

# Boston Marathon Diary 2009

Rob Maher April, 2009

*As I did before in 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 18 April 2009**

The flight leaving Bozeman at 6:00AM is full. I had gone to bed about 8:30PM Friday night and slept pretty well. I woke up a few times beginning at 1:30AM, then again around 3AM. My alarm went off at 4:10AM. I've been battling calf pain (left shin) for the last couple months. I pulled something down inside under the muscle way back at Thanksgiving, which had me limping through the Huffing for Stuffing run. That injury got better and I was able to complete most of the Higdon marathon training sequence without incident, including two long 20 mile runs and a good 16-17 mile run in New Orleans about a month ago. I also ran well in the Run to the Pub half marathon on March 14. Then on March 28 I had Lynn drop be off at Jackson Creek Road I-90 exit to run my third and final 20 mile training run, using the first 20 miles of the Lewis & Clark marathon course. About 3 miles into the run I started feeling a pain on the inside shin of my left lower leg. By carefully making my stride I was able to keep going, but it definitely didn't feel comfortable and I struggled through about 15 miles before having to rest and regroup. My stamina seemed good, but it didn't feel right to run in a stiff, awkward gait to protect the left calf. The bigger issue, thinking back on it, was that it really threw my confidence for a loop. I gave my sore leg almost a week of rest, riding the stationary bike at the gym rather than pounding the pavement. It felt better, but still a bit stiff the following week.

My remaining training schedule would call for a 12 miler on April 4, an 8 miler on April 11, then a taper to the marathon on April 20. Instead, when Greg Young suggested a run on April 4, I decided to get in a longer effort, running a couple miles from home to Kagy Corner to meet up with Greg, then two hours on the in-town trails leading north to a loop at the East Gallatin and Cherry Creek recreation areas and back to Kagy Corner, then the couple additional miles back home. Overall it probably covered ~19 miles, and my legs felt great! That was a big confidence boost. But then the following week I did an indoor interval workout on the track around Shroyer Gym and—of course—re-injured the left shin along the bone. More rest and recuperation.

So here it is, April 18, just 40+ hours until the race starts in Hopkinton. Also on this flight from Bozeman are Pat O'Connor and Brad Murphy. Pat ran a 3 hour time at the Marine Corps marathon so he is placed way up in the first few thousand runners. Brad also has a good qualifying race time so he will be starting several thousand runners ahead of me. My placement is 11,647. Pat's wife is along to watch the race, and Brad has his daughter, Brinn, with him. Brinn is a freshman at CMR in Great Falls, runs on the varsity track team, and will run in the special 5km road run in Boston on Sunday, the day before the marathon.

Pat, Brad, and I were among those who attended a nice pre-event brunch hosted by Peter Galindo on Saturday, April 11. Peter and his wife, Anna, invited all of the Bozeman participants in the

Boston Marathon to come to their house for pancakes. Greg Young and I did a nice ~8 mile run beforehand. Besides Peter, Greg, Pat, and Brad, there was also Steve Bruner and Matt Edwards (two REAL runners with sub-3 hour expectations), plus Craig Kenworthy. Craig is not running this year in Boston, but he did run back in 2004, and he's a well-known local runner. It was very nice of Peter to host the brunch—and the pancakes from Anna's recipe were excellent.

The PA just announced that the flight from Bozeman will be delayed half an hour, but there is a long layover in Minneapolis so it should be OK anyway. The flight itself is fine. It turns out we arrived at a gate where the outbound flight was going on to Boston, so right away I spot several waiting passengers wearing the distinctive Boston Marathon shirts, hats, jackets, etc., from past years. I note a few even have the 2009 jackets—must have ordered them online or something. I check on the possibility of a standby seat on that earlier flight, but the agent tells me the plane is pretty full, and that if a seat is available, they now charge a \$50 change fee. Standbys used to be free, but not in the era of paying extra for checked bags and in-flight snacks. So instead I figure I will just wait for the scheduled flight at 1:20PM. I expect to see a lot of the same Bozeman runners, plus Greg Young, who is supposed to be on the same flight out of Minneapolis after being at an undergraduate research conference in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, this week. I'll go get a sandwich to eat, then head to the departure gate. Brad Murphy says that he gave some Montana State University running shirts to Terry Leist, so there might be a spare MSU shirt for me to wear in the race—assuming I see Terry before Monday!

Meanwhile, it sounds like several of the other Bozeman runners like John Dudas are traveling via Denver on United, and Terry Leist is traveling on Delta via Salt Lake City. Denver is getting hammered with a big spring snow storm and some flights are being cancelled, so I hope John will get his connections without undue delay.

I see Greg Young arriving at the gate, plus Pat O'Connor and Brad Murphy. It looks like at least half of the passengers on our flight from MSP to BOS are marathon runners based on the race attire—plus that certain "look" that many distance runners have.

We arrive in Boston pretty much on time, and I see Terry Leist waiting in the terminal for our flight. Terry pulls an MSU shirt for me out of his luggage, so it looks like I will match the other MSU runners—other than John Dudas, who will presumably be wearing his traditional "geek" outfit as he has always done for Boston!

Brad and his daughter are heading for the cab line, Greg and Terry for the bus to Wellesley, and I find an automated ticket kiosk for the subway, Boston's "T" system. We make an arrangement to meet Sunday afternoon at the race packet pickup area. Brad is staying at a hotel near the finish line, while Greg, Terry, and another Bozeman runner, Dave Gibson, are staying with an acquaintance of Greg's.

