

Boston 2010 – Plan the Race; Race the Plan

Background:

2009 was a difficult and disappointing marathon year for me. Shortly before Boston in April, I developed a severe neuroma problem in my left foot that caused an inefficient running style and resulted in a very painful run on weary legs. I finished in 4:08 and was beat up both physically and mentally. I toed the line again in December on the pancake-flat Kiawah Island SC course. The same thing happened, as I again subconsciously compensated for the neuroma by favoring my other leg, and shortly after half-way, both legs were incredibly sore and weary. It was a death march and I finished in a miserable 4:13, wondering if my marathon days had finally come to an end.

But I had a couple of BQ's in the bank for Boston 2010 and was registered, so it was still "game on", whether I had confidence in my ability to race another 26 miles 385 yards or not. I trained well, following a Pfitz 12/70 plan which meant I ran fewer weekly miles and 20-milers than usual. But throughout the training period plagued with trepidation, the distinct possibility that I could be heading for a 3-peat was constantly on my mind. I knew that if that happened, then I couldn't see how I could consciously subject myself to that kind of pain any more. But if my 53rd marathon was to be my swan song, I felt that there was no better place to do it than at Boston. Boston had and has meant so much to me during my running career. It remains my favorite event, despite the difficulty of the course.

I shared with a number of friends my strategy for the race. I would try to run 27:00 minutes for each 5K up until I reached the ominous Newton Hills starting at mile 16. My hope was that this would allow me to have enough gas left in the tank to finish with just the usual marathon pain, but not be subjected to the incredible torture that the previous 2 marathons had inflicted on me. A secondary goal was also modest – given the conservative start and the hard second half at Boston, I aspired to come in under 4 hours, which is a BQ for this old fartlek.

The Race:

So; what happened? I executed my plan flawlessly. The first 5K was 26:59; the 2nd was 26:56; and the 3rd was 27:25. From 15K to 20K, I was 27:55, but that was due to a bio break. The inevitable distraction of the Scream Tunnel – aka the coeds at Wellesley – meant that I was 27:24 between 20K and 25K. I had one more important bio break before attacking the hills in Newton, and ran 28:59 including the first long uphill.

Despite no hill training during the winter down south in the South Carolina Lowcountry other than doing a Newton Hills Simulation Run on the treadmill a few times, I ran the hills better than I ever had in my previous 4 Boston's. I went through the next two 5K's at just over 29:00 each, and never once thought of walking or sensed that I was hitting the wall. I never ran a 10:00 minute mile all day, even up the infamous Heartbreak from mile 20-21.

For the final 10 miles, I knew I had it in me to run 3:57, so I made myself a new target to get into the 3:56's if I could. I made the right turn on Hereford, and just kicked it in, passing people like they were standing still. I made the greatest left-hand turn in marathoning onto Boylston, and just flew down the street. I finished strong; I finished elated; and I knew immediately that my marathoning days were not over quite yet.

My wife asked me later if I perhaps could have gone faster since I finished so strong and had relatively fresh legs afterwards. Perhaps with the benefit of 20:20 hindsight, I might have. But then again, there's a fine line when it comes to ideal pacing, and I might have finished a lot worse if I had pushed the pace early on. I've run 36 marathons faster than this one, but there aren't too many that I feel like I've run better. I ran smart and I ran about as well as I could. I'm elated with the final time result, but more importantly, I'm ecstatic that my neuroma behaved itself; that I finished feeling great and proud of myself; and that I now have the option of running another marathon or two. There may be one or two before the year is out, but certainly there will be Boston 2011. Yes; I BQ'd *baby*, and there's nothing quite like running a Boston Qualifier AT Boston itself.

Final Thoughts:

There's so many things about the Boston Marathon that make it special – the history, the tradition, the excitement, the electricity of the city on Patriot's Day weekend, the volunteers, the spectators, etc. But for me what makes it really something is the camaraderie of being there with so many good friends. I have special memories of good times with my NJ running club buddies, and many others who frequent on-line running forums. We may be virtual friends for 364 days

of the year, but we come together from all over and meet up once a year at the mecca of running – the Boston Marathon.
It's special.

Statistics:

Official time – 3:56:53

Pace – 9:02

AG time – 3:11:17

PLP – 65.3%

Overall – 14623

Gender – 9521

Division - 226