

The Boston Diaries, Part 3

There is good news and bad news to report about this year's Boston Marathon. First the bad news. The weather was so hot that runners were dropping like flies. The good news is that I was not one of them.

That having been said, did I mention it was hot? One runner collapsed 30 yards from the finish line, lay there a moment unable to get up, and then crawled those final few yards. He was quickly lifted into an ambulance and rushed to a hospital. I saw two others taken off the course on stretchers by medical personnel in mid-race.

Plus, the winning time was the slowest since 1987, and although an American did sneak in fourth this year, otherwise it was the same old story with Africans taking home most of the medals. It seems so easy to them. You'd think they could at least sweat or something.

Actually, the weather for the 2005 race was not as hot as the year before, but try and tell that to my near-delusional brain out in the mid-day sun. And as the race progressed, my goal for a finish time underwent a gradual but inexorable revision as I kept pouring water over my head.

Early on, when all things seemed possible in the euphoria of the moment, 3:30 was not out of the question. Later, as the sun bore steadily down, 3:45 appeared imminently more reasonable. Still later, anything under four hours would do. Finally, I was down simply to "Monday."

The race actually began quite well as I hit a comfortable pace and settled in to enjoy the crowds, scenery and atmosphere that is unique to this, the oldest continuously-run marathon in the world. Families have been coming out to the same spot all along the course for generations to cheer on generations of runners. Towns seem to vie with one another to see which can provide the most support, and the girls of Wellesley – well, they are the Girls of Wellesley and yes, you really do hear them long before you see them. One, bless her heart, was even holding a New Mexico flag.

Music has always been an important part of my running with my mind's song selection generally reflecting the kind of run I'm having. Not far into the race a group of bikers gathered in front of a Harley-Davidson dealership to blast runners with the Texas blues of Stevie Ray Vaughn and this fit the bill just fine. And in Framingham there was the most improbable music that I ever expected to hear during the Boston Marathon, none other than Hank Williams. I wonder if ol' Hank done it this way?

The number of cell phones in use by runners during this year's race was astounding. But the Hang Up and Run Award goes to the woman who kept bumping into other runners while talking on her cell phone and taking pictures and then emailing them. That seems to be the new way to keep your mind occupied during a long run. Another runner had a beer can dangling in front of him from a wire. You do what you have to do, I guess.

In the latter part of the race, the Newton Hills posed a challenge, but nothing comparable to anything in New Mexico as I motored on up only to get light-headed in the afternoon sun. The gas prices I was seeing along the way here in Taxachussets were surely a sun-addled illusion – they were significantly lower than back home.

Finally, mercifully, up ahead appeared a testament to my salvation – the Citgo sign at Kenmore Square, signifying one mile to go. But it was at least another mile away. Crunch time, put the head down and keep moving, helped along by cheering fans pouring out of nearby Fenway Park. Then a left turn onto Boylston Street to the blue and gold finish line banner down at Copley Square.

Back at the B&B, a young Korean woman was having trouble with her key to the front door. After helping her in, she saw my finisher's medal and foil blanket. "Ooh, ooh," she exclaimed several times. As I limped up the stairs to the room, she held out two tulips. "For you," she said with a broad smile. Yes, life is good.

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