

# Boston Marathon Diary

Rob Maher    April, 2007

*This is a transcription of the handwritten journal entries I made during marathon weekend. My intent was to capture some of my thoughts and experiences more or less as they happened, and so the entries were made within 24 hours of the events described. I may eventually go back through this raw material and reformulate it as a more concise memoir, but for now it is in its essentially unedited, contemporaneous form.--RCM*

## Saturday, April 14, 2007

The flight from DCA (Reagan National Airport) to EWR (Newark) is scheduled for 9AM, but the schedule screens show a delay until 9:45. The gate agent explains that the flight crew had arrived late last night and so had not met the regulatory off-duty time requirement. The weather in DC is nice: clear, cool, and slightly breezy.

The flight arrives in Newark at 11AM. Weather still nice and getting warmer. I notice a Boston flight departing Newark at 12:30PM, so I hustle to the gate to see about a standby. That flight checked in full. My scheduled 2:30PM flight shows a delayed departure at 3:36PM because of a delay in the incoming airplane from Orlando. It's that sort of day, apparently, despite the currently nice weather in the area.

I need to call John Dudas (a friend from the Big Sky Wind Drinkers running club in Bozeman), who should be in Boston already, to let him know my flight is delayed. I'll wait until the flight actually starts loading, since I have come to learn that predictions on delayed flights are usually optimistic. I start looking around the waiting area. There are several obvious Boston participants. Some are wearing warm-up clothes and performance gear and looking at the blue and yellow marathon guide sent to each entrant. Others are flipping through Runners World magazine. Some are even wearing the distinctive 2007 race shirts and jackets, while still others have on shirts from prior Boston Marathons. Still others have on race shirts from other events around the country. The ages and genders vary. No really young people—it looks like 30s-50s mostly. I'm wearing casual business attire: dress slacks and a button-down shirt, and carrying a trench coat. I wonder if anyone in the waiting area glances at me and thinks "I bet that's a marathon participant." Probably not. I suspect I look ordinary, trim but not particularly athletic, and generally nondescript. That's part of what separates the casual amateur runners like me from the serious, competitive—perhaps compulsive—runners traveling to Boston, all dressed up as if the race were about to begin.

As I see one of the "flaming" marathoners walk by, wearing the distinctive blue and white 2007 Boston Marathon race jacket—which I am planning to buy myself at the packet pick-up fair tomorrow—I wonder where I will ever wear mine? Maybe on the plane ride home to Bozeman? Why? Is it to call attention to myself, or to encourage conversation, or ...? It reminds me of people putting bumper stickers on their car listing places they have been (Grand Canyon, Six Flags, Wall Drug, etc.)—or people like me who have window decals listing college affiliations. I guess it is vanity and showing off—making sure others can see that you aren't a loner, but are part of some authentic group.

Forecast for race day says temps in the low 40s, 20+ mph wind, and 3-5 inches of rain. I think my selection of running garments and layers is OK, but I worry about my hands. I have one pair of knit running gloves, and if they get wet before the race, I could have very chilly fingers for hours on the course. I may need to get some plastic bags to wear over my gloves, or maybe find some mittens at the athlete's fair. I bet the vendors may be sold out of gloves and hats by the time I get there tomorrow, since the show has been going on Friday and Saturday already.

I notice several fit-looking guys walk up to the counter. One is wearing a Boston 2005 hat, the others have on fancy running pants. Yep, looks like another group of runners traveling together.

My flight is called—all the runners in the waiting area head for the gate. I dial the cell number John Dudas gave me and I connect immediately with John's father, John Sr., and let him know my status. He confirms that the dinner plan is on. I promise to call back once I get situated in Boston. John Jr. is out seeing some of his friends in the Boston area.

When the flight arrives in Boston, all the marathon-guise people head straight to the first rest room in the terminal: obviously everyone is staying fully hydrated already! Boston weather is gray and cool, slightly breezy, but no actual rain yet. I take a cab to the Milner Hotel (\$28 trip) and get there shortly after 5PM. I should have taken the subway for just \$2 (the famous Boston "T" system, Metropolitan Transit Authority--MTA, immortalized in the song "MTA," recorded in 1959 by the Kingston Trio, about hapless rider Charlie who can't pay the 5 cent exit fare to get off the train ... *"Did he ever return, No he never returned, And his fate is still unlearned, He may ride forever, 'neath the streets of Boston, He's the man who never returned!"* ... In fact, the ticket cards used on the T today are officially known as "Charlie Cards"). But, I mostly wanted to save time and avoid any confusion getting from the T station to the hotel since I'm not familiar with the neighborhood.

The Milner Hotel is quaint and more than a bit rough around the edges, but the location is excellent. It is a couple blocks south of Boylston Street, near the Boston Common, and right in the middle of the Boston "Theater District." The elevator in the lobby is broken, but no problem for a marathon runner who always takes the stairs if less than 6 floors anyway. My room is on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor, but actually opens off the fire stairwell rather than the regular hallway. I walked down the hall and couldn't find room 413, but then noticed the number below the exit sign on the stairwell door. So, I actually need to go out the exit before the room door is visible! The keycard doesn't work the first time, so I hike back down to the lobby to get a new card. It works the second time.

I call John Dudas' father's cell number again. John Sr. passes on the number of John's friend's cell phone. It turns out that John Jr. and his friend (Mike Neff) are out driving the marathon course and happen to be approaching the finish line on Boylston, only 4-5 blocks from the hotel. I walk out of the hotel and stroll north to the corner of Tremont and Boylston to meet up with them. It still isn't actually raining, but I have my umbrella and trench coat nevertheless. I wait a few minutes near the T station and eventually John strolls up. Mike had parked on one of the side streets due to the busy traffic. We walk back to where Mike is waiting, hop in the car, and set out for the restaurant. Mike is from Charlottesville, VA. He used to be in the US Coast Guard. We drive south from downtown to get on the Massachusetts Turnpike and head out toward the

restaurant in Lexington. John suggests taking a small detour in Newton so that I can see the “Heartbreak Hill” portion of the race course between a right turn at the Newton Fire Department at mile 17 and the top of the hilly section near mile 21. The incline is noticeable, but not like the hills on the Lewis & Clark Marathon course in Bozeman. However, the rise is pretty late in the marathon and I'm sure it will be more noticeable on Monday. I suddenly notice that I'm starting to feel some butterflies in my stomach, and I get a slight chill and shudder. It seems like eons since I did my 20 mile training run three weeks ago, and I actually have trouble imagining getting to 21, 22, 23 ... miles. I certainly should be plenty rested and fueled, but for some reason there remain strong doubts in my mind. The weather forecast for Sunday and Monday has become yet more terrible now: 30 mph winds with gust to 50 mph, temps in the 30s, and 3-5 inches of rain. I'm still particularly worried about cold hands, so that remains my top priority for merchandise at the athlete's fair. I try hard to shake off the butterflies and listen to John's comments about the race course.