With my "Charlie Ticket" in hand, I get on the free shuttle bus between the airport terminal and the airport subway station. The inbound blue line train comes shortly after the shuttle bus drops us off, and I hop aboard for the short trip to Government Center subway stop, where I get off to transfer to the green line train to Boylston. There is a huge crowd at the Government Center station due to all the marathon people combined with fans for a Celtics basketball playoff game

AND a Red Sox baseball game. Nevertheless, the "T" works great: for \$2 I get from the airport all the way downtown in about 20 minutes, compared to more like 45 minutes and \$35 by taxi. I hop off the train at Boylston and fight the crowd on the platform and head up the stairs to Boston Common.

The Milner Hotel is 3-4 blocks south of Boylston on Charles Street South, and is just like I remember from 2007, right down to the marathon folks milling around the lobby and the hotel workers taking a break to smoke at the curb out front. Thankfully, the entire hotel itself is non smoking. The neighborhood seems about the same, too, except the Bennigan's near the hotel where I ate after the race in 2007 is all closed up. The whole Bennigan's chain shut down last year, including the Boston location, and evidently no other business has taken over the space. My room this time is on the third floor (4<sup>th</sup> floor in 2007), but is in the same peculiar location in the fire stairwell: you walk down the hotel corridor past most of the rooms, then go out the "fire exit" door into the stairwell, then find my room! The tiny room also looks familiar, with the single bed, a dresser at the foot of the bed (which doesn't allow enough space to even open the drawers half way), a TV on the dresser, a night stand, a sink attached to the wall, and then a small alcove with no door that holds the toilet and a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -size bathtub/shower. The remaining floor space doesn't even allow room for a chair. But I don't need much space, the room is relatively cheap, and I know I will appreciate the short walk to the bus pickup Monday morning at the Boston Common, and the short walk from the finish line back to the hotel after the race.

I phone home and leave a message letting Lynn know I arrived OK, then unpack a few things and relax a few minutes to watch the local news and weather report. Sounds like cool and overcast for Monday, with possible late-day rain. That is a good report—especially compared to the sleet and wind we faced in 2007. I feel hungry, so I head out onto Boylston and grab a sandwich and chips at a Bon Au Pain restaurant. The Boston weather is currently great, with clear skies and temps still in the low 50s. I see lots of people on the street with their race packets, but the pickup ended at 5PM today and it is now close to 7PM, so I will get my packet on Sunday. I see that the bags are yellow this year, not the bright orange used in 2007. I hike back to my room with my dinner and then check email while I eat and drink a liter of bottled water. I watch a bit of TV and then get ready for bed. So far, so good.

### ***Sunday 19 April 2009***

The alarm wakes me about 7AM (5AM Bozeman time), but I feel good and rested. I get shaved and showered, make some in-room coffee, then pick up a toasted bagel and juice in the lobby breakfast alcove. I head down Boylston to the finish area near Copley Square in time to see the 5km run and the invitational mile run events scheduled for 8AM. In 2007 they held a "Freedom Run" fun run for anyone who wanted to participate, but this year the 5k and 1 mile events are formally registered and timed. I see Brad Murphy jogging along as he followed his daughter's progress on the 5km course. I also bump into Dave Dolezilek from the state of Washington: Dave is an MSU EE alumnus, works for Schweitzer Engineering, and is a member of our ECE Department external advisory council. Dave is planning to run his first Boston Marathon, and has his family and some friends with him.

The 5km race announcer mentions that Joan Benoit Samuelson and several other former Boston Marathon winners are in the 5km field this morning. I recognize Olympian Joan Benoit, but the other names and faces aren't immediately familiar. As the 5km winds down the announcer says the one mile events will start at 9:30 or so, so I decide to walk a couple blocks west to the Hynes Convention Center where the packet pickup starts at 9AM. There is a long line on the second floor waiting to get into the pickup area, but the volunteers say that the door isn't open yet and the line will move very quickly once it does open. Sure enough, they have an excellent system inside with lots of volunteers arranged at dozens of tables organized by bib number, so there isn't even anyone lined up at the table corresponding to my number despite the fact that there were 300-400 people waiting in line when the doors opened. The volunteer takes my pickup ticket, verifies my face and signature with my photo ID, and hands over my #11647 bib with a hearty "good luck, Dr. Maher!" I choose a men's medium technical (synthetic fabric) long sleeve shirt after trying on that size in the fitting area.

I stroll through the vast race expo area (not crowded just after 9AM—whew!) and buy the commemorative race jacket, a hat, and some nice technical running gloves at the Adidas booth. The Image Impact company did not participate as a supplier this year, so the commemorative jacket is less distinctive and elaborate than in 2007—but the jacket still costs \$90, ouch. It looks good, I guess. I choose a medium size this year to get the arm length just right.

I also buy a few GU packets (like a liquid energy bar) for use on race day—no sign of Hammer Gel anywhere. The expo has the usual big group of vendors, and I particularly notice lots of booths with reps from *other* marathons around the country and around the world. There is even an Antarctica Marathon! I guess there are probably serial marathoners who can now run a race on every continent.

