

May 2007—Supplement



The Pacer

The London Pacers Running Club

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***Newsletter
Supplement***

May Supplement

These articles were too good to hold until June!

Enjoy!

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Newsletter deadline May 30, 2007
Please send articles, information and photos
to Sherry Watts.

London Pacers Meeting May 14, 2007
Grosvenor Lodge, 1017 Western Road (on the big
curve south of Platts Lane)
7:30 PM



2007 Boston Marathon – Race Report

by Jim Burrows

Often you can predict the outcome of your marathon even before you get to the starting line. It usually is a function of training that has not gone as well as you had originally planned.

This year my training had been nearly perfect, so I wasn't going to be able to blame my conditioning on a sub-par performance. Though like all good marathoners, I was working on a legitimate pre-race excuse. One of my "glut" muscles was extremely tight and had started to affect my sciatic nerve and in turn seemed to be affecting my gait. Luckily it didn't really hurt, but it still made me feel like I had "square wheels".

But this year Boston was almost guaranteed to be unusual as the "signs" leading up to the race became apparent.

First the race organizers planned on moving the start time from the traditional 12:00 pm to 10:00 am. On the surface this should be a good thing since its closer to the time most marathoners are used to running and racing. Nevertheless, this was different from any other Boston before and would require a change from the typical Boston race morning preparations.

The next indication that this was going to be a different Boston came a few days prior to the race. All participants were notified that an extreme storm system was going to coincide with the day of the marathon. The storm called a Nor'easter, was expected to result in torrential rains and strong east winds, a recipe for slow times since Boston is run from west to east.

My attitude toward the weather was, don't worry about it, since it's the one thing you definitely can't control, just wear the appropriate gear and try to avoid the deep puddles.

The next sign came on our journey to Boston. On the drive from London there really are only 2 turns to make after you leave Buffalo. I missed half of those. Normally missing a turn is not a big deal, but if you don't discover your mistake until 90 minutes later, it turns a long 9 hour trip into a very long 12 hour event. We never did make all the way to New York City, but the highway signs said we were only 28 miles from the end of the NY Turnpike, which I assume is close to the city's limits.

Once in Boston, things settled down. The weather got crappy as predicted and we all planned how we were going to deal with the inclement weather over the next 3 days.

Race day dawned with teeming rain, strong winds and cool temperatures (40F in Boston, 48F in Hopkington). It figures that the weather forecasters would get it right when the weather is really bad.

Waiting to catch the buses at the Boston Common in downtown Boston, we started formulating ways to make the race less "painful". Gone were plans for personal record attempts and thoughts drifted to stopping at various pubs along the route. Unfortunately, with the 10:00 am start time, none of them would be open until we were back in the city.

Steve Cochrane and I, decided that our original goal of 2:46 to be achieved with a half way split of 1:23, just wasn't going to be possible. So we settled on a new half way target of 1:24. After that it would depend on the weather, as to how fast we could complete the last half of the race.

The bus ride seemed to take forever and it ended up in a traffic jam on the outskirts of Hopkington. I finished the last gulps of a double size Gatorade as we waited in a line of buses for at least 20 minutes, before finally being dropped off at the town's high school, where the staging begins.

Somehow we found ourselves in race to get to the starting line as we nervously finished last minute preparations of clothing decisions, attaching gel packages, strategically lubricating sensitive areas and making last minute washroom breaks. As we checked our bags, we knew timing was going to be tight. We had about 11 minutes before the gun and about 1.5 km to cover to get to the first corral on the starting line.

We ran and arrived with about 3 minutes to spare. I had just enough time partake in a male Boston tradition, whereby you empty the last contents of your bladder into your now empty Gatorade bottle.

Normally I would enjoy a warm up like the "jog" we put in before the start, but when it's a marathon I prefer to conserve as much energy as possible. I suspected that we had burned up some valuable glycogen stores and might end up paying for that mistake later.

Steve, Rod Henning and I, had planned to run together along with Steve Beasley from Goderich. Because we were late we never found Beasley. The first mile started with a leisurely and crowded 7:00 pace, but we were serious about getting to the 6:24/mile pace that would get us to the half in 1:24. We got to the 5k timing mat in 20:22 which was 6:33 pace. Steve knew what to do and he picked it up slightly to get closer to the target pace. Unfortunately, Rod and I weren't in the same "mood" and we decided to stick with the pace we were running, which would put us 1:00 back of Steve at the half way. Rod and I watched from 100 metres back as Steve twisted his head all over trying to find out where Rod and I had gone. Later Steve admitted that he had been talking to us for at least a mile and wondered why we were being so rude, by not responding. He had no idea that he had dropped us.

