

## **Melbourne Marathon 2012**

### **By Ewen “Smurf” Vowels**

#### ***The Long and Winding “Road To”***

Compared to many of my running friends, it is fair to say that it has been a fairly unconventional induction into the running scene for me. I had always wanted to run a marathon and looking back I can pinpoint the seed for this to a specific event as an impressionable 10 year old. It was watching Robert De Castella run the LA Olympic Games Marathon in 1984.

Fast forward almost 20 years and I was a seriously out of shape thirty year old. I was active in my twenties with bike riding, Aussie rules and ice hockey but I found myself less and less active as time went by. I was also becoming increasingly unhappy with the situation and decided that something had to be done. Cycling took too much time with two young kids, so I decided to try running. At 95kg it was a lot of hard work the first 6 months but I stuck to it and found I enjoyed it more each time I hit the paths. Six to seven minute kilometres were a good speed for me, but I didn't walk and slowly improved. To give myself a goal I entered the Run Melbourne Half Marathon in 2007. I waddled around in 1:54 and was happy with the result. I entered the 2007 Marathon but a broken arm stopped me from running that year – probably a good thing because I was not in any shape to make the distance.

Another year of running and I entered my first Marathon in 2008. I hit the line at 94kg with a goal of running the entire distance at 6 minute/km for a 4:12. Despite hot and windy conditions (32C when I finished), I ran with the 4hr pacers and finished in 3:56:58. This is a very slow time, but I was proud to complete the event without stopping or walking. 2009 at 92kg I thought 3:30 was achievable and was feeling good about 8km in so jumped onto the 3:20 pacing group – it was being paced by a familiar face “House” from the Midday Milers! I got dropped on the Fitzroy St “Hill” but came home in 3:25. 2010 at 89kg with a goal of 3:10, I self-paced to 3:12:16.

Just before the 2011 Marathon on a long morning run in the worst conditions ever (hail, torrential rain and high winds) I met a tall lanky bloke near Southbank who was finishing a 35km run. We got to chatting and fate had it that he was pacing the 3 hour group. He was also part of a group of runners called the Melbourne Midday Milers – I'd often seen them as I did laps of the Tan and knew they were out of my league. He told me to just show up and join in on a few sessions, I wasn't sure if he was taking the piss but I showed up to a Tuesday session and proceeded to be destroyed and humiliated. Most of you know this bloke as “Dozer”! 2011 at 87kg I had the privilege of running with House and Dozer as pacers in the 3hr pacing group. Again I got dropped on Fitzroy St “Hill” (note the recurring theme) from House's group and struggled onto the back group with Dozer until the Tan when the Birdswood Drive Hill shattered me. The 3 hour dream was over, but I was incredibly happy with the 3:02:41. Half an hour after finishing I already knew I was heading back for another attempt at 3 hours, but this time I was not leaving anything to chance.

The months following the 2011 Marathon were spent getting flogged to death trying to keep up with the Milers around the Tan. Thankfully they introduced an Alpha and Beta group, so I was able to do sessions with the Betas and enjoyed the experience a lot more. Did my first Milers' event, the Tan Handicap and ran a 36 second Tan PB (14:04) and just missed catching Diggler for first. Already I'd

seen some big improvements with the Tuesday and Thursday sessions and resolved to persist with the training.

I had some hip issues in the lead up to the Two Bays 56km Ultra in early Jan 2012, there were some quality Milers running in it and I ran near House and AL (who were jogging) for the first half and felt decent. It's safe to say that the second half (especially 41-50km) was probably the toughest and most painful running I've ever done. My quads were beyond blown, I couldn't run uphill and running downhill was agony. I had to side step down the steep hills because I could not handle the pain. Finished in just over 6 hours but learnt some valuable lessons and found I had the stubbornness and will power to keep moving when the body was screaming out to stop.

Did the 5M's Milers event in March, this was an amazing experience and a great opportunity to meet more of the club members. Had a blast and was impressed by the level of organisation required to pull off a point to point relay with all the car swapping and navigation issues!