It's getting close to 9:30, so I leave the Convention Center and stroll back up the street to Copley Square. The invitational one mile begins with a high school race consisting of two students from each high school in the towns along the marathon route (Hopkinton, Natick, Framingham, etc.), girls then boys, then they have the races for the professional invited male and female runners. The announcers are really going out of their way to pat the 5k and 1 mile organizers on the back for putting together "such a great Sunday morning event," but I miss the large crowd and more inclusive feel of the Freedom Run. I start to head back to the hotel and my mobile phone rings: Greg Young suggests that he, Terry, and Brad would meet at the packet pickup at 4PM and then go over to the pre-race pasta dinner. Sounds good to me.

I decide to go for a short, relaxed run around Boston Common to loosen up and stretch my legs. My sore left calf feels pretty good and my muscles feel peppy and strong. I even get in four nice 75 yard strides along a paved path before heading back to the hotel for a bit more rest and relaxation.

About 3:30PM I stroll up to Boylston again and hop on the "T" back to Hynes Convention Center to meet up with Greg, Terry, Brad, and Brad's daughter, Brinn. I walk around while Greg and Terry do some shopping in the expo and then we all walk a block or two to the Arlington "T" station to go to the pasta party. The "T" is completely packed with people again, lots of marathoners and Red Sox fans. We eventually push our way onto a crowded train and make it as

far as Park Street, where they announce that for some reason that train is being taken out of service. We all shrug and pile off onto the platform, and eventually another train comes along for the short segment to Government Center.

The pasta party is held in the government buildings adjacent to the Big Apple Circus tent, just like it was in 2007. But unlike 2007, it is not pummeled by wind, turning umbrellas inside out and pouring down rain! The pasta dinner tickets have a particular seating time printed on them, but none of us have the same time listed, so we just go ahead and walk in the entry gate. The volunteers just take the tickets without worrying about the printed time, and they even let Brinn in at no charge. We walk into the entry lobby of the big top tent and queue up in a line looping around inside. As we wait for a few minutes a young girl comes out into the circus ring and begins juggling all sorts of balls, rings, clubs, etc. She has a trained Chihuahua that emerges from a small box to do various tricks, then dutifully returns to the box. We watch a few series of tricks, but within a few minutes we are escorted out of the tent exit and across the plaza to the pasta lines, with salad, bread, and beverages, too. We find a table with some empty seats and enjoy the meal. One of the other people at the table is an older man from San Antonio, ex-air force, wearing a 2007 race jacket. He and I exchange a few words about "the wet and windy year" in 2007: he jokes that the 2007 race jacket is "a true sign of honor". He also shares a few good stories about the Air Force Marathon in Dayton, and his long career in the service (1955-1989, including a stint at Langley AFB in the early days of the NASA period).

After dinner we stroll back across the plaza, wish each other luck, and I hop on the next green train back to Boylston. Once back at the hotel I plan out my morning tasks and look over my garment choices. The schedule calls for Wave 1 runners to load the shuttle buses to Hopkinton from the east side of Boston Common between 6 and 6:45AM, so I figure I will get up at 5:30, get dressed, double-check my stuff, then grab a bite or two in the lobby breakfast nook before the 10 minute walk up to the bus pickup.

The weather report still shows temps holding in the mid-40s and no rain expected during the race—but a chance of strong east winds right in the face of the runners. So I opt for my longish Nike shorts, a thin poly singlet top and the Montana State Bobcats t-shirt provided by Brad, my BSWD running hat, and the new running gloves I bought at the expo. I put my hotel key card and a GU packet in my short's waistband pocket, and then put one GU packet in the small pockets on the back side of my gloves. I plan to wear a garbage bag as a poncho for warmth up until race time, and also have my nylon wind jacket and wind pants to wear until I drop off my baggage sack at the baggage buses before heading to the starting corral. I put my race bib number on the shirt using safety pins, and pre-lace the timing chip onto my right shoe. Looks like I'm set. I watch a bit of TV to relax and then flip off the TV and the room lights about 8:30 or so. I fall asleep still feeling a bit "unreal" about what is going to happen tomorrow, but surprisingly calm and not too apprehensive.

## ***Monday 20 April 2009 RACE DAY***

I hear the alarm radio click on, so I reach over and reset my wristwatch alarm before it goes off. A quick glance out the window shows what appears to be a quickly brightening pre-dawn blue sky. I flip on the TV and one of the local stations is covering the local weather forecast for

Patriots' Day, confirming the "no rain until evening" assurance. That's good. Very good. I drink some water, visit the bathroom, and notice my urine is moderately dark yellow—probably the initial digestion of the pasta dinner overnight—and I refill my half-liter bottle. I put the anti-chafing lube/glide stick on the top of my toes, my nipples, and the back side of my crotch...it's good not to take chances with chafing! I get on my running outfit, and find everything comfortable and fitting well without pinching or pulling. I lace up my shoes, verifying that the timing chip is snug in the laces and securely placed, and slip on my wind pants and jacket. The TV is showing some scenes live from the dark and deserted starting area in Hopkinton, where there is some obvious frost on the ground and fog in the air. Looks like the temps there are in the low 30s, as expected, but warming up when the sun comes up. I put my garbage bag and an extra long-sleeve t-shirt (an old, black Cherry Creek Sneak shirt from Denver, and actually the shirt I wore for my first marathon in the Twin Cities in 1998!) into my yellow gear bag, make sure my ID sticker is attached securely to the bag, and head down to the lobby. Only a few runners are sitting in the breakfast area, so it seems very relaxed at 5:45AM. I make some small talk, get a cup of coffee and some juice, eat a small blueberry muffin, and toast a bagel to eat later on.