We arrive in Lexington a few minutes before the 7PM reservation. John points out the Lexington Common where the reenactment of the Lexington-Concord battle will take place at dawn on Monday morning for Patriot's Day (weather permitting, that is. I found out later that the event was canceled due to rain and wind). The restaurant, Vinny T's, is located on a side street. We meet John's parents (from New Jersey) and John's Boston friend, Kevin, who used to work with him. I find out that John Sr. will also be running the marathon. Dinner is fun—good company and good food—and I devour a huge plate of pasta with fresh vegetables. After dinner we say our goodbyes to Kevin and to John's parents, and John and Mike drive me a few miles down the road to a convenient red-line T station. It is a couple stops closer to my hotel than the Alewife terminal, which had been my original destination before John and Mike turned out to be downtown earlier when they picked me up. I buy my “Charlie Ticket” at an automated kiosk using my credit card and load it with \$10 (5 subway rides @ \$2). The red train takes me back downtown to Park St., where I wait just a couple minutes before boarding the green train back to Tremont and Boylston. It is gray and windy as I emerge from the subway station, but still no rain to speak of.

The hotel is adjacent to several theaters, including the venue hosting the “Blue Man Group” performances, so I can hear lots of bass and drum sounds emanating from somewhere down the street. Fortunately, the air handling unit mounted in the window of my hotel room does a good job of sound masking. Speaking of my hotel room: it is *really* tiny. The small, single bed occupies all but about two feet of the north-south dimension along the east wall. A rack and several hangers are located at eye level in the small gap at the foot of the bed, and a TV is situated on a cart just to the right. The west wall opposite the bed has a mirror and a pedestal sink, separated from the bed by a few feet of open floor. A small nightstand sits next to the head of the bed, and to its left is a doorless alcove with the toilet and small bathtub/shower. And that's it! Very cozy, indeed. I discover that the built-in Ethernet cable attached to the TV does not work, but my wi-fi card does pick up a free signal provided by the hotel. I check email—and the weather report—on the computer, then doze off with the TV showing one of my favorite movies, “The Fugitive,” with Harrison Ford.

**Sunday, April 15, 2007**

I wake up spontaneously about 6:30AM. I had a good night's sleep. The bed was comfortable and I was able to ignore the noises and bright lights from outside my hotel room window. I can see a strong breeze and light sprinkles of rain hitting a lower rooftop visible out the window, and the TV weather forecast appears increasingly ominous. There was substantial rain and flooding overnight in New York and Connecticut, and heavy, wet snow fell in the higher elevations of western Massachusetts. I feel the need to stretch my legs with an easy warm-up/warm-down run, and decide to head over to the marathon finish line in Copley Square to take part in the free "Freedom Run" fun run event at 8AM. I put on my black tights, long sleeve Lewis & Clark Marathon shirt, and my blue nylon wind jacket, and jog over to the starting area. A few thousand people are streaming into the area. I get two free T-shirts (one Freedom Run shirt and an Adidas "reason to run" shirt), turn in a signed risk waiver, and they give me a bib number. I'm not sure why they need bib numbers, since this is a fun run and there is no timing, but perhaps it is just a souvenir. The fun run course heads east on Boylston, turns north a block or two after Tremont, then back west past the Massachusetts State House, and eventually around south and east again to the finish line. A large tent holds dozens of tables and volunteers handing out some free chow (bagels, juice, apples, bananas, granola bars, etc.). I emerge from the chow tent and discover the sprinkles are continuing off and on, so I jog quickly back to the hotel.

I shave and shower, then hang my wet garments on the shower rod. The Weather Channel reports the latest forecast: dismal. Boston has a flood watch, extra high tide warning, wind, rain, possible snow, sleet, etc. The worst is expected between late afternoon today and early morning on Monday. Great.

I get dressed, don my trench coat, and grab my umbrella. I had planned to walk to the packet pick-up, but the increasingly heavy rain and swirling wind encourage me to head to the subway station instead. I hop on the T from Boylston and ride a few stops west to Hynes Convention Center station, and open my umbrella to walk a couple blocks to the Convention Center itself. As always happens to me—no matter what city or country I might be in—I have a young couple come up to me to ask for directions. I still haven't figured out why, out of the numerous people leaving the station, it always seems like I'm the one to be approached for directions. I guess I should take it as a compliment: apparently I seem knowledgeable and non-threatening. Or something. I have them turn around and I point to the Convention Center area, visible just down the street, and they sigh in relief. My good deed of the day.

Inside the Convention Center I follow the signs to the packet pickup area. The volunteer looks at my official packet pickup postcard, asks for photo ID, and has me sign the pickup card. She remarks on how far I have come to participate in the Boston Marathon, and I think to myself, yes, I have come a long way to be here—in more ways than one. She hands me my sealed packet containing my bib and timing chip. Yep, that's my name on there. Reality starts to set in and the butterflies are suddenly back in my stomach. Apprehension and anxiety well up inside me, and I quickly move on to the T-shirt and freebie "swag" pickup stations to help distract myself. The swag comes in a very large orange plastic bag with a heavy rope tie. The bag will be good to haul my free and purchased booty from the athlete's fair today, and it is required to be used as the baggage carrier on race day.

