

BOSTON IS IN THE BOOKS

The 113th Boston Marathon was filled with great expectations. It filled up in record time and had a very competitive, strong and fast elite field competing. Among them were Kara Goucher and Ryan Hall who made their Boston debuts to give the U.S. its best podium hopes in decades. It was my Boston debut as well. I qualified at the 2008 Marine Corps Marathon in D.C. with 3:09:09. I received bib number 4918 for my Marine Corps time, just 11 numbers from Jen Brown. By chance we met under the tent at the athlete's village in Hopkinton. Jen and I made our way to the front of coral 4. The gun signaled the start and we waited about 2 minutes to cross the starting mat.

It was a start like no other. Crowds lined the streets to cheer us on. All I could see and hear around me were the bobbing heads and footsteps and breathing from the thousands of runners around me. We were all here on the same quest, to conquer the course from Hopkinton to Boston, the Holy Grail of marathoning. With those thousands of runners, my first 5k was about 30 seconds slower than I would have liked as I crossed the mat in 22:02. But the marathon is 26 miles and 385 yards and I had plenty of road ahead to make up for whatever time I lost at the start. About 10k into the race the sun warmed up the course, so I shed my gloves and skull cap.ⁱ I came through 10k in 43:17, still back about 30 seconds, but I had settled into the 6:52 pace that I wanted to run for the first half, a pace would get me across the finish in 3 hours.

A couple miles later as I entered Natick, I had to reach back and put my gloves and cap back onⁱⁱ as the sun hid behind the clouds and the wind picked up. It may have been chilly weather outside, but there was a warm welcoming atmosphere in Natick. I loved hearing the cheers from the people who packed the streets. Kids and their parents were handing out oranges, bananas, lollipops, little cups of water and Kleenex. I grabbed a Kleenex and passed through the first half in 1:30:37. I still felt fresh, so I knew my primary goal of finishing would be realized. I had a very good chance to negative splitⁱⁱⁱ and finish under 3 hours. I would need to run an extraordinary second half to finish under 2:55^{iv} and I would leave breaking 2:50 for another race.

I had heard the stories, but experiencing it first hand while running to Boston is incredible. You hear a distant murmur about half a mile out and then a wall of whoops and hollers erupt from around the bend. That's right, you guessed it; I'm talking about the girls from Wellesley College. They made noise with everything imaginable. They held out their hands for high fives and some held out puckered lips holding signs that read "KISS ME". It was a great adrenaline rush, which quickened my pace to 6:40.

I took advantage of the near 100 foot drop in elevation during mile 15 to run my quickest split in 6:19. The sharp decent was greeted with the first of the 4 Newton Hills. This is what I trained for with the Tornados, waking up early on the weekends to run the hills in Huntsville, Conroe and New Ulm. So I put my head down and powered up, passing a lot of runners along the way. I was on the right side of the road as I crested the hill about midway through the 16th mile. I spotted volunteers wearing their bright yellow jackets lining the left side of the road. They were handing out PowerBar gels, so I made a beeline to the left and grabbed 2. I had one at the water station at mile 17 and saved the other for later. I ran a 6:44 for mile 16 with the hill.

The 2nd Newton Hill came midway through mile 17. Again I charged up and came through with a 6:58 split. Mile 18 was a gradual 50 foot decent as I ran a 6:20. The 3rd Newton Hill came quickly after

We interrupt this report to bring you the latest race results from the finish line on Boylston St. Once again Ethiopia's Dire Tune battles for the win in the final meters of the 42.2km race. This year, however, Kenya's Salina Kosgei prevailed, breaking the tape one second ahead of Dire in 2:32:16. Kara Goucher crosses for 3rd only 9 seconds behind.

The men's race was decided at mile 18, when Deriba Merga^v started to break away from the pack. Robert Cheruiyot succumbed to the hills and dropped out after 35k. Deriba won in 2:08:42 unchallenged by the 2nd place finish by Daniel Rono in 2:09:32. Ryan Hall claimed 3rd in 2:09:40. We now return to the report all ready in progress. Thank you.

the 19 mile mark. I was still carrying my gel that I picked up in mile 16 and squeezed it in my left hand as I felt the burn in my legs going uphill. I ran a 6:38 split.

Mile 20 is home of the infamous Heartbreak Hill, where runners most often hit the wall. This is the stretch on the course where Commonwealth Ave. climbs 75 feet over a quarter mile. After having run the first 3 hills, I felt a little tired, but I gathered my thoughts and ran through at 6:46. It was all downhill from here, and I hoped to use that to my advantage and make up some lost time and gun for a 2:55 finish. But as I've heard the warnings before, "If the uphill doesn't kill you, the downhill will" and sure enough, I felt the back of my quads start to tighten. I couldn't let myself fly downhill as I had hoped without risking a crippling cramp. I grimaced a bit and pounded my fists on the back of my quads to try

and relax them. It worked (or maybe it was the second gel I had at mile 21^{vi}) and following a 6:55 for mile 21, I ran a 6:33 for mile 22.

My surge went as quickly as it had come, though, leaving me to fight off cramps for the last miles. My pace slowed to 6:53 for mile 23 as I was unable to let gravity pull me faster. The fans from the Red Sox vs Orioles game lined the streets as we entered Boston. They were in good spirits after Boston won 12-1. I had accepted the fact that breaking 2:55 would not happen today, so I focused on crossing the finish under 3 hours. I glanced at my watch after making the left turn onto Boylston. I had 2 minutes, plenty of time, so I soaked up the atmosphere and let the crowd cheer me in at 2:59:30!^{vii}

ⁱ The Houston climate is warm year round and shops don't regularly carry warm running gear. The retailers at the expo were selling these items at 40% off by the end of the day on Sunday – I love expos. I bought a skull cap and arm warmers from Craft and a pair of Nike gloves.

ⁱⁱ I had tucked them in my shorts in the small of my back.

ⁱⁱⁱ The term “negative split” is runner lingo for running the second half of the race faster than the first half. It took me 4 marathons to discipline myself not to let the adrenaline take me out too fast for the first half. Running with this strategy has allowed me to run faster times and I also feel better crossing the line.

^{iv} I set my PR (personal record) at the 2009 Houston Marathon in 2:55:08

^v Deriba Merga currently holds the Chevron Houston Marathon course record at 2:07:52. Dire Tune set a Chevron Houston Marathon course record in 2008 at 2:24:40. Ryan Hall shattered the U.S. half marathon record at the 2007 Houston Aramco Half Marathon at 0:59:43. My conclusion is that all roads to Boston go through Houston.

^{vi} Jen said she's going to help me experiment with different energy and electrolyte products to help me get even faster. I usually only take what's provided on the course – Gatorade endurance formula and water, sometimes Gus

^{vii} 2:59:30 equates to a 6:51 minute per mile pace. This time placed me at 1282 overall out of 22,898 official finishers. 64 female runners finished before me and I was 908th in the 18-39 male open division.