About 6AM I head out of the hotel and walk up to Boston Common. It is a quiet, calm, and relaxed scene, nothing at all like the wind and rain that was relentlessly drenching everyone waiting for the buses in 2007! Everyone is in good spirits this year. I queue up with a group about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way up the Common, and see the first line of buses pull away packed with runners. The next row of buses pull up, and I end up in a seat toward the back. I'm joined by a gentleman from Kansas City, probably in his mid-50s. He is retired from a medical software company, and we have an interesting conversation about the national push for electronic health records because of his professional background and also the fact that he had briefed the staff of Kansas governor Sibelius, who is now being considered for Secretary of Health and Human Services in the Obama cabinet.

The bus gradually makes its way out of the city and soon encounters lots of fog as the route approaches Hopkinton. The route is so quick this time compared to 2007 that we arrive at the drop-off point before 7AM—yipes!, it will be three hours until the race start—or at least two hours to wait before needing to get moving toward the starting corrals. I say goodbye and good luck to the runners as we exit the bus, then walk across the field at the high school to locate porta potties with no lines yet, then find some comfortable grass under one of the large tents set up in the field. There are tables with bananas, bagels, water, Gatorade, and coffee. I drink a cup of Gatorade and grab a bottle of water, then put my garbage bag on the ground and use my baggage bag and t-shirt as a pillow as I lie down for a little nap. Good idea, except I quickly notice a chill and start shivering. I look around and see that the more prepared runners have brought cardboard sheets to lie on, plus blankets and towels to stay warm. Oh well.

The PA announcer keeps making statements about the time, where to find the least-busy porta potties, where to meet lost companions, etc. Before long the announcer is mostly saying things like "Bill Davis from Kingston, Ontario, please meet your friends by the Poland Spring Water Bottle," or "Sally Jones of Indianapolis, your sister is looking for you. Sally, please go to the Poland Spring Water Bottle, "etc., etc., referring to a large inflated advertising sign for one of the race sponsors. After about 90 minutes or so I sit up, drink my water bottle, and discover that the formerly deserted porta potties now have lines of 100 people queued up. I get in line and

eventually make it to the front. Not long after that the announcer says that it is time for the first few corrals of runners to start heading down Grove Street to the starting area. I pick up my stuff and start a leisurely walk out of high school field toward the area where the baggage buses are lined up. I take off my jacket and wind pants and decide it is windy enough to need the garbage bag as a poncho. As I get my stuff together I notice a young woman nearby who is also getting ready: she has a very elaborate Wonder Woman outfit, complete with a headpiece and tights. Several Japanese runners come over and have their pictures taken with Wonder Woman. I'm thinking to myself "gee, I hope I don't get passed by a woman in a costume when I am here to take this race seriously," but then I laugh and realize that someone like me with bib 11,647 out of 26,000 should not be acting like this event is really a competitive outing! I'm here to participate, enjoy an adventure that most people won't duplicate, see what my training will accomplish, and simply make sure I cover the distance between Hopkinton and Copley Square—while making a memory that very few people will ever have the opportunity to accomplish. *Go ahead, Wonder Woman: enjoy your day, too!*

I pass my yellow runner's bag containing my jacket, wind pants, and spare t-shirt, to the attendant at the appointed bus window for my particular bib number, and join the throng of people heading down the  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile or so on Grove Street from the high school to the starting area. The fog has burned off, but now it is gusty and breezy. A news helicopter passes over noisily, and one or two planes towing advertising banners are circling. I drink a bit more water and stand in line for a potty stop at Colella's Market parking lot, adjacent to Main Street, and I eat a pre-race GU packet. I find the signs for corral #11, raise my garbage bag to show my bib number to the volunteer marshals, and hop into the 1,000 runners sharing the corral, all gazing up the road at the 10,000 runners filling corrals 1-10 ahead. What a sight! All the colorful outfits, flags waving from poles on each side of the street, and the unmistakable babble of thousands and thousands of nervous voices. The national anthem comes over the PA, sung by a tenor with a very fine voice, and a pair of F-15 jets fly over in tight formation. I smile and take in the ambience—and enjoy the fact that this year I don't need to pee my pants in a cold and rainy corral like I did in 2007. I can't help thinking how different the scene was in 2007. Unlike the soaked runners and wet streets facing the throng, 2009 has dry streets, comfortable temperatures for shorts and either long or short sleeved shirts and gloves, and gradually increasingly overcast skies. Only the strong breeze out of the east prevents it from being a really ideal day to run a marathon.

Then way up ahead we sense the sound of cheering and hear bells ringing, and it is apparent that the race is underway, right on time! From the viewpoint of corral #11 I can see perhaps as far as corral #6, and no one is moving at all yet. Then gradually, imperceptibly, I notice some heads moving up and down and occasionally some waving arms way up ahead. After about four minutes our group is walking together, and we are each able to run more or less independently by the time we cross the starting line and timing mats about seven minutes after the gun. The crowd is still cheering and yelling like mad!