The reality was neither Rod nor I were really in proper racing mode. Sure I was happy with my clothing choice of a long-sleeved shirt, singlet, shorts, mitts and toque (which I removed early on), but I didn't feel like I was running smoothly and even though I was running well below my original and revised pace, my heart rate was a couple of BPM higher than I expected it to be. (It remained that way through the entire race.)

Rod and I also separated shortly after we reached the 15k point. Rod had to stop at a "port-a-potty" and fell about 2 minutes back. I too was thinking I might have to make a pit stop as my bladder was starting to feel full. But I told myself I had run through that discomfort before and so I plodded on.

Many of the course landmarks looked familiar this year since it was my second Boston in a row. Some of them like the girls of Wellesley College, had the wonderful effect of distracting you from whatever seems to be bothering you in the race. Even though it was a cool, dreary day and it had been raining on and off, the crowds were still out and at Wellesley there had to be close to 1,000 female students cheering us on. Not long after Wellesley comes the half way point, which I crossed in 1:25, which had become my new goal after Steve had left us.

I did a full body check and noticed that my legs seemed to be fine, but I had a new problem. In addition to a full bladder, I also had pressure building in my bowels. Lately, I had heard of more and more runners having this problem, but I had never experienced it. By 15 miles I was pretty sure I was going to have to stop to relieve myself.

I became fixated with watching to port-a-johns along the course. Just before mile 18 I spotted a pair right next to the curb and I went in one. The relief was instantaneous, but it was taking too long to empty the bladder. I checked my watch and decided that was enough and cleaned up and completed the pit stop in 75 seconds. Though not completely empty, I felt relieved and felt like I could now get serious about the race again.



Enthusiastically, I got right back on pace, but I was now beginning to feel the race in my quads and we were in the Newton hills. I seemed to be able to stay on pace running up the hills, but coming down was getting painful and I was having trouble sticking with some of the guys I had been running with up to that point.

It felt good to get through Heartbreak Hill (the last of the Newton hills), but I could tell the last 6 miles were going to be a challenge. I was slowing noticeably because of the pain growing in my quads and to make matters worse, the familiar pressure on the bowels had returned.

My pace had slowed to about 7 minute miles and I had begun watching for "conveniently located" port-a-potties again. At 23 miles I spotted Lisa and the other wives. That gave me another short lived boost.

Two things kept going through my mind. First you don't hurt enough to even think about walking, so stop listening to the quads. And second, you can't afford another minute in a port-a-john, so stop looking for them.

Fenway Park is about 2 miles from the finish and as I passed it I knew I could hold things together for another 15 minutes. I had reset my target and knew that if I kept my current pace I could sneak under 2:55.

My 25th mile had slowed to 7:09, my slowest (except for the mile with the pit stop). A couple of minutes later I passed the timing clock with 1 mile to go. It read 2:48:05. In my mind I knew I had to push a bit more to get a 6:55 last mile. And then I realized I had an additional 30 seconds to spare, since I crossed the starting line 30 seconds after the gun went off.

We made the last 2 turns onto Boylston and I could see the finish line about 600 m down the road. I picked up the pace which felt way faster than the 6:30 that I suspect I was doing. I passed 2 runners and started to key off of another who was also giving it all he had. I caught him 20 metres from the finish. A small victory that means absolutely nothing. For all I know he could have a time 10 minutes or more, better than mine.

It's funny that I decided to race this guy because chip timing makes finish line sprints irrelevant for all except the elites.

I crossed the line in 2:54:47. The official chip time would be an acceptable 2:54:17, which is 7:07 slower than I did the previous year.

I later found out the winner Robert Cheruiyot was 6:59 slower than his winning time in 2006, so maybe my race wasn't so bad after all. It was the slowest winning time since 1977. In fact many people had much poorer times than might be expected. But I think the weather conditions weren't too bad and might account for 3-4 minutes max, of the slower times. And the pit stop cost me another 1:15. I still had another 2 minutes unaccounted for, and even more if you consider that I believe I was in better shape than last year. So I can't really explain why I didn't feel faster and perform better. I suppose it wasn't my day and I guess that's okay. It just means I might have to return next year to try and get it right.

