone being so tired, and completely honest with themselves, and in such high spirits. Where was Petey? Has anyone seen Petey? I asked just about everyone, and strangely they had all seen him at some point throughout the race!

“Oh yeah, I saw him at checkpoint 4”

“Yeah, that guy is crazy on the downhill”

“...after checkpoint 5”

“...after checkpoint 6”

After hearing the updates, I knew he was going to make it in okay. There he was! An exhausted Petey crosses the line and jabs for it! Hahaha! Way to go Petey! Great, now we have to drive back home so that Petey can make it to work, and I can make it to school for Monday morning. (yeah right) He looked exhausted, and sore. We dragged him right to the Massage Tables. The same guy who worked on me helped Petey pretty much the same way he helped me. Déjà vu? So, I chatted with friends, and stretched everything the best that I could. I think I ate three Blimpie sandwiches (Thanks Blimpie) and got my A2A mug. Yeah! There were some guys drinking scotch... I think a sip would have knocked me out. Once Petey left the table, I made sure he "walked" around some, and loosened up. But he was very "eager" to hit the road for our drive. Soon later, we gathered our stuff, and hit the road on our way back to Athens to pick up the car AKA the "Bed-a-bago".

#### AFTER THE RACE

The drive home: after getting In John's truck, driving to Athens, then going back to the McCalpin's (who were fantastic hosts BTW) for a shower, we were on the road by 8:30PM, and it was becoming evident that Petey might be late for work. We drove through the night, taking short shifts. (I believe that this is a much better method than a few longer ones.) We crossed the Detroit/Windsor border around 8AM. After a low-petro scare that involved drafting a transport truck and turning everything in the car off, we made it to Petey's work by 11, a just few hours late. The trip was a success. I think this is a good place to stop. Bye, and thanks for reading!

Aaron Richard Arndt