I recall that in 2007 I was so caught up in the spectacle of the whole thing that I missed noticing the first mile marker. This year it's so obvious that I can't understand how I missed it before. I punch the lap button on my watch and it's 8:12.7. Not bad, not bad, I'm aiming for 8 minutes per mile, and with the crowd it isn't surprising that I am slightly slow. I also spend some effort

noticing the course terrain, and really detect the downhill aspect that predominates for the first few miles after the start.

The pack of runners is staying pretty steady for the first miles. There are lots more spectators in front yards and lining the roads through this section—with the nice weather it is clear that there will be many people sitting out in lawn chairs, cheering, waving signs, and enjoying picnic food. I grab a Gatorade at the first aid station just after mile 2, as I plan to at every aid station I can reach. I see on my watch that Mile 2 was 7:37, so I've made up the slow first mile already. Good. I am warmed up OK, so I pull the plastic garbage bag apart, crumple it up, and toss it toward one of the garbage cans just past the aid station without cutting in front of any runners. Good citizen, am I.

It's amazing to see how many volunteers are involved in this huge event. It must be thousands and thousands. Each aid station has at least two dozen workers, and each mile marker and each kilometer marker has a group of four or five volunteers, and most of the narrow and congested stretches of the course have volunteers along the side, too. They all wear distinctive yellow windbreakers. Then there are other volunteers with distinctive red windbreakers who comprise the emergency medical staff. A bunch of these red volunteers are at each medical tent, and it seems like there is a medical tent just about every mile. Amazing. And then there are the HUGE volunteer contingents at both the start and the finish areas...

Before I know it, we come to Mile 3 (7:41.5 pace), and then the first 5km timing mat. I hope to bank a few more sub-8 minute miles to compensate for what will probably be slower pace up the hills by mile 20. If I can stay on target, I will finish the 26.2 miles in just under 3h 30 min, which is my age group qualifying time, and maybe even be in the zone for a sub 3h 28 min PR (personal record). *But don't count your miles before they are run, Rob. Stay focused mile by mile.* Getting a few seconds under 8 minute pace in this downhill stretch seems fine.

Signs along the way indicate that we are passing through the town of Ashland. The course is still pretty congested as it weaves back and forth through the trees, but the perception is that the route flattens out in this section. I pace Mile 4 in 7:44.8, so still in good focus there. *Legs feel good, no discomfort at all, and my breathing is good. No problems for the first half hour of running.*

I maneuver my way along the right side of the course and grab a Gatorade at the aid station. By Mile 5 I see a Framingham sign and crowds seem to be getting larger again. Mile 5 seemed flatter, so the 7:59.7 split on my watch seems about right. *Pick up the pace just a bit, Rob.* I notice more wind gusts and the sun is increasingly being blocked by the cloud layer, but still quite comfortable.

Miles 6 through 10 from Framingham into Natick flow smooth and easy and even. The course seems flat through this section and passes between residences, business districts, forest areas, and waterfront/wetland areas. My splits for these miles are 7:47.9; 7:53.2; 8:02.5; 7:59.0; 7:58.0 -- again, right on my comfortable target. *Just keep moving, just keep running, just let it happen...*

I fish one of the GU packets out of the pocket in the waistband of my shorts—being careful not to drop the hotel key card also stashed in that pocket!—and rip the top of the packet and slide it

between my teeth to extrude the contents. I grab a cup of water instead of Gatorade at the next aid station.

There's mile 11, punch the watch and see 8:06.2 pace, and still OK. I notice a slight uphill aspect to the road. I remember the women of Wellesley College will be coming up soon, and sure enough, the screaming is audible a LONG way before actually seeing the signs and finding the vast line of coeds along the barricades on the right side of the road and extending for at least half a mile. That's a lot of college women! The screaming is deafening—I'm sure that there are going to be long lines at the Wellesley student health center tomorrow for throat lozenges! Lots of "kiss me" signs, as expected. I had noticed that one of the runners near me was listening to music with a portable player and earbuds, but as we approach the Wellesley girls he has apparently switched the device to record and I hear him say narration out loud "here's what it sounds like on the course at Wellesley!" I think that it would be interesting to make a continuous audio recording by carrying a portable binaural digital system while running the race. *Maybe if I ever come back to run Boston. But, for now, just concentrate on what you are doing, Rob...*

Mile 12 was at 8:01.1 pace, with overall elapsed time 1:35:04, putting me a minute ahead of completion pace. I'm sure I will need that time buffer to address the slower pace up the hills between miles 16-21, so just a bit more push should do it. Got to mile 13 at 7:55.6 split—good—and then crossed the 13.1 mile half-marathon point at about 1:43:50. I have run half-marathons in under 90 minutes, so 1h 44min is comfortable marathon pace. Things feel good and look good. I feel strong and comfortable—but *don't get cocky, Rob. You've had cramps and aches set in after 20 miles in other marathons...*

Miles 14, 15, and 16 are going by quickly, or so it seems. I am looking out for what I remember to be the big right turn at the Newton Fire Station that means the segue into the hill portion of the course. Assessing my physical state, I decide to pull off to the left side of the road in a wooded section around mile 15 and find a spot behind a tree for a quick potty stop. Other runners are taking advantage of the same area to "mark their territory," too. I get back on the road and down another GU packet from the pocket on the back of my glove. Pace on mile 14 is 7:59.6, mile 15 is 8:08.1, and mile 16 is 7:55.5.

