The Boston Marathon – Monday 18 April 2011

Report by Mike Roberts



After a good run in the inaugural Brighton marathon 2010 (great race but that's another story) I qualified for a "g*ood for age" place in London marathon 2011 – only problem was my application was lost in the post.*

Looked at other marathons around April, including the Brighton again, but fully booked by this time.

Decided to do the Boston as it is one of the few where you need to qualify to enter so fairly exclusive, also it is the oldest marathon (115th year). We visited Boston years ago and we both loved the city, so made the trip into a weeks family holiday.

All the locals call it Marathon Monday and it always happens on Patriots Day.

Brighton time was 03hrs 13mins so decided to train and aim for sub 03hrs, although maybe a bit optimistic – followed a Runners World 16 week training schedule which was mainly 6 days a week, except during the longest runs in the middle of the schedule where Monday is a day off, as well as the usual Friday.

Followed it religiously except where work got in the way – generally a long run or 10mile/ half marathon race on the Saturday, 5 mile Sunday slow, Monday 5 mile easy, Tuesday intervals/ hills, Wednesday 5 mile building to 12 mile during the schedule, Thursday intervals/ hills and Friday off.

Weekend training was enjoyable (except lack of alcohol!) but weekdays fairly tough after a long day at work, get home at 19 hrs, run for up to 1.5 hours and then dinner, bed. Then another session the next evening to look forward.

Seemed to be working, running, eating, sleeping and not a lot else.

Had a hamstring problem towards end of February which forced me to rest for about 10 days. Had run 20 miles slow (3 hrs) on the Saturday and raced a CC6 race on the Sunday. About 2 miles into the race hamstring went very tight which forced me to jog to the end.

Tried to carry on gentle training but was advised (thanks Malcolm) to get it looked at and rest.

Physiotherapist advised me to stretch it for 30 seconds and then apply ice for 10 minutes – seemed to do the trick and soon back into the schedule.

3 weeks before and started to taper off which was a nice feeling after all the hard work – started to feel really good and well prepared, hopefully it would pay off.

Just before flying out to US the hamstring did feel painful again although I can't remember doing anything to cause it – apart from moving a piano the night before, not the most sensible thing to do I guess!

Flight was Saturday evening with the marathon on Monday – was starting to get a bit grouchy and beginning to doubt whether I could even finish the race.

Stayed at Lenox hotel which was about 25 yards from the finish – highly recommend this hotel, New Balance posters everywhere, even on your room key. Staff dressed head to toe in New balance sports gear which was a nice touch, free bananas in reception.

Some marathon training advice tells you to even avoid walking during last few days but I was dragged around the shops with the girls. Also had a 30 minute jog the day before just to make sure I could still remember to run, found it hard not to do.

US Hotels always have ice machines so again did my stretching and icing the hamstring and on Marathon Monday morning (touch wood) the pain seemed to have gone.

Complimentary breakfast at 04 hrs in the Lenox hotel – large bowl of Porridge and fruit. Caught the bus at 06 hrs from Boston Common to the start line at Hopkinton which was a straight line west from the City – very cold at this time in the morning.

Had about 1.5 hrs to kill in the Athletes Village, everything you could want there, coffee, energy bars, massages, motivation talks, laces, Vasoline type stuff, energy drinks, etc. lots of people resting laying down in plastic bags to keep warm, I was wondering around restlessly.

At last the call to go to the carrels (2 starts – I was in the first), gentle jog to get warmed up and then threw away old clothes I had on to keep warm.

American anthem before we starting which was cool and then we where off. By this time it had warmed up about and by the 3rd mile was into my stride, hamstring seemed to be fine so time to try and push on.

Had my name on my shirt which is always a good move, lots of encouragement from the huge crowds which lined the way.

Every mile there is Gatorade stops and water on one side, and then after about 100 yards the same on the other side. I didn't feel the need to stop at every stop and you had to be careful and stay in the middle to avoid people turning in front of you.

First 10 miles fairly comfortable – had a text from daughter to keep encouraging me, managed to reply as well!

Knew fairly early on that sub 03 hrs wasn't really on but was not aiming for sub 03 hrs 10 mins – concentrated on just keeping consistent pace.

Apparently you will have good luck if you kiss one of the Wellesley college girls at the half way point, I resisted, but what a noise they made. Lots of excellent signs though, "give us a kiss I will be President one day, give us a quickie, give us a kiss, I've cleaned my teeth"

From half way it starts to get tough, wasn't looking forward to "heartbreak hill" but when I got there (20 mile point) it wasn't too bad. Hill training around Swanage must have been good.

Towards the end they had some chocolate energy bars which tasted really good – up to that point had just used the Lucozade ones I had bought. From mile 24 the support along the road was amazing and felt the finish was close so easier to keep pushing.

An underpass at mile 25 was very painful on the quads on the downhill part, a guy next to was groaning as well and we had a laugh about that.

A right and left and then I could see the finish line in the distance, about 0.6 mile, time to use that last bit of energy, I knew sub 03hrs 05 mins was achievable. Normally try and pass some people up to the line but just totally focused on the clock and the line.

Crossed the line, what a feeling. Slightly dizzy as the blood pressure dropped suddenly but then felt great. Energy bars, bananas and then the medal.

Got cold really quick on the walk back to see my support crew (Tracy and Jasmine) who were watching the finish from the hotel entrance.

Final time 03 hrs 04 mins 38 secs which I was really pleased with, next year I'll try again for the sub 03hrs…….