

Boston 2008
Steve Brookman

I flew into Boston Saturday morning on a spectacular spring day. I considered my luck in snagging a 1st class seat for the 40 minute flight from Newark a good omen. I still had a difficult time getting it in my head that I was here to run *Boston*. A year ago it was a pipe dream and before that it wasn't even on the horizon.

I was more than a little psyched and cautiously optimistic, that maybe, just maybe, this marathon would be special, and possibly not as painful as some of those in the past. Is it even possible to run a race like Doug Masi says and feel good enough to want to run it again? Not likely! But the past year had surprised me with some good race results and a lot of PR's. (Ok, some were of distances that I never ran before, but, hey, a PR is a PR and at this age you take 'em all!)

Since BQ'ing I read all I could on Boston and it's storied past. I had never run in a large race before, heck, I don't think I ever ran with as many runners that would be in my corral, never mind 25,000! (My first marathon only had 39 runners.) I set some tiered goals for the run to cover my bases: finish, enjoy, BQ, PR.

John, my running partner from Florida, who had last run Boston 33 years ago, had arrived a few minutes earlier and we took the "T" to our hotel in Cambridge. Our room had a great view of Boston, the Charles River, and its running paths filled with briskly moving joggers. The day was so beautiful that we hiked the several miles to the Expo, which in hind site was probably not the best choice, but it was such a great day!

The world's largest Running Expo sure seemed that. Amazingly as soon as we got our race packets and walked in the door we bumped into Bruce and Patty. Soon thereafter we lost them but managed to drop some change buying the prerequisite memorabilia. Leaving the Expo we walked into John Weidner. Small world this running community even with 25,361 invited to the party.

Saturday evening we met up with HRH'ers in Chinatown and managed to put away way too much food. Sunday was the women's Olympic Trials and our day of rest, as our legs were a bit beat from all the walking the day before. The turnaround for trial's course was right in front of our hotel. We watched Deena Kastor catch Magdalena Lewy Boulet on the last lap after being almost 2 minutes behind on the previous lap. And we saw little Joan Samuelson with that awkward gait of hers run her last competitive marathon in under 2:50!

It was a good thing that we went to bed early as not much sleep was to be had. I couldn't believe it was only 1:45 when my body said it was ready. I gave up tossing and turning around 3 and checked the weather on my PC for the umpteenth time. No excuses there: 53, cloudy with an easterly breeze. I worked on the computer under the sheets until John began stirring at 5am. Relieved to have the day finally begin, and after a light breakfast,

we headed for the buses and the start of the 112th Boston Marathon! The start was still over 4 hours away but we tried not to think about that.

On the taxi ride into the city we could see endless lines of yellow school buses choking the streets. The BAA impressed us once again with the number of grey jacketed volunteers efficiently queuing the runners who were staggering into the Commons from all directions into the waiting buses. The bus ride to Hopkinton was long, *very* long. We began to think the driver was either lost or taking us there via NY. It seemed an impossible long way to have to run back.

The athlete's village was another organizational masterpiece. While waiting around for hours is not an ideal way to start a race, they made it as painless as possible. There were crates of bananas and bagels, and many tables offering coffee, sport drinks and water. There were lines for porta potties, massages, lectures and who knows what else. The weather while ideal for running was not so great for sitting around; damp, chilly and breezy ruled the morning. They had to cancel the parachute jump team demo because of the low ceilings.

25,000 turns out to be a lot of people. I could find no familiar faces while circling the village several times until Barry Coopersmith happened by just before our start in the 2nd wave. Just as they were calling us to the start the sun burned through the overcast, rather abruptly, and the temperature immediately jumped 15 degrees. Warm up clothes, blankets, trash bags were discarded with abandon as runners reacted to the approaching start time and rapidly warming temps.

The actual start while exciting was more of a nonevent for us 2nd wavers as the flyover and anthem singing were done a half hour earlier. The first mile was down hill as advertised, but I was amazed at how many shuffling wide bodies there were in our corral. How did they all qualify? I didn't have to worry about starting out to fast, as I could only manage an 8:40 going down a steep hill. I was a little concerned that while I felt good, my legs didn't seem to have that spring in them that I normally feel at the start of race. (Too much walking, not enough sleep, planets misaligned?) Not to worry, we're off and running.