Coming up to mile 16 there is a distinct downhill section that leads to a bridge over the Charles River and then an annoyingly highway-like uphill crossing of I-95 before a PowerGel aid station and mile 17. *Ahh, there's the Newton Fire Station coming into view. Boy, my memory of the noisy Newton turn is not mistaken!* In fact, probably because of the nice weather there is no open space along the barricades anywhere in sight. Lots of flags waving in the breeze and people holding signs, too.

OK, now comes the first really noticeable portion of the hills comprising the rise to Heartbreak Hill. I still feel good, and see the scaffolding and cranes at 30km with the video and still cameras and whatnot, and just plug up the hill between miles 17 and 18 at 8:22.1 split. That's giving back some of the time cushion, but about what I expected. I'll focus on getting through miles 18, 20, and 21 at 8:20 pace, with a bit of a push on mile 19 to about 8:00 on the flat portion for recovery. *That's the plan.*

I get to mile 19 at 8:05.2 pace, making good use of tangents through the curves to save a few steps per quarter mile. 8:05 is OK, but getting below 8:00 would have been ideal. OK, here's the start of the second uphill pitch—not too bad—*just keep the steady pace and be loose*. Ahh, here's mile 20, and I punch my watch to see 8:28.3 pace. *Keep moving and stay relaxed, Rob*.

Now the hill coming up to Boston College presents itself. Still feeling OK—but *hmm, did I just notice the aura of a ham string cramp?* Need to breathe with puffs to make sure I'm staying fully aerobic, and get water at the next aid station...topping out at mile 21 in 8:36.6 pace—well, that means a bit of a push may be necessary down the hill if getting under 3h 30min is going to happen, but still OK.

I take my last GU packet from my left glove, passing the 35km mark. *That's half an hour to go*. At mile 22 I see I got back up to an 8:08.7 split, so everything looks OK. *now just stay loose and imagine sitting in a comfy chair with the feet up, relaxing, napping, whatever...* A few glimpses of the urban scene ahead, now turning onto Beacon Street. It looks very much like the stereotype historic Boston street scene here, and I can see quite a few blocks down and around a gradual right turn. Mile 23 should be just ahead.

THEN IT HITS; first a complete seize in my right hamstring, then my thigh, then my calf muscle spasms, forcing my right toe involuntarily toward the ground—*OUCH*. I stumble awkwardly but don't fall over. I have to sort of hop and skip off my left foot as my right leg goes into its own bizarre world, not obeying my directives. I manage to hop and skip over to the left side of the street without tripping anyone and try to think relaxed thoughts as I have to come to a complete stop. *DAMN, damn, damn this hurts...come on leg, loosen up!!* The right leg cramp finally eases, but just then I get ominous twinges now in my left calf. Darn it—my mind is solid, my breathing seems fine, I feel strong and ready, but these leg muscles are biting me, and bad. I get moving slowly, keeping my eyes almost closed as I will my legs to relax.

Everything that seemed A-OK 90 seconds ago now seem to be in chaos.

I actually notice Greg Young whiz by around mile 23: I definitely spot the Bobcat athletics symbol on the back of his shirt. I think about calling out or trying to match his pace, but my legs refuse to cooperate and answer my brain's request with an edge toward another cramp. I see my mile 23 split was 8:54.5—that probably rules out a 3h 30 min finish, dang it, but I should be able to beat my 2007 time. *But why oh why don't these legs give me a break??*

I struggle over to the aid station tables and grab both a Gatorade cup and a water cup—I'm baffled at this point what to do. Is it dehydration? Gosh, I've been drinking at essentially every aid station, and I pull down the edge of my glove to see if the veins are visible in the back of my hand: yes, everything looks fully normal. Can't be dehydration. Is it electrolyte imbalance? I guess it must be, but the temperature is cool and I've had lots of Gatorade and GU. I've been sweating quite a bit, but that's normal for me, and I have never before tried taking e-caps or other salt tablets. Baffling, frustrating...I figure I have to just keep going at a sustainable pace and work this out—*OUCH, there go the calf cramps again*—and I'm limping along trying to keep my legs stretched just slightly so they don't go into another relentless spasm of pain.

I get to mile 24 at 8:54.3 split. Elapsed time is 3:14:51—that's 15 minutes and 2.2 miles to go, so I'm not going to make 3h 30min. Well, OK, it looks like if things stay this way I can at least do 9 minute miles for 25 and 26 and get under 3h 35min, and that would be better than in 2007...

BUT essentially the moment this calculation crosses my mind my calf muscles both go into a complete lock-up and I very nearly fall over backward as my toes point straight down with inescapable intensity, like an electric shock is happening. Runners behind me must be wondering if I saw a ghost or something as I abruptly start tottering on my toes. I stumble to another complete stop and can't move for at least 30 seconds as the cramp tightens even more. *Man, does that hurt! Can I call a "time out" and stop the race clock? I'm not actually moving anyway...* I somehow manage to get the legs moving forward and do what I can to stay out of the way of the runners now passing me on both sides. *Keep breathing, keep moving...say, was that Wonder Woman who just passed by?*