My running partners had mixed results. Steve Cochrane ran 2:49:39, darn close to our revised goal. Rod Henning on the other hand had one of his worse marathons in recent memory finishing in 3:01:32. Steve Beasley had a spectacular race running 2:48:11, only 20 seconds slower than the previous year, which had nearly ideal conditions.

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Two things stand out as easy things to improve next time. First, plan to arrive earlier so there is more time to prepare in the starting corral. Had we gotten off the bus and walked to the school, we would've easily gained 15 to 20 minutes. Second, I don't think I had drunken any energy drinks in the previous 6 months. Drinking that much Gatorade prior to the race was too hard even for my "cast iron" stomach too handle. It was a rookie mistake and next time I will train with energy drinks to get used to them and hydrate with water prior to the start.

From a "what went well perspective", I was really happy with the way that I executed the race. I felt like I ran smart by not wildly going after a goal that I had no chance of achieving on that day. I was also happy with my mental conversations, deciding when to take the pit stop and when to tough it out. This Boston was one of the few times I actually felt like I was a marathoner and not just a runner doing the marathon.

And because of that feeling, it just might make sense to do it all over again next spring, or maybe even give it another try before the end of 2007.



Steve Cochrane at 20 miles



Steve Beasley
(bib 1302) at 20
miles



Rod Henning

Jim Burrows at 30k



Jim at 20 miles

A BLIZZARD NOT A SQUALL

Easter dawned on the Eastern Shore with classic clarity and calm.

Only the white rims of the fields bore witness to the fury of the day before.

This was the perfect day for a marathon, windless and dry with a towering cloudless sky.

Perfect except for one detail: the marathon had been yesterday!

The entire trip had seemed to tempt fate.

April 7th had been my 60th Birthday. Time it had seemed to resume my perennial quest to qualify for the New York City Marathon, the Holy Grail of my running career. If I can make it there I'm sure I can make it anywhere because I've been just about everywhere already just trying to make it there. Makes sense to me!

Astoundingly there were two marathons available on the very day. (Not surprising, as I found out later, the date was awkwardly plunked between Good Friday and Easter Sunday.) Nevertheless April 7th remained my first best chance to meet the newly granted 3:45:00 (or less) standard. The one opportunity was the Eisenhower Marathon in Abilene, Kansas; the other, an "Extreme Dream Event", the Ocean City Marathon in Maryland. I chose the latter.

I was actually celebrating the astuteness of my choice en route as the CNN airport monitors were reporting heavy snows in Kansas.

Then the wheels fell off.

For some reason, AIRMILES could only book me from Toronto-to-Detroit-to-Norfolk.

They couldn't just book Detroit-to-Norfolk. I could have purchased a flight from Detroit-to-Norfolk and driven there but my cheapness dictated the sacrifice of 6 hours of my dwindling life.

Problems began to mount, however, as the flight from Detroit was delayed, then inexplicably cancelled. Although NorthWest agents efficiently rebook a sequence of 2 more flights on Continental, the first leg of that also turned out to be delayed making the supposed connection in Newark impossible since the ETA would be 15 minutes after the second flight would leave for Norfolk. Nevertheless, the fact that no other connection to Norfolk from Detroit would be available until 5PM the following day, and the rumor that the flight from Newark was also delayed, bound a gaggle of fellow travelers to grit it out and take our chances. Having finally boarded in Detroit, however, our chances seemed to plummet once again as the passenger in 6F started vomiting uncontrollably even before the cabin door was sealed. I anticipated a medevac but he finally stopped IN SPITE OF the glasses of water the stewardess kept plying him with.

After a landing path that ran us parallel to Manhattan before turning back into the wind at the storied Verrazano Narrows Bridge, we found that, sure enough, the flight from Newark had been bumped from 9:15 to 10:35.

What a relief!

10:35 came. No boarding announcement. Nervous fidgets all around. .

Suddenly at 10:40, a frantic summons from the gate agent: "Passengers must now board as quickly as possible because the stewardess 'clocks off' at 11 and if this flight is not in the air by that time it will be CANCELLED.

Seats were filled and carry-ons were stowed in record time.

Then, a late-comer, a first-class African American adopting a white executive demeanor. A man clearly in no hurry nor to be hurried. He took off his overcoat, folded it meticulously and slid it into the overhead bin above his luggage. Then he repeated the process with his jacket .

I could feel the white knuckles and hear the silent screams from fellow passengers.

I didn't dare to look at my watch.

He sat down.

He stood up.