Long distance Oxfam training (including an 87km weekend) and the continuous abuse the Milers inflicted on me started to see the weight drop off. I embarked on the Oxfam adventure in April at 83kg and found the hills far easier, our team (A Momentary Lapse of Reason) finished well behind the Milers in 16 hours 30 minutes for the 100km but we were very happy with the time despite losing our captain at the 42km mark.

At about this time House had also asked me to join Waverley Athletics for the Winter Cross Country season – in hindsight this proved to be a catalyst to really take my running to a new level.

Two weeks after Oxfam was the Puffing Billy race, I had already dropped a lot of weight and was feeling far stronger for all the endurance Oxfam training. I started the race and thought I'd try to hang on to Lurch (who usually thrashed me at the hard sessions), I went past him in the first few kms and waited for the inevitable blow up. He caught up with me around 8 km and I was pleasantly surprised to find that the engine had more to give. Finished with a 5 minute PB and started to believe that maybe I could give this running gig a shot.

This marked the start of my "intense" 24 week program that incorporated the Run Melbourne Half Marathon in July and the Melbourne Marathon in October. The weight was falling off now, which made the sessions faster and easier and more importantly helped the long run recovery a great deal.

The AV season was an eye opening experience, the events were varied and difficult and the quality of the field was mind blowing. I enjoyed all the runs (apart from Bundoora which came a week after a 77:59 Half). The highlight run for me was Burnley Half where I pushed as hard as I could and ran with my Waverley club mates House and James for the first 13kms at a pace I never thought possible – suffice it to say I blew up big time but managed to hold on for a very satisfying result.

Most of the training went well and to plan, apart from 2 very light weeks for an abdominal strain due to the "Dog Bollard Incident" and a foot injury (pinched nerve) which was probably due to overuse/overtraining after the Burnley Half. I managed 70.5km a week for the Half programme and 71.5km a week for the full programme – so 71km for 24 weeks. Never the less, I was a tired and sore body for a lot of the last 8 weeks and the overly long taper (due to injury and work) was a blessing to freshen up for the day.

## ***Race Day***

I found myself in the weird situation of basically feeling like a debutant. I'd dropped 11.5kg in a year and at 75.5kg I didn't really have a good reference point to set a goal from. Numerous people said I'd be right for anywhere between 2:40 and 2:48. That's easy for them to say, but it's a big leap of faith to believe you can run a 15-20 minute PB in a Marathon and go under 3hrs for the first time.

A few people knew my top end goal of 2:42:30. This clearly relied on having perfect weather and feeling good early in the race. I wasn't confident of getting this but when I arrived at the start line in cool, crisp and still conditions I decided to give it everything I had to get close to that time. I was reminded of Bacchus's statement of "ambition exceeding ability" and was wondering if I was biting off more than I could chew. I would find out either way in the next 3 hours.

I saw Racer and Rafa near the 'G. Found the Robyn's (Millard and Fletcher) in the preferred start area, along with Kirsten, Dozer, Dizzy and a rather nervous looking Woolies. The excitement and adrenaline was rapidly building. A whole year of running and training was rapidly coming to a head.

The preferred start was a blessing, so nice to be out front and not have to worry about the usual anarchy of a mass start. I quickly settled in to a rhythm using the easy to spot Dozer as a rough yardstick for the first couple of Ks to ensure I didn't go too fast or too slow. He was chatting with a Mornington runner I'll call "Nail Gun" – who had been shot in the leg with a 3 inch nail on Monday and was still starting and looking comfortable in the early stages. The first few splits came through, a little fast but nothing silly. I said goodbye to Dozer at 4km as he was going a bit faster than I wanted and found some welcome company with Kaz Barlow who was wearing the Vic uniform. Robyn Millard was just ahead and Dizzy was a bit behind. Woolies was charging clear and looking fantastic. I saw the welcome face of TW early on and in no time the first 5km in 18:53 - so far so good.