The next few miles were right on schedule, averaging what I thought was a conservative 8:10 pace. A GU at mile 5, talking up fellow runners, I was running *Boston!* Soon I became aware of something sticking on my shorts. I looked down and saw that my GU was *guing* the shorts to my side, as I had not clicked the bottle completely closed. I tried washing it out with my water bottle and must have been preoccupied with that as the next thing I knew I was hugging the trolley tracks at mile 6.47! (The Garmin logged the fall as a lap at .47!) Stunned and a bit bloody I was relieved that somehow I hadn't taken anyone down with me. I staggered off to the side and eventually got moving again and was even more relieved that I hadn't broken



anything major. (Left knee and thumb sure smarted though.) Somehow that mile still logged in at 8:10!

I rinsed as well as I could while on the move and resumed pace. I ran into Bruce around mile 8 and got him to talk for a bit. He was looking good, but seemed a bit overdressed with 2 HRH shirts on. I was enjoying the experience, amazed at the enthusiasm of the crowds and the never ending stream of bobbing heads stretching out before me. The girls of Wellesley were all that they were advertised to be and responsible for a sub 8 pace for that mile.

I thought I saw Patty on the left at mile 17, but since she took a picture from the right side, I was obviously confused. Maybe I had hit my head too! Knowing that my brother Gary who had driven down from Maine and his friends would be somewhere around the later hills in Newton gave me something to look forward to as the heat of this spring day was starting to take its toll. I was hitting every aid station and dousing myself trying to keep cool. I passed by my brother's group just before Heartbreak Hill and from then on it was pretty much a death march. After mile 20 I dropped to a 9



minute average, and while I've run slower miles I don't recall any more painful ones. Unfortunately my 2nd goal of enjoying the run was passing along with any hope of a PR. Finishing was all I could think about and I felt miserable that I couldn't appreciate all the good cheer emanating around me. Thoughts of what a stupid sport this is and why the hell am I doing it, again, were resounding in my head.

I did a last time hack on the final turn on to Boylston and saw that I could still salvage a BQ if I could get to what seemed a so faraway finish line in 3 minutes. I managed it in 2:29 and put my first Boston behind me. But I wasn't done yet as the toughest part of marathoning for me is moving, or surviving, after crossing the line.

They are very clever in Boston as they force you to walk down the chute, get a water bottle, then a space blanket, then tape for the blanket, then remove your chip while picking up your medal. All the while, keeping you moving further away from the finish. It was a challenge to make it through the throngs of now silver wrapped runners, staggering ahead, some puking, some collapsing into wheelchairs. That stupid sport mantra resounded.

As I said, I don't do well after the finish and several volunteers inquired if I needed assistance. One, after looking at my knee, called for a wheelchair, and they whisked me off to the medical tent. My only thoughts then were that I'm losing all that ground that I had just so gamely shuffled over. At the tent I was told that they don't do bandages and the nice volunteer wheeled me part of the way back. Along the way she drove the chair

into a rut that triggered some of the most severe calf cramps I have ever felt. I kindly moaned to her to just deposit me on the nearest bench and let me be.

As usual, after a bit, the cramps subsided, and I became partly human. Soon I was able to hobble along and began wondering how I would hook up with John. We had designated a bar that we could meet, or barring that, we'd meet back at the hotel. I made it to Remingtons and had a cold pint and hoarsely celebrated finishing with another runner, her pilot husband and family. No John, but it was no surprise as with his wave 1 start, and my dawdling, I expected him to be maybe an hour ahead of me.

I ambled down the steps to the "T," receiving many kind congratulatory remarks from other riders that saw the hard won medal, or was it the sweat stains and limp? I finally got back to hotel by 4:15. I was totally surprised to find no sign of John there. I called Susan and was just starting to get majorly concerned when he staggered in. His knee had acted up and he bonked, but finished, and spent 2 hours in the medical tent, getting 2 units of IV.

I was still cursing the sport as an act of supreme lunacy, expecting him to be totally dejected, and while he was very disappointed, he said that we couldn't leave it this way and that we'd have to return next year and do it right.

After a Cajun pasta dinner and a couple of cold beers it didn't sound like such a bad idea.



Did you know that lodging for 2009 is open?