He removed the jacket, then the overcoat, then the carry-on. Having unzipped various pockets, he finally located and extricated a laptop, set it on his seat, replaced the bag, the overcoat and the jacket with excruciating care. Picking up the laptop, he sat down again.

The flight deck door was wide open, hardly an auspicious sign. The pilots were repeatedly clicking various buttons, turning knobs, pulling levers and flipping through loose papers and manuals. "This cannot be good", I thought.

Suddenly an "unaccompanied minor", an impudent lad with a skateboard he had recently been recklessly riding in the terminal, appeared in the cabin door. The stewardess remained extremely gracious and planted him in the front left seat. ("Perhaps she was unaware of the time?" "Perhaps she was a union rebel who would thumb her nose at the rules in order to pursue her career, her vocation, her absolute dedication to the welfare of her passengers." We all silently hoped.) The delinquent boy wanted to go up into the already troubled cockpit. She skillfully deflected him. "What a pro!"

Meanwhile, ominous snaps and sounds like deflating tires emanated repeatedly from the inner sanctum. Finally the copilot's hands flew up into the air. The captain got up and left the area altogether!

An ancient black man with a greasy kufi and a reflective vest appeared in his place. The copilot "popped the hood" and the mechanic dove into the floor.

Just then, the skateboarder's cell phone rang. He handed it to the stewardess.

("What now?")

She smiled her way through her half of an insistent conversation, then handed it back to junior.

This was followed by the re-emergence of the repairman who stood up, shook his head slowly, turned and walked away dejectedly.

The next instant a woman appeared in the landing dock. The "minor" burst from his seat and threw himself on her neck. She scraped him off and started an animated conversation with him. Obviously she wanted him to go. He did not.

The pilot reappeared, pushed past the family scene, sat down, nodded at the copilot and strapped himself in.

("Great sign!")

The domestic soap opera, however, was continuing: mother-and-son waltzing to-and-fro the cabin door. Watching them vacillate, the stewardess' bemused smile became progressively more forced. Finally she closed the cockpit door abruptly and put her foot down. ("On or off?") She was closing the cabin door. She turned, retrieved the youngster's skateboard from a closet, thrust it at mom, closed the cabin door and sat down.

The plane backed 30 feet from the ramp then stopped. Mother-and-son were still visible in unresolved dispute in the entryway. Eons passed.

Finally the captain came on the overhead, apologizing for problems "too numerous to mention" and promising to get us "in the air" without further delay.

More time passed.

Finally, more movement back from the dock.

The tractor detached.

Forward motion.



A long taxi to the brink of the runway. Seven distant lights were allowed to slowly materialize into planes that landed in front of us. Then finally, finally, we turned, accelerated and were airborne.

Again our flight path circled right by the Verrazano Narrows Bridge which taunted me: "This is as close me as you're going to get to me on this trip!"

Arriving at Norfolk at 1AM, my next panic was that HERTZ might have packed it in for the night. As we deplaned, no comfort came from an overhead announcement that the baggage area for all flight would be closed in 3 minutes. I ran for the HERTZ counter which bore a plastic sign "BACK IN 5 MINUTES". (Hardly credible.) A couple of minutes later, however, not one but two vigorous representatives appeared and I was off.

By 3:30 I was checking into the Francis Scott Key Family Resort in Ocean City having driven the 23-mile Chesapeake Bridge and Tunnel Complex (What a great venue for a marathon if we could get it closed of traffic!), all of Virginia's Eastern Shore and most of Maryland's. It was 27 hours before gun-time and that all-important good-night's-sleep the night-before-the-night-before the marathon was pouched. I turned on the WEATHER CHANNEL: "Today – sunny, high of 45. Saturday – WINTER STORM ADVISORY – snow mixed with rain, high of 34, strong gusty winds. ("OBOY! Whatever happened to global warming?")

Good Friday was fairly blurry: got my number and chip; looked unsuccessfully for some long-but-light race gear, studied a sky (mare's tails leading in a wall of clouds), had a submarine sandwich and went back to bed. Woke at 4.

The Weather Channel showed 42 degrees.

Looked outside: no snow, no wet.

("What do meteorologists know?")

Nevertheless it WAS cool so I rigged my throw-offs including an old long-sleeved dress shirt to fit over my shorts and singlet until just before the start.

I walked over to the first shuttle bus at 5:45. The wind was picking up.

A one-mile ride took us out to the boardwalk area. Many of us would've stayed on for another round-trip just to stay warm but the driver was headed elsewhere.