I spot the huge orange triangle of the famous Citgo sign up ahead. In 2007 the view of that sign was a reassurance, since the sign is located at the one-mile-to-go point on the course, but this time it seems like a glowing, throbbing warning light on the dashboard, taunting me and laughing at my state of inoperative muscles. The most frustrating feeling is that I am not tired! I have plenty of strength and stamina, and my mind is completely clear and aware, with no end-of-race blur or exhaustion. In fact, it almost seems too real as I sense the muscles not obeying my commands. Is this what it is like to be paralyzed, feeling like a mind trapped in someone else's body? Then another abrupt spasm causes a total halt—*ouch, ouch, ouch—please stop cramping...please, please, please...*

Gradually the intensity eases and I'm able to walk, concentrating on each step. But each time I try to up the cadence into a run, the muscles lock up. Finally—*finally*—I cross the mile 25 marker at barely a half run / half walk, and it is a 10:05 split, 3:24:56 overall. *I should be DONE now, darn it.* If I can get a bit more motion, maybe my circulatory system will compensate and run the cramps out of my legs—but no, at the one-mile-to-go sign I lock up completely once again, and stand/lean in one place for what seems like a minute while the muscles burn in a fury of full contraction. That Citgo triangle was not a friend this year, and I am at least relieved to have that orange glow behind me.

The last mile flows in super frustrating slow motion—I am limp-walking through the portion of the course that should be the most fun and exhilarating, with the huge crowds jamming the sidewalks and the roar of voices reverberating up and down between the buildings lining the streets. In my mind's eye I had imagined running triumphantly through this section to the turn onto Hereford and then the final celebratory turn onto Boylston, but no, I am absolutely being denied that satisfaction. Walk as fast as I can, try to start jogging again, then try to switch to a run cadence, but *ouch*, a cramp seizes the calves, and I am stumbling again—the sequence repeated over and over and over as I urge my legs into action. For goodness sake, it is just a fraction of a mile to go.

OK, here's the turn onto Boylston and I can see the archway marking the finish line up ahead...but not before one final, annoying, debilitating, major calf cramp only about 50 meters before the finish—and right in front of the grandstand. The calves pull with such great intensity

that I can't keep my balance and I fall backwards as both of my feet involuntarily become solid, pointed pillars. I immediately struggle to stand back up, but these legs are no longer taking any orders. A red-jacketed course marshal comes over and says "OK, man? Can you finish under your own power?" I think he assumes I am exhausted or delirious—which makes me angry, since other than the cramps, I feel great—so I worry that he is going to call for a wheel chair—or maybe a stretcher! I shout and wave my hands "NO PROBLEM, no problem, it's just nasty muscle cramps—I'm going to be fine in just a moment, NO PROBLEM." A runner passing by comes over and offers me his arm to help get up—I think his bib number was 5000-something, but unfortunately I can't remember because I would like to thank him—and I let him help get me vertical on my still-rigid calves. Nice of him to help—but now I still have to move forward to the finish on my own. I hear a bunch of shouting "Go Montana State, Go Montana State!" from the people in the front of the grandstand who can see the writing on the front of my shirt. The marshal yells "just take small steps now!" and I get moving again toward the finish. Another big "Go Montana!" cheer goes up from the crowd, and I try to jog forward so the finish cameras might capture an image that looks like I'm running and enjoying the triumph of it all. I make it across the mats, under the archway, and feel rather sheepish about the last three miles. Not what I had pictured in my mind, that's for sure.

I say a quick prayer under my breath, thankful for being alive and human. Walking with the throng of other runners I feel an unexpected mixture of satisfaction and feeling good about coming to Boston and finishing the race with no serious fatigue, chafing, or weakness, but also feeling extremely frustrated about my dang calves and thighs, even now still hovering on the verge of cramps. I stop briefly to have the customary mylar space blanket vested on my shoulders and I make the mistake of crouching and leaning slightly backwards as the short female volunteer reaches around my neck—BAM, both calf muscles cramp up tight. I stand there wavering, not able to move, as the swirling wind tries to twist the blanket around my head and face. I keep willing my muscles to loosen, standing there effectively immobile, and a volunteer comes up and says "do you need a wheel chair to the massage area?" I decline, figuring that if I were to sit down right now I would REALLY turn to stone—permanently. So as the cramp slightly eases I start stumbling forward to the timing chip collection area. I take a big risk trying to get my right foot up onto the low saw horse for the volunteer to untie my laces and retrieve the chip—and here comes another excruciating cramp! The volunteer kindly re-ties my shoe and places the finisher medal around my neck—and at least that part feels really good indeed. I shuffle forward again and walk the half-block or so to reach the food area. I immediately grab, peel, and devour a banana and drink some more Gatorade. I seize a food bag from one of the volunteers and pull out a bag of salty potato chips, rip it open, and quickly chew up handfuls of the salty chips. That tastes good right now, yes indeed. *Will it help my muscle cramps?*

Walking stiffly to avoid triggering the cramps, I get down another block or so and reach the baggage bus area. It takes some pushing and jostling to get through the crowd of runners and to locate the proper bus with my bib number range. The volunteer passes out my bag and I pull out my wind jacket, slip it on and zip it up to keep warm in the brisk, swirling east wind. I re-wrap the mylar sheet over my shoulders, then keep pushing forward through the crowd of runners, finally reaching the exit area at Providence St. and Arlington. The exit gate area is crowded with families and other well-wishers. Interesting—*my legs are finally starting to de-crimp and loosen*

*up*—must be the banana and chips doing the trick, perhaps—and I walk stiffly and gingerly back to the hotel via St. James Avenue.