The athlete's fair has a huge crowd milling about in the aisles between the vendor booths. I quickly remember the urgency of finding gloves, and my desire to buy an official commemorative race jacket. Not many gloves are to be found. I end up buying one cheap pair of polypropylene "liner" gloves and another pair of gloves with a thin, mitten-like cover that can be pulled over the fingers. I figure I can bring both pairs and see what the weather is like at race time, plus use the pair of knit gloves I brought from home as backup in case the other gloves get too wet. I figure I will put anything I don't need into my orange baggage sack, which will be transported from the marathon starting area to the finish area by bus. I push my way through the narrow aisles and find the large Image Impact booth with the commemorative jackets I'm seeking. They have not sold out yet! The size medium jacket fits me snugly, but I decide to go with the large size so that it will fit over a sweatshirt on cold days back in Bozeman. The arm length of the large jacket is fine. \$90 for a jacket—ouch.

The fair has lots of nutrition and health supplement vendors. None of that stuff looks at all appealing to me today. I decide to buy a headband to keep my ears warm (if necessary). The crowd thickens still further and I sense the feeling of anxiety returning—mixed in with not-so-subtle claustrophobia. There's been no sign of the Dudas family—nor anyone else I recognize—and I feel the need to get out of there.

It's now raining heavily but the buildings along Boylston seem to be blocking the wind, so I decide to walk back to the hotel, toting my distinctive orange bag on my shoulder. Just like the marathon garb evident yesterday in the airport waiting area, the orange bags have now become the exclusive badge of participation as people walk around Boston in the rain. Bag after bag after bag can be seen on shoulders up and down the streets...

By mid-afternoon it is raining steadily and getting increasingly windy. Gusts are drilling raindrops into my hotel room window. This is preposterous. Whose idea was it to come to Boston to run a marathon, anyway? This could be a truly nasty experience if the weather stays like this. I'm not too hungry, but I think I should probably eat something before the evening pasta dinner. I walk a block north to a food court and buy a toasted turkey club sub sandwich. I also start my fluid loading regimen by drinking a couple water bottles full of tap water. My fluid balance comes quickly, and within an hour my urine is essentially clear.

By 6:30PM I'm ready to go to the hosted pre-race pasta dinner at Government Center/City Hall plaza. It is very gusty and raining hard—just terrible conditions. I struggle with my wind-whipped umbrella to the T station, and ride a couple stops to Government Center. The original plan was for the Big Apple Circus to give performances under the big top set up in the plaza, but the shows were cancelled so that the runners waiting in the food line could stand under cover in the circus tent and out of the rain. A few jugglers and clowns are on hand to entertain. After waiting in line for a few minutes, a group of us are escorted out of the big top and across the open square to the city hall area. Food lines are set up under the overhang in the plaza. Volunteers dole out plates and plastic forks, then dish up pasta, pasta salad, regular salad, and some bread. Tables are set up here and there inside the building. I find a seat at a vacant table, and soon I'm joined by a gentleman from Houston and a few ladies from Virginia. The Houston runner is an attorney—a nice chap, also running his first Boston Marathon, but this is only his second marathon overall: he qualified in his first marathon last fall in Houston.

The weather has gotten worse as I leave the building. It's still very windy—just about wrapped the umbrella a few times as I walked to the T station for the ride back to the hotel. Everyone on the train seems to be talking about the terrible forecast. The latest statement calls for huge wind gusts and heavy rain through at least mid-day on Monday! That means at least the first two hours of running will be soaking wet and cold. What have I gotten myself into? I'm starting to consider the implications of just dropping out of the race...no, I can't really do that; I'm committed to run, come what may. Besides, I've run in rain, wind, and cold many times during my training. But, what should I wear?

I packed a wide selection. I have my tights, wind pants, and/or shorts for my lower body. I have two different long sleeve poly shirts (REI and L&C marathon shirts), two poly undershirts, my blue thermal long johns top, my blue zippered wind jacket, and my new white poly short-sleeved "Montana State Bobcats" shirt. I also have my large garbage bag to wear as a disposable poncho. After some consideration and trial and error, I end up settling on my shorts covered by my wind pants. The shorts have pockets to hold my Hammer Gel packets (four of them: one for the start and another one for each hour on the course). On top I decide to wear the blue thermal shirt, then the wind jacket, and finally the white MSU shirt with my number bib pinned on. I figure I can put the garbage bag over that. On my head I plan to wear my ancient "Lincoln Corporate Run" purple hat. Who would have thought that I would still have—much less wear in the Boston Marathon—a hat that had been a free giveaway item in a local 5 mile fun run about 1995 or so in Lincoln, NE? I put a couple plastic wastebasket liner bags in my wind jacket pocket for use as water waders on my feet, another plastic bag with my two pairs of dry backup gloves and my headband, and I decide to load my tights, spare shirt, and my trusty old blue and white wool hat into the big orange baggage sack to bring to the start just in case. I put in a couple extra Hammer Gel packets, too. The race packet included a small container of a waxy anti-chafing compound, and I set that on the edge of the sink so I don't forget it in the morning.

My fluid balance seems good. I drink a bit more water and wait to see how quickly I need to get up to relieve myself: just a few minutes. Kidneys seem to be working great, my stomach feels fine, my legs feel somewhat tight so I stretch them a little bit. All my garb is set out on the floor. I spend a moment threading my Champion Chip timing device through the laces of my left shoe. The Chip has a tiny radio frequency identification (RFID) device encapsulated in a plastic shell. At the start, finish, and every 5km along the course, a special mat containing a strong alternating magnetic field wirelessly energizes the chip, which responds with a unique identification number via radio frequency energy that can be detected by the timing system. Thus, timing is based on when the chip is detected along the course, rather than based on when the starting gun goes off. This is good for people like me who will be starting 10,000 runners back in the pack, as I won't actually cross the starting line for many minutes after the "start" of the race.

The Weather Channel reports (alright, *confirms*) the rainy and windy overnight forecast. Looking outside I see sheets of wind-whipped rain coursing across the streets and alleys. I get in bed around 9PM and think through my plans for the morning: wake up at 6AM (using both my watch alarm and the clock radio as backup), brew some in-room coffee and get dressed, go to the lobby for a light breakfast, plan to reach the bus pick up spot in Boston Common (Tremont St. side) by 6:30AM, and bring a bottle of water to drink on the bus.