Got to Albert Park and Kaz and I continue to chat away – we'd been messaging on FB and both had similar end goals so it was great to team up to pass the early stages. The hot air balloons were flying in the distance and it is hard to imagine better conditions to run around Melbourne. Right on the 7km banner Bacchus was there with some more Milers and I grab the first drink without incident. Past MSAC Kaz isn't feeling perfect, declines a drink from Damo and drops off the pace a fraction, I fully expect to see her re-join me but it's not to be. Next 5km in 18:59 and still feeling good – 10km split within the range written on my hand. Catch sight of my supercoach AL, GGO and a few Milers at the turn here. I also catch sight of Grunter and Thai who seems to be the official Miler photographer - so good to see some friendly faces.

Already the race is strung out and by the time I reach the F1 pit area the lead pack is flying back the other way. Not too far behind is a very strong looking Fat Ass, I call out to him (not sure he really knows who I am though). Woolies passes the other way in his Milers singlet, he looks very fluid and focussed. I wish him well and turn around back to Fitzroy St. Next is Tony Hally running very strongly ahead of Lurch and Roger Mellie. Then I see Racer, House and Damien Angus in the 3hour train. Everyone seems to be running smoothly which is what you want at this point. Almost back to Fitzroy St and a tall race sign almost falls on me and the guy running next to me, a close call but no damage done. Down Fitzroy St to the 14km mark and Bacchus is right on queue with my sister Annabelle ready with a backup drink. Slips and some more Milers are there too. Just beyond them Rach and

kids are cheering me on along with my brother in-law. My call of "Hi Pork Chops" gets a few odd looks...

On to Beaconsfield Parade and a tiny headwind (nothing really to bother me, but noticeable compared to the shelter of St Kilda Rd and Albert Park). 15km down and 5km split of 18:39. A WA state representative called Simon mentions how much support is out there for me today, as calls of "Go Smurf" have been peppering us for the last few KMs. I feel especially lucky to have this level of help from the crowd! Simon and I run together and chat to pass the time, turns out he was a bit like me and started running 5 years ago to lose a lot of weight. He finally made the state team at 45 years of age – it goes to show that every single runner out on course has a great story to tell. We work well together and pass the 20km mark feeling pretty good (5km split of 19:12). Spot Grunter, TW and Cans in the next stretch. I know the 21km mark is just ahead and get ready to grab the next drink from Annabelle. Good support at this point with AL, Slips, Bacchus, GG and a few more (sorry a bit blurry here). Slips kindly runs an extra water bottle up to WA Simon – who is very appreciative and wants me to thank El Pres the next time I see him. With all the distractions I forgot to look at my half way split, so I can only guesstimate what my out and back were.

First big blow for the day as I see the distraught figure of my beloved Big Bird walking and throwing his water bottle to the side of the road. He is clearly having a bad day (being sick the week of the race and not being able to carbo load properly) and my heart goes out to him – there's not much I can say but it was a distressing sight to behold. Sorry it didn't work out for you on the day Dozer.

Next 5km is uneventful but there's less and less talk with Simon as we both concentrate on the race. 5km split is 19:07 and still feeling decent. Turn around at Elwood and the tiny headwind starts to take its toll on Simon who drops off. Up ahead I see Rafa running comfortably just off the back of House and see Thorny and Mitho doing the pacing duties! I work solidly along the road back to Fitzroy St, picking up a few runners and grab another drink from Annabelle at 28km and get a cheer from Jamie (brother in law) a bit further along.

First big test of the race, the Fitzroy St "Hill" – while barely more than an incline it has been my undoing in every marathon attempt so far. Rach is at the top of the first rise coming off Jacka Boulevard and promises me a coffee (I've been off caffeine for a few days now), god that sounds good and gives me the much needed lift as I roll on to the bottom of Fitzroy St. 30KMs clicks over half way up (5km split 19:19) and so far the elastic is holding, more importantly I feel decent going up but I do notice the heart rate go above 160 for the first time today. Nick Paine and family cheers me on for the third time today and I'm again grateful for the all support. Another family wearing Milers' singlets cheers me on (don't know who you are but thanks!). I manage to keep the pace below 4 mins/km up the "Hill" which is a huge relief and consolidate down St Kilda Road. I know there's a long way to go so I keep running conservatively but am starting to feel the cumulative effort of running at this pace. Two guys run past and Bacchus gives me a much needed drink and pep talk as I head towards the Arts Centre. See Mrs Racer and family and say hi.

