

Boston Take 2

Steve Brookman

Strolling the streets of Boston during Patriot's weekend seemed an appropriate time to break out the 2008 jacket. It did a decent job of cutting the brisk New England breeze also. This being my second Boston eased a lot of the anxiety that came with the first attempt last year. My training had gone well, I had a few good races under my belt and I might have even shed a pound or two from a year ago. If the weather cooperated I was a cautiously optimistic as my main goal was simple: not to trip and fall this time. Running smarter with a controlled pace would hopefully make it more enjoyable, and if possible, a re-BQ (3:45 for this senior grandmaster) would be nice also.



Susan and I drove up on Saturday and met with John (JC) and Holly, our friends from Florida who had just flown in. We soaked up the Boston atmosphere at the Expo, then had an early dinner, featuring some outstanding chowdah and, surprise, a few beers. Sunday we strolled down to the bay, leaning into a stiff and chilly ocean breeze that had us questioning clothing options for next day. We kicked back in an IMAX theater to rest the legs and watched some amazing fishies in 3D. Sunday evening we met with Bruce and Patti for a pre-race pasta dinner at Vinnie-T's. The dinner and company were great, but it was a much different gathering than envisioned when the reservations were made back in December.

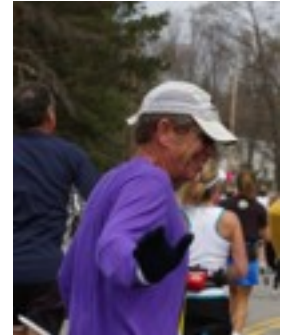
Did I mention the weather? Believe it or not I checked it a few times. OK, so maybe more than a few. I'd like to say it's my aviation background or the college courses in meteorology that keeps me focused on it. But it's really just a neurosis that I can't control before a race. The temps looked great, mid 40's, and the threat of rain had retreated but the easterly headwinds were still there, with some sites forecasting up to 33mph gusts! You have to have something to worry about, it might as well be something you have no control over.

Race day, the ride to Hopkinton didn't seem nearly as long as last year. And I was better prepared for the athlete's village this time by following JC's lead and purchasing an air mattress for the wait. It took several minutes to blow that sucker up and by the time I was done huffing and puffing it was time to get in a line for the portolets. The BAA said there would be more of them this year. There may have been, but they weren't at this village. I stood hopping on one leg then the other for over 45 minutes. At least I picked the slow line that was in front of the loudspeakers. As I was entering the room of relief my wave was being called to the start. I was real glad I had brought that mattress.

Leaving the village I joined the procession of runners shuffling towards the start, most sporting the classic trash bag ensemble. First wavers, most likely those caught in the long portolet lines, frantically weaved through the masses in an attempt to get to their start. Approaching the corrals, I heard my name called, turned, and got a hug from Janet. We wished each other luck and I worked my way towards my corral. The start and initial miles went as planned, right on pace, and I was feeling fine. I came up to Bruce at mile 5 wearing his tribute to John Fisher on his back. He said that his neuroma was bad and that this was going to be a tough one. Early on I saw a runner in a hunter green singlet, with John Fischer's build, running on the other side of the course. I never saw him again and it made me think that I never saw John running last year, but knew he was somewhere ahead of me. It would be the same this time.

Approaching mile 6.4 I cautioned the runners near me to be aware of the treacherous trolley tracks. I'm glad to report that they weren't an issue but I did spend an inordinate amount of time looking down this race. Some of you might not be aware how rough a course it is with trolley tracks, cobblestones, manhole covers, broken and uneven pavement the entire way!

The middle miles were fine also, very close to pace. I made a mental note not to keep my gel burst packets in the same pocket as I lost one of two when I reached to pull one out. Now I would have to rely on the gels offered on the course. I surprised Patty at mile 17, then I began to get tunnel vision as I focused on the road and getting through the hills of Newton. My plan was to stay close to pace until Heartbreak, then see if I could pick it up and earn another BQ. Also John Fisher's time last year was 3:45 and that seemed an appropriate goal.



At mile 18 I got a surprise when I looked up from my road trance and saw Bill Rodgers just behind me! Wow, running with Boston Billy, now that got me motivated. I picked up the pace so I could stay with him until I realized that I had just passed him! He didn't look so good either. There's no satisfaction in seeing a former elite runner so beat, only that it wasn't just us mere mortals who struggled.

I was cutting it close, goal wise, as I crested Heartbreak Hill, 8:30's from now on would do it. But by mile 24 I was up to 8:50, then miles 25 and 26, both were just over 9, and even with a (sort of) sprint down Boylston I missed it. (3:46:22, I had :16 and hoped their clock was more forgiving) Possibly one gel and one bag of gel-bursts weren't enough fuel, or possibly who knows what. Bottom line, I finished, enjoyed it (pretty much, except for the last few miles and the cramps afterwards) and I didn't fall. Another check in the box. Congrats to JC, fellow HRH'ers and all the 22,849 who crossed the finish line.



I think we lucked out on the weather, while we battled headwinds the entire way, they were no where near the top range forecast while I was out there. The mostly cloudy skies and 40's° were ideal for me. Susan drove us home that night in torrential rains, lightning and buffeting winds. I thanked the weather gods for holding off as I couldn't imagine running in those conditions.

One thing I can say about marathons after completing number 10 is that I enjoy everything about them except the actual running part. I relish the spectacle, camaraderie, even most of the training, and especially the resulting level of fitness and the amount of food and drink you can pack away. It's just those damn 26.2 miles you have to do that spoils it! Having said that, I'm signing up for the Poconos in 3 weeks. But I don't plan on liking the running part of it.