## **Monday, April 16, 2007 (Race Day)**

I slept OK, but somewhat fitfully. I woke up every few hours through the night, and the alarming wind and rain continued to blow against the window relentlessly. But by 6AM the wind seems to have calmed slightly, and the weather reports on TV give a more optimistic forecast: clearing and less wind as the morning wears on, with perhaps only sprinkles by race time. On radar the nor'easter storm looks like a pinwheel with various arms of severe weather rotating counter-clockwise around the center of the low pressure system, which seems to be centered somewhere south of Boston. Also, the current report from Hopkinton (start) is interesting: raining hard, but temperatures already in the 40s. I start to rethink my choice of running garb, since I don't want to get too warm during the race.

I use the waxy anti-chafing compound on my nipples, wondering if non-runners are aware of what can happen after 3 ½ hours with a shirt sliding back and forth... I leave the garbage bag poncho, my headband, and my foot bags in my jacket pocket for now. I discover the power outlet at the nightstand is broken, so I move the coffee pot over to another outlet near the sink. The hotel was probably built 75 years ago so there are only a couple outlets in the room. I note that they have installed a separate surface conduit with a special outlet for the heating/cooling unit in the window. I also mix up a few ounces of Powerade to drink. I grab my orange baggage sack—labeled with my name and race number sticker—finish my coffee and Powerade, and put my room key card, driver's license, and a few contingency dollars in a small zip-lock bag that will ride in the back pocket of my shorts. I guess I am ready to go!

I make my way down to the lobby, which is getting crowded with runners, but I see that most of them have the red bibs indicating the second wave (10:30AM start), so they will likely be waiting for 7AM buses to the starting line. My placement is at the end of the first wave (blue bib, 10AM start), so I'm supposed to get in the bus line at 6:30AM. I grab a muffin and a bagel.

The walk to the pickup area on the edge of Boston Common takes about five minutes. It is blustery, not much rain, and relatively warm. I brought the plastic bag my commemorative jacket came in to use as a "hat" and a couple other spare plastic bags to help keep water from leaking into my big orange baggage sack. The buses are lined up all along Tremont St. and thousands of runners are queued up in the rain in long lines winding around the sidewalks. What a scene! The progress is very slow. The buses get loaded gradually, then several minutes go by with no action, then the line of buses pull away. The weather is deteriorating again, with rain and strong wind gusts, so I pull out my garbage bag, make holes for my head and arms, don my plastic bag hat, and try to think dry thoughts. I meet some runners from New York and a young woman from northern California as the line snakes along. A few more minutes go by before the next line of buses pull up. After 4-5 of these bus loading cycles my line finally gets to the street and I file onto the next available bus.

Lovely. The bus windows fog up instantly as the 50 wet runners get on board. I share the seat with a 60-something fellow from Tennessee (near Cumberland Pass). He had run in Boston several times before and clearly had "caught the Boston bug." Our conversation is fun, but the bus ride seems interminable. Several toll plazas, a few exits and redirections—even the bus driver has to yell out "do we turn right here or go straight??" at one of the exit ramps. As we

finally near Hopkinton (about 8:45AM), the rain begins to pick up again. The ditches and low areas along the road are full of standing water. The bus comes to a stop and a few runners get off and scamper through the wet grass to line up near a porta-potty. I'm content to stay on the dry—by comparison—bus as long as possible. After the line of buses inches its way forward another block or so, the driver opens the door and the runners clamber out into the rain and start slipping and sliding their way up a muddy slope toward what appears to be the “athlete's village” on the practice field at Hopkinton High School. I stay behind on the bus for a few minutes in order to get the plastic wastebasket bags on my feet with the tops tucked over into my socks. This turns out to be a particularly brilliant move since my socks and feet stayed clean and dry as I walked through the mud and wet grass covering the football field. I notice some other runners are carrying their running shoes and socks and wearing an old pair of shoes or flip-flops on their feet. That looks workable, but a lot colder on the toes!

I have some trouble getting oriented. The map of the start area in the race guidebook had seemed very clear, but the hills, trees, and buildings made it hard to get the lay of the land. Fortunately, the PA announcer is making some regular descriptions about where to walk—and where *not* to. I wait in a porta-potty line for about 10 minutes before “being seated.” I am glad to relieve myself, both #1 and #2, but I note that the toilet paper is almost gone, which makes me worry about the dozens upon dozens of runners still in line. As I emerge from the potty the announcer is requesting that runners in my wave and corral (#10) start heading to the starting line. I decide to stick with my original plan as to my race garments. With the rain still falling I am getting chilled. I sure don't want to be hypothermic due to wet and windy conditions. I put my two pairs of spare gloves and my headband in my jacket pocket, cinch the rope tight on my orange baggage sack, and drop it in the pile at the appointed baggage bus. Each baggage bus has a sign indicating which bib numbers should use it, and each window of the bus has the sub-group of numbers. Yes, it is clear that when you organize a race for the 111<sup>th</sup> time, people have figured out how to manage the warm-up bags for 20,000 runners in a quick and orderly fashion! I double-check my gear and head down Grove St. with all the other runners to the starting area on Main St.

My corral, #10, is right at the intersection of Grove and Main. It is about 9:30AM, so I decide to make one more stop at the porta-potties near the intersection. I eat my starting-line Hammer Gel packet while waiting in the line. I then head to my corral, lifting my garbage bag so the marshals can see my bib number, and get in line. The 10,000 or so prior runners are queued up in front of me up and over a hill along Main Street. I can only see as far as the sign for corral #6, so corrals 1-5 must be over the hill. People all around me are shedding plastic bags, hats, gloves, and coats, and tossing them off to the side of the course. I finish a bottle of water, and then take the bags off my own feet.

Looking around, I see that many runners are covered up in jackets and pants (like me), while others are in just shorts and singlet tops! I'm cold and actually start to shiver. This just doesn't feel right. Will I give out along the course and have to quit? How will I explain that to everyone? I wonder how long it would take to reach the finish line if I had to take the sweep bus? These are not the sort of thoughts I want to have at the starting line of the 111<sup>th</sup> Boston Marathon! Then another sensation hits me: I have to pee again. No way can I get out of the corral—it is all packed in. I guess I could squat down, but with my wind pants, shorts, and jock on, it would not be easy. I figure my urine at this point is basically just hot water anyway—and I am already wet



from the rain—so I make the strange decision to arrange my shorts to just go inside the wind pants. Perhaps disgusting, but I am cold, wet, and uncomfortable already, and nothing compared to the sweaty mess I will be in about 3.5 hours, so who cares?! I don't think anyone around me noticed—probably doing the same thing themselves!

