

To those of us who have barely managed to qualify, just being in the Boston Marathon is the thrill of a lifetime. For me, this was the culmination of a 4 year quest, during which I tried a lot of different training methods, paces, gels and replacement fluids, and lost 40 pounds to improve my chances.

My wife/manager/psychotherapist/baggageHandler/publicist Diane and I drove to Boston on Saturday and met a former co-worker who happened to live in the town of Hopkinton, the tiny town where the Boston Marathon starts. My friend and his wife kept asking me if I wanted them to take me "into town", which I had assumed meant Boston - no they meant downtown Hopkinton, which is one step up from a gas station and diner town. I was glad we accepted because I got to see that the staging area was a complete mess - the "athletes village" was a muddy field over which they erected a tent. Also, it seemed like almost a mile from there to the starting line - good to know. We walked around and bought some memorabilia at the tent stores and then walked over to the starting line painted on the street. My friend's wife asked the traffic cop to take my picture on the starting line. She said "sure!" and proceeded to stop all the traffic, tell me where to stand, took several pictures with two different cameras (sure wish I had one of the cop stopping the traffic to take my picture), then let the traffic go after I got off the road. Such small-town hospitality at such a huge Marathon - Incredible! Then we took several pictures of each other at the "Boston Marathon - Hopkinton - it all starts here" sign and I was really getting emotional just to think I was really there.

We left Hopkinton for Boston, checked in at the hotel and had about 2 hours to get to and through the expo. They really did have a packet and bib number for me - it wasn't all a big dream. Bought some more memorabilia, knowing that I was there before Wes and Bev, and if I hesitated there may not be anything left.

The dire weather forecasts played on the TV and radio all weekend, and I mostly ignored them until the night before and morning of, when the forecasts had a prayer of being accurate. Besides, I had made a conscious decision that even if it poured that I wasn't going to let it ruin my experience. On Sunday, Bev called to let me know she had arrived, and we made arrangements to meet the morning of the race and go to the starting line together. Diane and I went to the Pasta Party Sunday night where the conversation centered on what to wear for the run. Some very enthusiastic volunteers sat at our table, and we learned they were from Wellesley, the girls school at around the halfway mark of the run which is famous for their tradition of high-volume cheering for the marathoners every year for decades. When I asked whether the Wellesley girls would still be out there in spite of the rain, they told me "of course", the only ones who might not be out cheering are some seniors who have exams.

It rained overnight and into the morning. The morning of, they were predicting 40-50 degrees, a possibility of drizzle, but torrential rain with high winds could not be ruled out. Met Bev and we walked out into the rain in our plastic ponchos. Based on the forecast, I had decided to wear shorts a long sleeve dry-release shirt and a Gore-tex jacket on the run. We arrived at Hopkinton just before our bladders burst, and Bev and I begged the driver to let us off the bus. Only when I threatened to pee right on the bus, did the driver agree to break the rules and let us off.

We trudged through the puddles and mud and found a place to stand in the doorway of the "athletes village" tent. We managed to stay warm and reasonably dry, thanks to our own ingenuity and no thanks to the facilities. Bev decided to leave for the start, we wished each other luck and parted company. After that I didn't see anyone else I knew. I then joined the muddy walk to the street and corrals and I enjoyed the company of several International runners around me. Found the 16000 corral and waited in my poncho covered by the traditional black garbage bag, carrying an empty Gatorade bottle plus a 16 oz Accelerade. For the first time ever, I used the empty bottle under the garbage bag trick that Bruce had taught me and it worked fantastically, drawing no attention. I double checked that I had used the right bottle, then discarded the newly-filled "Gatorade" bottle. The rain had stopped and I decided to dump the poncho.

I was very disappointed that I didn't hear the national anthem or see an F-16 flyover that I had heard about. The gun went off and off we started running and were soon passing the "Hopkinton" sign. I was amazed that the run was still exactly as described by Jim Fixx in his 1977 book, which I had studied prior to the race: An immediate downhill which flattens out at about 1 mile. At 2.1 miles there's the "Entering Ashland" sign. At this point my goal was to avoid going too fast or tripping over other runners or the stuff being thrown down by them. Nevertheless, I couldn't get rid of the big grin on my face, realizing that I was running the Boston Marathon through these places traversed by so many great runners for so many years.

Next landmark was Framingham - the site of the historic (and still ongoing) Framingham Heart Study which I had studied about in school years ago. Oops - my shoe came untied - you damned rookie - with mistakes like that, you don't deserve to be here. As you leave Framingham, you can see yourself in the Hansen Electrical Supply Company window, just as it says in Fixx's book. Then on to Natick, where I needed a bio-break, and actually found an open Port-a-potty without a line - another first and luckily so because the Boston course is not urine-friendly since it's lined with spectators the entire way.

A little more than one mile out of Natick, you could already hear the Wellesley girls a mile away. Wellesley did not disappoint: The most enthusiastic marathon fans, unbelievably loud, high fives, and some carrying signs saying "kiss me" - I didn't, and I'm sure they were thankful for that. This is the halfway point, and from here it is relatively flat until you reach the steepest downhill of the course that takes you across the Charles river to the vaunted Newton hills. I polished off my 16 oz Accelerade and was thankful to throw away the heavy bottle I'd been carrying.

I was feeling OK on the hills, and was surprised that there were significant flat and even downhill portions of the 5 mile section called "Heartbreak Hill". Reaching the top is a great mental lift and the crowds start getting thicker and progressively louder, with only about 5 miles to the finish line. Again I was running with a huge grin, just to think I was going to cross the Boston Finish Line soon. The crowds cheer 4-hour runners like me as if we were Kenyans, and I just soaked it up. Eventually I saw the Prudential building and knew I was less than a mile away. I crossed the finish line at 4:12:08, which was slower than planned but in many ways the best time I ever had.