

Boston 2008 John Fischer

On the advice of some Boston veterans, I ran my first Boston (2007) as a reward for qualifying, just enjoying the ride, and posting a time that was about 30 minutes slower than my qualifying time. This year I decided that re-qualifying for Boston at Boston would be a worthy, inspiring and achievable goal, just a little outside my comfortable reach. Since my past qualifying marathon times were very close to the required time, I thought I would need to lose the 10-12 pounds I had gained over the past year, and I added weight loss to my training goals. In addition, I thought I could apply my recent learning from long-distance triathlon regarding the necessity for following a nutrition plan during the race to improve my performance.

Training

I used the Pfitzinger 55 mile per week plan that had worked well for me in the past, and followed it pretty religiously over the 12 weeks. As a new convert to the value of nutritional support in training and competition, I began “feeding” my training runs over 14 miles, and for the first time found myself able to sprint the last mile or so at the end of my long training runs, which was a great confidence builder. I finished my last 20 miler about three weeks before race day, and was delighted to have arrived at that point injury-free. But it seems that I fed myself a little too well over the training period, and failed to knock off any weight, in spite of the high training load. During the last 3 weeks of training, I worked hard to avoid stupidity (a natural tendency for me) like racing a 5K in muddy conditions two weeks before race day or “seeing what I’m capable of” on the treadmill during the taper phase when your energy and excitement level is building inside you.

Pre Race

Unlike 2007, the weather gods smiled upon us in 2008, and the prediction was for near-perfect weather. I was happy with the weather but at the same time nervous with additional pressure to perform well having lost another great excuse for poor performance. I decided to wear my two piece tri-suit because it had pockets in the back of the shirt where I could stuff a few PowerBars, but when I tried jogging, the damn bars bounced around and tickled me. So I put the bars and gels in a belt pack in the front and carried an empty water bottle in a holster in the back on another belt. The point of the empty water bottle was to try to get enough hydration by dumping several cups into it at each station (which I had never tried before).

About 3 hours before race start, I had a sumptuous “breakfast” consisting of 3 PowerBars washed down with about 32 oz of Accelerade over the next hour – yum! I also had another 16 oz of Accelerade in a wide-mouth Gatorade bottle that I save for immediately pre-race. I found my second wave corral a few minutes before the “real” start in time to hear the National Anthem and to see the F-16 flyover, which I had missed last year. That was really cool, and I got a little choked up at that moment to think that I was there a second time at Boston –the Holy Grail of marathons. About 10 minutes before starting time, I was sitting just outside my corral on someone’s front steps, drinking my last drops of Accelerade and eating my pre-race Gu. Wearing a very stylish industrial quality garbage bag, I was able to discreetly empty my bladder into the wide mouth Gatorade bottle right within a few steps of my corral. I disposed

of the partially-filled bottle immediately before having a chance to get confused, since I was drinking from that bottle only a few minutes before – timing is everything. Meanwhile, just behind me, the entire Hopkinton Police Department (one policeman) was writing down bib numbers of several men urinating on the bushes of the house behind me, telling the perpetrators that they had earned themselves a disqualification. Saved by the Hefty-bag – that would have been just my luck to have done all the work to get there, only to have been DQ'd for desecrating hallowed ground.

The race

My race plan was to start slowly, and follow an “even-effort” pace which adjusts your pace for the up- and down-hills, theoretically keeping your effort the same throughout the race. But when the gun went off, I couldn't resist disregarding my “slow start” pace band and took advantage of the initial downhills to bank some time. The corral system at Boston is really great, since it places you in the midst of similarly-paced, experienced marathoners. So even though it is crowded, people move along at a reasonable clip, and you don't see a lot of 12 minute milers up front, running four abreast talking and obliviously blocking hundreds of runners behind them. I was able to run a little faster than my 8:35 goal pace but keep my heart rate well within range, so I deliberately ran faster than goal, which kept me in the same flow with my corral mates. I started talking to a man from South Carolina, whose goal was to finish within 3:45 like me, but around mile 5 I noticed that I was breathing heavier than normal, and realized that I was clearly going too fast. By that time I was almost 2 minutes ahead of pace, and I said goodbye to my friend and settled in to what I thought was about an 8:30 pace. The course turned relatively flat at that point, and it was much easier to feel my pace without the distortion of the hills.

At the water stops, I was able to get two or three cupfuls each time, and didn't feel the need to pull out my empty bottle from the holster. As planned, I ate a Gel every half-hour and PowerBar every hour, washed down with plain water. In between, I drank Gatorade with a total fluid intake of about 16 oz per hour. According to my watch I was maintaining pace reasonably well at that point, neither losing nor gaining any significant time. It wasn't long before I could hear the girls at Wellesley, and was anxious to see the size of the crowd in this years nice weather. On arrival at Wellesley, I decided to try to absorb some of their energy, figuring it would come in handy at mile 22, so I ran along the sides, high-fiving everyone in sight. Although I felt very energized and fast, I didn't realize at the time that my antics slowed me down significantly and I had given back almost all of my 2 banked minutes, with the Newton hills coming up soon.

I tried to take advantage of the downhill approaching the Charles river and that effort got me just about one minute ahead of schedule. As I passed the Newton Fire station and prepared to take on the hills, I focused on relaxing and maintaining pace. By the time I crested heartbreak at mile 21, I had lost my banked minute back but was almost exactly on time with a downhill 5.2 miles to go. My legs were sore, but not too tired, and I played emotional games with myself trying to experience both the thrill of victory or the agony of defeat – whatever would motivate me to stay on pace. I saw the Citgo sign and realized I wasn't far, but couldn't tell whether I had enough gas in the tank to crank it up a notch for the rest of the way in, so I held steady. Finally I saw an official sign that said “One mile left”, and checking my watch I was unable to do the math, but felt I could finish under 3:45, especially with the 59 second

bonus Boston gives you to qualify. So I took off at what seemed like 5K pace and used the crowd cheering to maintain it through the Finish. Final chip time was 3:45:00, exactly on goal –down to the second. No pit stops necessary, thanks to the Hefty bag trick.

The following were my times at the chip mats with other info thrown in mostly for my own information for when I go back over this in the future.

Mat	Miles	Planned Elapsed	JF Elapsed	Planned Legtime	JF Legtime	Time v plan	Planned Pace	JF Pace
5K	3.1069	26:48	25:28	26:48	25:28	-1:20		8:12
10K	6.2137	53:15	51:32	26:27	26:04	-0:23		8:23
15K	9.3205	1:19:44	1:17:54	26:29	26:22	-0:07		8:29
20K	12.4274	1:46:19	1:44:43	26:35	26:59	+0:24	8:30	8:41
Half	13.1094	1:52:07	1:50:24	5:48	5:41		8:30	
25K	15.5343	2:12:42	2:11:31	20:35	22:03	+1:28	8:35	8:57
30K	18.6411	2:39:37	2:39:14	26:55	26:43	-0:12	8:51	8:36
35K	21.748	3:06:43	3:06:45	27:06	27:31	+0:25		8:51
40K	24.8548	3:33:09	3:33:48	26:26	27:03	+0:37		8:42
Full	26.2187	3:45:00	3:45:00	11:51	11:12	-0:39		8:13