I notice that my corral is mostly 50-something men and 30-something women. This is the end of the 45-50 male qualifiers (like me) and probably the middle of the female qualifiers. Not many blacks or young people in my corral. I note a few runners from Korea. A cold wind blows through the street and I shiver some more. I can't believe the runners in shorts and short sleeve tops! They must really be freezing. I take my headband out of my jacket pocket and put it over my purple hat, pulling it down over my ears to keep warm. Now the rain starts up again!

Before long the word comes through the crowd that it is 5 minutes until the race starts! Runners almost instinctively start pressing slightly forward, and before long I have moved up 10-15 yards. Up ahead I see hundreds of pairs of gloves, hats, ponchos, etc., being thrown to the side of the starting area. Posters and placards near the starting area indicate that any clothing left at the start will be donated to charity. I wonder if there is a charity for homeless or destitute runners who need race gloves and jackets...

The variety of conversations going on among the participants is baffling. Mostly small talk about the course, what conditions were like last year, whether moving the start time earlier to 10AM was a mistake, what the crowds will be like, recommendations to start out slow, questions about whether the race might have already started, what did the PA announcer just say?, etc., etc. Lots of nervous energy.

Suddenly word spreads that the race has started! We hear a cheer from up ahead, but can't yet see anyone actually moving at all. It takes over three minutes before people around me start walking slowly forward. After another minute there is room to jog slowly, and another minute later the actual starting line and timing mats come into view. The people around me are all barely jogging and jostling when we cross the starting line. I hit the start button on my watch chronograph and notice that the elapsed time clock at the starting line reads something over 6 minutes. I make a mental note, for psychological purposes, that the course timers will be +6 minutes compared to my actual time.

Almost immediately as the course leaves Hopkinton I start seeing men and women pulling off to the trees and bushes near the course to relieve themselves on the ground. Everyone is very hydrated. The scene reminds me of my first marathon experience in Minneapolis (1998) when I saw dozens of men pulled off at a hillside just after the course crossed I-94, peeing with their backs to the oncoming runners. I recall thinking that it would have made a great picture! Probably still happens today—as it does in Boston, obviously.

The runners remain pretty packed together and it is a bit hard to maneuver. My plan is to work my way over to the right side of the road to be near the aid stations and to see the mile markers, but there isn't any good way to do so yet. Before long I hear someone say “I think we passed the mile marker,” but I haven't seen anything. I check my watch and see 8:35, which seems

conceivable considering the apparent slow pace and crowding, so I press my watch to record the first split.

Although the course drops a couple hundred feet in the first 4 miles, the running perspective is that the course is rolling up, down, and winding around through the woods. By mile 2 I have managed to maneuver over to the right side, and I do see the mile marker and record my split time, 7:44. That would be nice to maintain for a while. The mile markers are yellow signs with black numbers, and there is also a painted mile mark in the center of the road. I notice that I've warmed up considerably, so I take off my headband and put it in my jacket pocket, then pull apart my garbage bag poncho and toss it to the side of the road. Hundreds of other bags, knit gloves, headbands, pace chart wristbands, etc., are strewn along the side of the road, presumably discarded deliberately by runners as the conditions changed. I start thinking that I might end up getting too warm and want to remove my wind pants. I'd have to stop to do that, which would take time, and if I needed to remove my wind jacket I would have to take off my white Montana State shirt first. Before I can think about more options for disrobing, a cold mist and wind starts to blow across the road and my glasses start to fog up—I am glad I still have on the extra layers! I had been worried before the race that my glasses would be annoying if covered with rain drops and mist, but it didn't really ever get too bad to see clearly.

I start noticing Framingham signs during miles 5-6-7. Mile 7 is approaching one hour on the course, so I locate my first spare Hammer Gel packet and squeeze it out with my teeth. I grab a cup of water instead of Gatorade at the next aid station. As I pull away from the aid station, I think deliberately about how I am feeling. My temperature has reached equilibrium inside the wind pants and jacket—not too hot or too cold. My feet feel fine. I was expecting my shoelaces to get loose running through the wet puddles, but no problem so far. My socks feel damp but my toes are not uncomfortable. My hands are damp in the gloves, but not cold. Upper body is comfortable and no sign of chafing. My attitude is very good! Breathing and heart rate feel calm and easy. My mile splits have been slow, 8:20's rather than 8:00, so my conservative start seems to be paying off.

I start computing the remainder of the course in my head: could I run a few miles now at 7:45 pace between mile 7 and mile 11 and make up the overall pace without dying later? How would I feel mile 17 to mile 21 on the uphill portion if I over-run 7-11? Maybe I could recover between miles 11-17 (10km), do the hills, and then hold on for the last 5.2 miles...yeah, that's an idea. But what if it starts raining or becomes windy as the course heads east from Newton to downtown? I decide to play it conservative and stick with my controlled pace through the flat portion—after all, I'm here to participate and experience the spectacle of the race, not to win!

I start to realize that I need to make a potty stop for #1, so I stop at a porta potty just before mile 8, adding about 30 seconds to my time for that mile. As I start running again I am annoyed to feel the headband and the spare gloves bouncing around in my wind jacket pocket. I think about tossing them to the side of the road and just writing off the \$20 or so in value, but once again I start to worry about a potential rain squall or windy mist in the latter half of the race. It's still two and half hours to go, so I decide to put up with the annoying weight and bouncing.

Things seem to open up near miles 9-10 along a lake area in Natick. The crowds are sparse along this stretch, but some people have tables and tents set up here and there. A few businesses seem to have Patriot's Day sales and parties going on, too.

As I pass over the timing mats (every 5km) on the course I can hear the whistle from the Champion Chip timing system. At 5k and 10k there were so many runners around that I couldn't be sure which whistle was due to my chip beeping the system, but by 15k and 20k things have spread out sufficiently so that I am pretty sure the whistle I hear is due to my chip. I wonder if the web site and the automatic email system have been sending the timing info for everyone to see?