The lights in the predawn darkness revealed cascades of snow falling and swirling amongst the buildings. The only heated areas on the pier were the washrooms which were soon packed with waiters and wetters.

I had presumed that I would be the only entrant making this year's edition "international" but there was a Kiwi wearing his national colours, and I talked to a runner from, of all places, Ecuador who had come to "get away from the heat". ("Boy, did he get his money's worth!")

I went out and stood for the national anthem which was well sung in spite of the occasional shiver.

Finally, it was "READY, SET ,,,,,(long pause),,,,, GO!" We rounded a large parking lot before heading up the boardwalk squarely into the whipping wind. After weaving our way amongst various amusement park rides and booths for the better part of a mile, we turned for the mainland across a long causeway-and-bridge, grated in the middle, fully exposed to winds that blew at a 45-degree angle into our faces. At last we turned south.

The wind would be at our backs for the balance of the first half. In fact, they were essentially eliminated by a course that meandered for a few miles along tightly wooded backroads. The mood was relaxed and I even joked about Robert Frost not stopping by woods on a snowy morning. We emerged again onto the main highway at mile 8. By mile 12 we were fully exposed to very strong following winds which pushed us over a foot-bridge then along a causeway to a barrier island game reserve. The faces of the runners struggling back issued a sinking premonition .



to



Sure enough, we were met by battering winds and blinding flakes for the return trip.

Not only were pylons flying, a woman just ahead was blown right off her feet.

The fellow just in front of me wouldn't yield to a pass so I slipped behind him to gain a modicum of shelter and conserve energy. Eventually an awkward left hand jutted back at an odd angle. I grasped it briefly. Then we exchanged positions. The only thing that kept us going was the spectre of mainland refuge inching its way towards us.

Indeed there was an initial wind shadow from the woods. Then the highway turned north.

Whenever I dared to look up, all I could see was a torrential vortex of flakes corkscrewing down on us between the columns of trees lining the roadway.

Now, I've certainly marathoned in colder circumstances, with more snow and with higher winds but this was the trifecta of misery. Although the surfaces were never frozen,

the temperature actually dropped to 34 degrees by 10 o'clock, thus fulfilling all the criteria for a blizzard: blowing snow, strong winds and falling temperature with a 3 hour duration and reduced visibility. (A frontal snowsquall would've lasted less than 30 minutes.)

Plodding on, my gloves and bare forearms were totally caked in snow. My thumbs were numb.

There was little respite in a trio of out-and-back sidetrips, the first one mercifully short, the second longer and the third interminably (3-4 miles) long on the downwind side of an airport. The tedium of the "long gray line" was refreshed only slightly by seeing moribund passersby from the field ahead and then the field behind.

The ultimate three miles was basically straight into the wind with a slight twist at the end to finish on a covered bridge. I thought the clock would read in DAYS and I didn't care. 3:45 was long gone.

I had to sit to have my chip removed. (Instead of lacing it in as instructed, I had used my usual two plastic lock-ties. The helper apologized for not having a cutter. Then amongst our 16 frozen fingers and four thumbs we unlaced the entire shoe to free it.)

After a short but desperate walk back to the Resort and a long and hot shower in my toasty room, I ambled over to the POST RACE PARTY in a largely deserted enormous tent erected in the Outlet Mall across the road.

It was cold and wet inside and I ate my pizza slices only after finding a place to sit where both of my feet wouldn't be in puddles.

Finally I collected my small trophy with a plastic sprinter on top for third place in age and wandered off wondering why they can't make marathon trophies with plastic marathon shufflers on them?

The marathon winners were Michael Wardian (32) from Arlington, VA in 2:41:20 (exactly 8 minutes slower than his balmy winning time in 2006) and



Conni Grace (44) from Poughquag, NY in 3:00:56. Saadin Solah (45) from Quito finished in 3:35:59. Mike Piper (61) from Ivergargill, NZ, 4:06:36.

The largely wind-aided half-marathon featured winning times of 1:21:02 for Michael Sewell and 1:26:54 for Sherry Stick. Saadin's wife, Karen, finished in 1:51:24.

For future reference, this course IS flat and potentially fast (Weather permitting!).

The race organization was both cordial and thoroughgoing.

(And, with all due respect to the Pacers' Hopkinton contingent, one post-Patriot-day reflection concluded that Ocean City 2007 made the conditions in Boston look like a day in Key West!)

Jamie Harris