I carefully walk up the hotel stairs to the third floor and get my stuff hung up. My shirt and face are caked with salty perspiration residue, which is probably a good clue about what happened at mile 23... I power-on the cell phone and call Lynn to let her know I'm done, although she should already know if the email notification system worked along the course. No answer, so I leave a quick message. I see I have a message on my phone, and it turns out it is from Greg Young asking directions to the hotel so that he and Terry Leist can have a place to wait for Dave Gibson to finish from Wave 2. I check and see that the message was actually from last night after I turned off my phone. I give Greg's phone number a call and leave a message in case he had the phone in his baggage sack. I flip on the TV to see if there is any race coverage, but all the local stations are showing their regular schedule of soap operas.

I run a tub full of cold water to try out the post-race cold-soak treatment recommended by several people, but before I can get in the tub, the room phone rings: it is Greg and Terry down in the lobby. Apparently after they didn't reach me last night they used Google Maps to get directions to the Milner, but for some reason it had directed them to Charles St. North instead of the correct coordinates on Charles St. South, so they had been walking a long way here after discovering the mistake and then getting the proper directions. They come up to my tiny room and manage to find places to sit on the floor and relax. Greg took advantage of the cold tub to soak his legs: he's used that method in the past to reduce soreness and inflammation. In fact, he got chilled by the cold water and I let him take my old Cherry Creek Sneak shirt to help keep warm. We all chat and compare notes about the day and how things went. My story is the least encouraging, of course.

Before long the room phone rings and it's Dave Gibson, calling from—of course—a shop on Charles St. North near where Google had erroneously located the destination. Rather than shuffling on his sore legs all the way to the Milner, Dave decides to just meet Greg and Terry at the Boylston "T" station for their ride out to Wellesley where they parked the car. After Greg and Terry leave, I run another cold tub of water to try the treatment on my legs, but I have great difficulty convincing my feet and legs to go into the water: too cold! I do my best to get at least my calves under the water, then I start to feel a chill all over. Time for the warm and soapy shower! Oh baby!

After relaxing a bit more I reflected again on the day's race. Prior to today I figured I would not feel the urge ever to come back to run in Boston, but now the frustrations of the last 5km have me thinking I didn't show the course who was boss—*darn muscle cramps!* But as of this moment, nothing can be done: time only flows in one direction, and the events of today have already happened. That is all.

I decide to get some dinner, and choose to walk to the nearby California Pizza Kitchen restaurant. I sit at the bar counter so as not to preempt an entire table in the busy restaurant. I also enjoy the view of the hectic pizza prep area and the big brick oven. I order a Sam Adams lager and a barbecue chicken pizza, and enjoy the buzz and activity of the busy restaurant. The food tastes great, washed down with the Boston beer—and also a tall glass of water.

Back at the hotel I rinse my soggy, stinky running clothes in the tub, then hike down the fire stairs to the basement and pop everything into the dryer in the laundry room. I go back to the room and get my suitcase packed up for the trip home. I decide to take a couple ibuprofen since my legs are starting to hurt and ache, especially where the vice-like cramps had been.

I retrieve my stuff from the dryer, complete packing, and then check and reply to a bunch of email messages. Then it's time to relax and get ready for bed. I have some trouble falling asleep: my mind keeps replaying and replaying the various sections of the course—*especially mile 23*...

## **Tuesday, April 21, 2009**

Woke up around 5AM with the clock radio, shave and shower, then double-check my packing and head down to the lobby. Check out is quick, and I head up the street to the "T" station for the inbound green train. As I make my way (painfully!) down the stairs to the platform, a green train arrives and the doors open. I hurry through the pass gate and make it on board before the doors begin to close. I'm wearing my blue race jacket, and I notice quite a few other passengers in marathon racewear or toting the yellow baggage sacks over a shoulder. Some are even wearing their finisher medals! Mine is packed safely in my briefcase pocket. I switch to the blue line at Government Center and arrive promptly at the airport station, where the free airport shuttle bus is waiting for the short trip over to the terminal. The whole trip from the hotel to the airport check-in at Terminal A took barely 30 minutes and a two dollar "T" fare. Amazing.

Long, long, LONG lines at the security check point, even though it is, like, 7AM. I'm directed by the TSA staff into a line weaving back and forth toward the screening area, but only later do I discover that there are three lanes described as "frequent traveler," "occasional traveler," and "family and first-time traveler," and, of course, I find that I was arbitrarily directed into the latter lane. I'm not sure if the other lanes would have been any faster, but I'm not in a position to switch. I have plenty of time anyway. I find Pat O'Connor and his wife in the gate area, and so are Brad Murphy and his daughter. It sounds like Greg Young and Dave Gibson went on an even earlier flight to MSP, but they will end up with us on the same MSP-BZN flight anyway.

In MSP I get a bite to eat and walk around to stretch my legs. I spot Dave Gibson and we have a chat about the race: he ended up with a slightly faster time than me, and that is remarkable for a guy 67 years old! I believe Dave is in the top 25 for his entire age group. Dave also explains that his mother-in-law passed away two days earlier, so he is going to need to turn right around when he reaches Bozeman and fly out to the funeral in the Midwest.

The MSP-BZN flight is delayed about an hour, but everyone seems to be in a good mood. The return flights are otherwise uneventful, and I find it feels good to put the race behind me.

Another great adventure, and I am glad to be fortunate enough to participate, no matter the outcome.