I can hear cheering up ahead as I reach mile 12, and before long I can see hundreds of people lined up along metal barricades on the right side of the street. Yes, it is the fabled line of co-eds from Wellesley College. They are all screaming and cheering, and many hold "kiss me" signs. Others are holding out hands for high-fives, and a few say "hey, go Montana State!" when they see my shirt. A few even say "Go Bobcats," although I am not sure if they saw the tiny letters on my shirt or actually knew the proper Montana State mascot.

As I get past mile 12 and mile 13, I am still feeling quite well, with no foot trouble or chafing, but the fronts of my upper thighs are starting to feel a bit tight and I think about the possibility of impending leg cramps or other muscle trouble that have sometimes set in after mile 20 in my other marathons. I begin doing puff breathing (or pressure breathing)—sending outward breaths through tight lips to help increase the air pressure in the lungs, and thereby the available oxygen—which seems to have helped me suppress leg cramps in the past.

At the half marathon point (13.1 miles) I once again go through my mental checklist: how is my stamina? Temperature ok? Any tight muscles? Knees and ankles ok? How's my posture? Is the pace comfortable or am I straining? And so on. I feel a little liquid in my bladder, but no urge to stop and urinate, so my fluid balance is probably ok. Just keep running!

Miles 14-15-16 go by in a complete blur. The course crosses the Charles River at mile 16 according to the map, but I guess I am focused inward and just don't notice a bridge or whatever. I recall that the big right turn at the Newton Fire Department will mark the start of the hilly section, but I can't remember exactly where to expect the turn—is it mile 16, 17, or 18? I see a sign proclaiming "Entering Newton," somewhere like mile 16, and sure enough, the Fire Department appears after an uphill crossing of I-95. After the right turn and gradual uphill pitch, I notice a new "vibe" on the course. First, there are a lot of people walking—maybe 10-20% of the participants! Since I am coming upon these folks from behind, I assume they started in earlier corrals, so maybe this is their deliberate strategy to recover and save some energy before pushing the last miles downhill into Boston. Second, I notice that the crowds have become larger and much more vocal. Especially at the turn in Newton, there are flags waving, people holding posters supporting particular runners, and lots of cheering and hollering going on. My line through the course continues to be along the right side of the road, and this brings me close enough so that my Montana State shirt is easily readable. It is surprisingly helpful psychologically to hear people shout "Hey, Montana!", "Go Montana!", "Wow, your looking strong, Montana!", and things like that. The third vibe I notice is a sense of relief: I can probably

count on being able to finish now. With under ten miles left to go, I figure that I could now manage to walk the rest of the way—if necessary—even if I suffer some serious setback like a cramp, twisted ankle, muscle pull, or whatever. I hope that doesn't happen, of course, but it's my nature to be thinking about contingency plans.

As the course leads gradually uphill, I continue to feel strong and comfortable. My mental and physical checklist is good. By now the runners have spread out sufficiently that I can run some tangent routes through the curves, trending across the road to find the shortest path through the course and save a few steps. Yet, even as I feel strong, I keep thinking that I must not get euphoric and make a tactical mistake. I need to stay conservative and make sure I won't run out of gas beyond mile 20—which is what happened at my first marathon in 1998, when my legs got cramped, weak, and just wouldn't run properly anymore.

I finally reach the top of the hilly section at around mile 21, and the runners are greeted by another throng of college students. This time it is a boisterous group from Boston College. The boys were mostly jolly and many seem to be drunk already (close to noon, after all, on Patriot's Day...). They love to yell "Go Montana State" as I pass by, except for a few with blurry vision who yell "Go Michigan State" instead.

I pass the 35km mark and cross the timing mats. Yes, I hear the telltale whistle of the timing system. I try to work through the mental math:  $35 = 7 \times 5\text{km}$ ,  $5\text{km} = 3.1\text{ miles}$ , so 35km is 21.7 miles. Yep, my brain is still working properly and not too starved of oxygen or glucose! That puts 40km at mile 24.8, so I realize that the next timing mat 3.1 miles from now will be the last split point before the finish!

The course begins a noticeable descent and some more curves. I see a few glimpses of downtown buildings in the distance! There are lots of street cars and more traffic on side streets now as the course gets into a more urban section. I also see even more fans along the route holding signs of support, hoping to see a friend or family member run by. My watch reads just over 3 hours elapsed now (3h 5min at 22 miles), so I consume my last Hammer Gel packet. I start to recalculate what it would take to finish in under 3h 30min. I would need to cover the remaining 4.2 miles in 25 minutes. At 7 min/mile I could do it! I am able to run a 10km race at a 6:30 pace, so for a moment I think I might go for it. But wait—do I have it in me to accelerate from 8:20 pace to 7:00 pace after being on the course now for 3 hours? What is the rest of the course really going to be like? I quickly have the "get real" sensation that there is insufficient distance left to try to make up several minutes of time. The only way it could have happened would be if I had done a surge back in miles 7-11, and that was two hours ago!! Just keep plugging along now.

Before I know it I see mile 23. The question now becomes should I, could I pick up the pace? Yes, I seem to have a lot left in the tank, so I could do it. But to what purpose? So I start concentrating on soaking in the scenes: people lining the streets, packed right up against the barrier fencing, the race banners on the light poles, the runners ahead waving to the crowd and reacting to the cheering, the dozens of runners who have slowed to a limping pace or stopped to stretch out a cramped leg, sore foot, or some other need. Some runners are switching between a slow jog and hobbling along, relentlessly making it toward the finish line somewhere miles ahead, step by step by step.

I spot the shiny glass of the John Hancock tower off in the distance. How can *that* be at the finish? It seems too far away and too far south. Is that really it, or am I getting a bit delirious? OK, I now see the giant orange triangle of the Citgo sign coming up straight ahead in the middle distance. I recall hearing that the triangle marks mile 25, if my memory serves me. And yes, here is the 40km timing mat! Just 0.2 miles to mile 25—I get myself to think about gauging the 0.2 miles, because that is what will remain when I reach mile 26: it's 26.2 miles. Now the crowd is really screaming. I'm passing other runners with every step. I haven't noticed anyone passing me lately. I see that we are still on Commonwealth Av., but the finish line is on Boylston—boy, the John Hancock tower still seems impossibly far away. Maybe it is just that the glass exterior presents no obvious scale to gain a frame of reference. I see the flow of runners up ahead disappearing on Commonwealth—that must be the turn south up there.

