

## January 2017 *Wingfoot* Spotlight: Racing Overseas, VIP Style By Natalie Demarko

The night before the 2016 AJC Peachtree Road Race, Jonathan Miller received an odd voicemail. Instructed by an Atlanta Track Club staff member to watch 11Alive's eleven o'clock newscast, Miller wondered if the Club was now individually reaching out to all participants prior to race day. Because of work, he had to record the news and planned to watch it later.

When Miller woke up the next morning, ran Peachtree for the sixth consecutive year and went home to get ready for his Fourth of July family festivities. Before heading to his sister Sandy's house, he watched the recording.

Sandy Miller's cellphone rang, and all she heard on the end of the line was, "I won, Sandy. I won. Oh my God! I won!" It was her younger brother, 'JonBoy' screaming into the phone. "His voice was half excited, half stunned," she said. "I wasn't sure if he was on the verge of tears or what!"

Jonathan had been selected as the winner of the 2016 Delta Runway to the World Contest. Announced at the Peachtree VIP dinner at the Ritz Carlton, Buckhead, the selection was broadcast on 11Alive on July 3. For the first time, anyone who registered or attempted to register for the AJC Peachtree Road Race was eligible to win two round-trip tickets to Amsterdam, a four-night stay at a hotel and VIP entry into the Mizuno Half Marathon in October.

"I thought it was so weird I got picked because Mizuno is actually the only thing I've ever run in," Jonathan says. "I thought there had to be a correlation there, but apparently I was just the one who was chosen."

The Mizuno Half would mark Jonathan's 14<sup>th</sup> half marathon since he started running six years ago. He admits his journey was actually kick-started by a crude comment about his health from a customer at his job. After that, his best friend, Tyler, inspired him to get moving to change his lifestyle. "The customer really did me a solid," Jonathan confesses. "I still remember the first mile I tried doing with Tyler after that. It definitely wasn't easy, but here I am, almost 2,000 miles later."

His sister Sandy started her running journey a little later. It wasn't until Jonathan asked her to go to Amsterdam that she decided she would lace up, train and run the



Mizuno Half Marathon with him. “I joined Atlanta Track Club after I decided to run the race,” Sandy says. Jonathan, who was already a member, convinced her to join after describing member perks such as discounts on events. To help train for the half marathon, the two ran the Rise Up and Run 5K/Walk Like MADD presented by Northside Hospital. They also trained together during the weeks leading up to their Amsterdam adventure.

It turns out it wasn’t the Millers first time visiting Amsterdam. They had visited back in their college days while venturing overseas on a “shoe-string budget.” After discovering the details of the contest, they scheduled their trip for one extra day to enjoy the city and culture even more. “In college, we stayed in hostels, had no money for the train, and ate meat and cheese from the grocery store” Sandy laughs. A highlight of their 2016 trip was enjoying Dutch food.



“Food is actually another huge part of why I run,” Jonathan says. “Eating was just another motivator for us to run the half because of all the miles we put in!” Jonathan loves to explore new restaurants and try different types of food. Thanks to Delta, his second trip to Amsterdam allowed him and his sister to do so.

While in Amsterdam, Jonathan and Sandy received VIP treatment from Mizuno. “I was

so tickled that they ended up hooking me up with the same gear that JonBoy got,” she says. “They were absolutely fantastic.”

Both received Mizuno running shoes, a running outfit, a suitcase, an English-to-Dutch translation book and handwritten thank you notes. In addition to the Mizuno swag, Jonathan and Sandy enjoyed a VIP Lounge at the Mizuno Half Marathon. “The finish line was just a few yards in front of us,” Jonathan remembers. “We got to see the marathon runners start and finish inside the Olympic Stadium.”

Seeing the thrill of the race up close and personal was one of the memorable parts of the trip for Sandy. “Watching the marathon finishers come in to the finish line with the music and all the people cheering - I really, really enjoyed that,” she says.

The Mizuno Half Marathon did not start until the marathoners were finished. At the 41<sup>st</sup> running of the marathon, the Millers even had the chance to witness history. Kenyan runner Daniel Wanjiru broke the marathon course record with a winning time of 2:05:21. “Being able to see that was pretty spectacular,” Jonathan says. “Thanks to Mizuno, we really had a perfect view.”

While waiting for their race to begin, the Millers got to enjoy perks offered in the VIP Lounge. There was a variety of food available including sandwiches, soups and salads; TVs to stay up to date on the race; and even a personalized smoothie station. “I really enjoyed having that access to the lounge,” Jonathan says. “They really pulled out all the stops.”

The course itself turned out to be challenging for the siblings. With cobble stones, train tracks and narrow roads, the Millers were put to the test. The weather was also warmer than they expected. “Despite the conditions, I was still excited to wear my Atlanta Track Club tee,” Jonathan says. “The course was actually pretty tumultuous, but it was still a fun race and a challenging course.”



Jonathan finished with an official time of 1:58:49 while Sandy finished in 2:32:45. “Not everyone is fortunate enough to have a free trip to Amsterdam to begin their running careers, but luckily I’m able to say I have,” Sandy laughs. “My first goal was just to finish. I really wanted to finish in under a 12-minute mile pace, and I finished averaging 11:30 miles. I was pretty proud about that!”

The highlight of Jonathan’s entire trip was being with Sandy and seeing her succeed. “Knowing she was there doing this for the first time was more inspiring than anything,” he says.

Even though the one-of-a-kind experience is over, Sandy’s plans to run are not. “The trip made me want to keep running and also travel to run again,” she says. “I definitely have the itch to get out there and keep it up.” Her running goal in 2017 is to complete the Publix Georgia Half Marathon with her brother.



Jonathan, on the other hand, says he's ready to tackle a full marathon. Setting his goal to run a full before the age of 40, he feels prepared going into the New Year after completing the Rock 'n' Roll Savannah Half Marathon, Mizuno Half Marathon and Thanksgiving Day Half Marathon last year. "I really can't say thank you enough to Atlanta Track Club and Delta Air Lines for everything," he says. "It's really more than what's physical or about the trip, but it's about being an inspiration to people who are runners and people who are trying to be runners."



For Sandy, it was Jonathan who was her inspiration. The two siblings were able to bond in a new way, and the entire experience brought them even closer together. "The mornings that we trained together were a lot of fun," she says. "It was good brother-sister time for us to be out there just running side by side."

Jonathan got a lot of joy out of becoming one of the reasons why his sister started running.

He admits he's glad to be the motivator now. "I think running is for everybody. Anybody is able to get out there and do it," he says. "Anybody can run and you can do it at any pace you desire. You just have to get out there."