The route goes down below an overpass and then comes back up to street level. Where is mile 26? Well, here is the turn south. I think the Freedom Run came through here on Sunday, but I can't recognize anything for sure. The crowd noise is now *really* deafening with the spectators packed between the downtown buildings and the barricade fencing. I see the left turn onto Boylston a block ahead of me, but still no sign of the mile 26 marker! Could I have missed it, like I missed seeing the mile 1 marker, or is there really that nagging, final 0.2 miles still to be run on Boylston? Now there's the scaffolding over the course up ahead—I know the finish is right before that, and it's not much farther to go. OK, forget about mile 26, it's time to finish. Remember to smile for the camera—punch the stop button on my watch after the finish. Pass another couple runners, and yes! there's the finish line!! Get that chip across the mats and wave those arms and take off my hat for the cameras!! It's done! I did it! As Phidippides is fabled to have said at the end of the first marathon—from Marathon to Athens, Greece: *Rejoice! We Conquer!* Although Phidippides is believed to have dropped dead on the spot, I decide to stick with just his utterance. That's authentic enough for me!

All that worry, weather angst, feelings of anxiety and possibly dropping out—none of that matters now. I carried a chip on my shoe from Hopkinton to Boston in 3h 39m. I also carried a wind jacket, wind pants, hat, three pairs of gloves, head warmer, and a steady east wind in my face the whole way. Would I have been faster without all that stuff? Maybe. I think the big difference was my curtailed training due to my leg injury, and my lack of self confidence with the weather conditions on the course.

At the finish area I zone-out for a moment and feel my own spiritual release—and say a thankful prayer. I look around as the runners do the post-marathon “zombie walk,” or should I say shuffle, about a block to the tables with water, Gatorade, and volunteers holding Mylar space blankets. The swirling wind makes the Mylar bunch up at first, but a careful shawl wrap and a strategically placed sticker from a volunteer keeps it in place. After grabbing a water bottle I spy the low benches and foot-tall saw horses where other volunteers are helping remove the Champion Chips from the runners' shoes. I lift my foot just enough to place it on the low sawhorse, and stand there grateful that the volunteer is doing the lace untying, removing the chip, and re-tying. It would be hard to bend over that far right now, but I don't envy the volunteer who has to deal with wet, muddy, and probably stinky shoes over and over all afternoon. I thank the volunteer and shake his hand. He then reaches into a nearby box and pulls out the coveted blue and yellow finishers' medal. I lean forward and he puts the ribbon around my neck. Feels good indeed!

It's interesting to see everyone wrapped in Mylar, now with medals around the neck, but still shuffling gingerly forward. The race organizers have been wise to spread out the various finisher activities into several blocks, since this keeps a gradual flow away from the finish line itself. Nevertheless, up ahead in the next block there seems to be a big jam up of runners. I see that this is the food area coming up. Volunteers are handing out plastic bags, and then the runners are moving along past tables where other volunteers are handing out bananas, granola bars, apples, bags of potato chips, etc. I fill my bag with plenty, as I can tell I am going to be very hungry as soon as I get back to the hotel.

The next section is the baggage buses. I have to walk up and down for a few minutes to find which side street has the bus corresponding to my bib number. I finally locate the right bus, but there is a throng of people crowded together between the bus and one of the medical tents. Each window on the bus has a range of bib numbers posted, but there aren't enough volunteers in the bus to man each window. The crowd is starting to get restless and irritable. The volunteers on the bus decide to just pick up bags and holler out the bib number and wait for someone to claim it. Fortunately, my belongings are not too deep in the pile and I hear my number called within just a few minutes. After struggling through the mass of runners waiting for their bags or putting on dry clothes, I pull out my warm wool hat and switch to my warm, dry gloves. That feels very good!

I push my way past the medical aid area and look for a way to get through the barricade separating the runners' area from the public waiting area. I spot an exit gate and make my way through the crowd of people waiting for their friends or family members to emerge from the gate. I check the nearby street signs and figure out that I am just a few blocks from the hotel, as expected. I walk east along the sidewalk and enjoy hearing the “congratulations!”, “good job!”, “how do you feel? you look great!”, and similar comments from the people I pass. Bostonians really seem to feel that this race is their own—at least the folks who are downtown on Patriot's Day.

I didn't mind the broken elevator when I arrived at the hotel on Saturday, but *now* I sure wish it was working! My legs aren't too bad, but it aches to lift my feet up each step on the way up four floors to my room. I keep drinking water gradually, and I dig into my food bag. The bananas and the apple taste particularly good right now. The granola bar seems too dry and gritty. I call Lynn and leave a message to confirm that I have completed the race successfully—she should have been receiving the automatic emails from the timing system every 5km. Now it's time to peel off the wet and sticky clothes, socks, and shoes. Ahhh, does that feel good or what?!? I get the shower going and step into the warm and welcome water. It is about 2:30PM.

After getting cleaned up I flip on the TV to see the ongoing race coverage, and continue to sip extra water as I start to flush the combustion by-products out of my muscles. I also take a couple ibuprofen to help ward off painful legs later this evening. The local TV station is showing the finish area and the steady, unending stream of runners still flowing down Boylston St. There is also a “breaking news” crawl text at the bottom of the screen saying that a shooting has occurred on the Virginia Tech campus. This is my first hint regarding the tragic shooting rampage by a disgruntled student that ultimately leaves 32 people killed and many more injured.

I glance over and see the steaming pile of wet clothing sitting on my orange drawstring baggage sack. I briefly consider just tossing the whole pile into the maid's cart out in the hallway rather than dealing with the stinking and muddy items, but then I remember the front desk clerk telling me about a laundry room in the hotel basement. I stand up, feeling my aching legs again, and work a minute or two to build up sufficient resolve to face the trek down to the basement—that's five floors each way, without an elevator, and this is going to hurt. Ouch, my poor legs! I then decide to just rinse everything in the bathtub, squeeze out the excess water, and face the stairs for the slog down to use the dryers. At least this way I won't have to pack wet stuff. Considering how many marathon participants were in the lobby today, I expect to find the laundry room jammed with other aching runners, but evidently I am the first to make it down there.

While the dryer goes to work on my duds, I decide to go get a bit of caffeine from the nearby Starbucks. Is there any other kind of Starbucks than “nearby”? Not in a big city like Boston, where it seems like there is a Starbucks on every corner—and sometimes kitty corner from each other. I get back to my room and look out the window. It isn't raining hard, so I decide to leave my trench coat behind and instead wear my fancy blue and white race jacket. I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror over the sink, and stop to admire the jacket: the medium size would have looked more trim and sleek, but the large fits my arm length just fine and has more room across the back when I cross my arms in front of me. As I gingerly make my way back down to the lobby, I notice a couple other runners wearing their blue jackets sitting here and there, while other runners still in their race garb and Mylar blankets—and clutching their orange drawstring bags—continue to shuffle along the sidewalks in the neighborhood. It reminds me that while the elite finishers completed the marathon more than an hour before me, many more runners will be one, two, three, or more hours behind. I keep thinking about this as I queue up at Starbucks. I try to imagine what is going on at the finish line, now 5 hours after the start of my wave and 4.5 hours after the start of the second wave. I also think again about whether the people around me are surprised to see someone like me in a blue Boston Marathon jacket—would they be asking me about the race if I were wearing my trench coat? Probably not, I think.

Back at the hotel I wait around for the dryer to complete its work. My nylon jacket, pants, and shorts are already dry, but my shirts and socks take the whole cycle. I fold everything and hike back up to my room to continue balancing my fluids. I've been planning to go to the post-race dance party at 7:30PM, since a complimentary ticket came in my race packet and the dance club is just around the corner from the hotel, but after some further thought I decide it will probably be too noisy and I won't be able to count on getting anything substantive to eat. So, I continue resting and figure I will go out for a burger or whatever once I get hungry.

It's raining again by the time I decide to find dinner, so I grab my trench coat and umbrella for the short walk up the street to Bennigan's. Not an exotic choice, with Legal Seafoods visible a couple blocks away, but at least I figure I can get a table for one (or just sit at the bar) without depriving the wait staff of a full table with a full tip. They seat me at a small table next to the bar, and I order a big cheeseburger and salad, plus a Sam Adams to drink—the beer will be my nod to Boston. I look around the restaurant and see numerous groups of runners wearing their race shirts or their marathon jackets. I realize that the race gear is essentially a uniform. I look around to see if I can spot anyone else who, like me, is wearing civilian clothes but still seems like a possible

marathon runner. I can't convince myself that there is even one other person—based on the beer bellies or other non-running aspects.

The beer has accelerated my fluid transfer rate, so I head back to the hotel and engage in some half-hearted attempts at packing. I have accumulated three additional T-shirts, the race packet material, my new jacket, a commemorative one liter water bottle, the extra gloves and headband, various magazines and brochures, etc. I also find that my regular clothes never seem to fold up as compactly at the end of a trip as they did originally at home. I have my race jacket hanging up to wear tomorrow, but then I realize that this would require me to stuff my tweed jacket and my trench coat into the carryon bag along with all the clothing. I conclude that there is insufficient room for that to work, so I reluctantly pack up the race jacket and leave my tweed and trench out on the hangers, ready to wear on Tuesday as I head to the airport. Oh well.

I somehow manage to get everything into the carryon bag and my briefcase. Not bad, considering that I had been to Washington, DC, for the IEEE workshop last week, plus all the marathon garment issues, all while being away from home for a week. I'll need to remember this the next time I pack an overflowing suitcase for a shorter trip. My flight in the morning doesn't leave BOS until 11:20AM, so I can make a leisurely wake up time.

I climb into bed and flip through the TV channels for a few minutes. Wow, it's been quite a day, starting with the rainy wait for the buses, the tremendous run itself, and the gradual decompression this afternoon and evening.

## **Tuesday, April 17, 2007**

I slept well. My legs are sore and my calf muscles are slightly stiff and crampy, so I take a couple more ibuprofen. I check the Weather Channel and also look up the flight status on the computer, and everything looks good. My plan is to get cleaned up, get something to eat, and then get checked out of the hotel. I still have one ride left on my Charlie Ticket, so I plan to take the green T line from Boylston to Government Center, transfer to the blue line and ride a few stops to the airport terminal, followed by a free shuttle bus ride over to airport terminal E, where Northwest flies. If this works, it's a pretty good deal: \$2 public transport vs. nearly \$30 for a cab. The MTA web site indicates that the ride from Boylston to Air Terminal should only take 20 minutes, and I doubt a cab can get there as fast.

I unzip my carryon to put in the last few items, and then struggle for a few minutes to get it zipped up again. The breakfast area in the lobby has been picked over pretty thoroughly already, with no coffee and only a couple bagels and muffins left. I observe quite a few blue jackets and orange bags among the other guests. I figure I will have time to get something to eat at the airport instead.

I return up the stairs to my room, finish getting things together, and then hike back down to the lobby one last time to check out. It is gray and slightly drizzly as I step out onto the sidewalk, but the stroll to the T station is fine. The trains and the route switch from green to blue work great. The bus from the airport T station to the air terminal is ready and waiting, too. Terminal E



appears to be newly opened and still shows some evidence of ongoing construction, but no delays or problems.

My Northwest flight departs on time—and I particularly enjoy my frequent flyer upgrade to first class for the leg from Boston to Minneapolis. A great time to sit back and reflect on the great adventure that has transpired over the last three days.

<b>10827</b>	Maher, Rob C. PhD.		45	M	Bozeman	MT	USA		
Checkpoints	5k	10k	15k	20k	Half	25k	30k	35k	40k
	0:25:28	0:51:42	1:18:33	1:44:59	1:50:37	2:11:01	2:37:08	3:03:04	3:28:40
Finish				Pace	Projected Time	Official Time	Overall	Gender	Division
				0:08:23		3:39:27	7822	6170	2437