It's taking an effort to keep rolling along, but I keep picking up a few people which gives a small boost and the two guys who passed me haven't gone too far ahead – so I know I'm not out of it yet. KM splits are still decent, but are taking more effort to maintain. Just before the Arts Centre I see Peely and MJ (well done on your 10k boys) and another friend Nicole. This is where the cheering

really makes a difference. 35km down with last 5km split of 19:10. Under St Kilda Road and the final big test of the day is up ahead.

Last year the wheels fell off within 50m of starting up the hill. I was powerless to do anything as I watched Dozer cruise up and off into the distance. In preparation and a reminder I had done this part of the course on Thursday as a 15 min threshold run with Racer, Lurch and Rafa. My biggest doubts and fears were about to be tested, how would it go? Would the training get me through? I missed a lot of KMs in training 4 and 3 weeks out – would that be my downfall? Bacchus arrives right on queue with the last drink of the day, I can only manage half a gel and half the powerade and he gives it to the guy in front. He gives me spare water which comes in handy up the remainder of the hill. I see the next casualty of the day – a poor guy who has collapsed and is sitting on the road looking very dazed and confused – a spectator is running to give him water but I suspect his day is well and truly done. A wheelchair racer in fluoro yellow is also struggling up the hill. His screams of “F\*\*K” and “Come on!” break the sound of thudding feet. First KM up the hill is the slowest so far 4:03, not great but well within what I was expecting. Next KM past the Shrine and towards the top of the hill is 4:06. This is a huge boost, last year I ballooned out to 4:45 and 4:50 for the same section. My plan was to go harder if I made it onto Domain Road with anything left. The wheelchair dude screams “Get out of my way” at me as he heads downhill.

At the bottom of Domain Rd near St Kilda Road, Bacchus as if by magic appears again and gives me a high five and some much needed words of encouragement and runs with me for a couple of hundred meters. This was just the kick I needed, thanks mate! Run some good KM splits again along St Kilda Road and this was the point where it finally hit me. I will get a great time regardless of what happens in the next 5km. This realisation makes it a lot easier to lift the pace up, however I am still not prepared to risk a kick for home as I know I’m very close to my limit. It’s taking my full concentration to hold form and stop the Smurf head bobble, I think its working but only the bystanders could tell me for sure. Run past “Nail Gun” from Mornington who has done an amazing job given what he’s been through.

I tell the drinks volunteers at 38km to throw water in my face as I run along – it gives them a few laughs but it shocks the body and mind to wake up a little. Getting close to Flinders St and the improvements with the separation of Full and Half Marathoners are evident. There’s no congestion and I can concentrate of running and not dodging people which is a great improvement over last year – kudos to the organisers. Last 5km split of 19:37 including the hill is very pleasing.

Passing Flinders St Station my fingers start to tingle and I know I’m starting to go hypoglycemic - I realise that there will be no fast finish, just maintain the pace and get the job done. I also haven’t looked at my elapsed time since 35km so I don’t really know what my finish time will be. Around the bottom of the ‘G on Brunton Avenue the crowds are cheering on the Half and Full runners. Great atmosphere as I climb onto the G. Figure I better run the last part as hard as the body will allow and see the finish clock ahead. Cross the line with next to nothing left and am elated with a time of 2:42:08 on my watch. I had to grab a seat as I’m a bit wobbly. I see a tired but happy Woolies ahead and give him a big hug and trade times. He has smashed it on debut, so happy for him. I saw Licka and the Job who had finished their Half and they pass on congratulations.

Head down into the ‘G, see House and Damien Angus who both had a good day leading the 3hr train. Grab my gear and Annabelle finds me and we head back to the bikes so we can ride home. I just

finish telling her about Lurch and his quest to crack 3 hours, when serendipitously Lurch and Roger Mellie stroll past. I am almost afraid to ask his time, but he beams as he says 2:58. Woohoo! A big hug and congratulations all round. Roger Mellie has also run a massive PB and got a well-deserved 2:55. There are so many good Milers stories to be had today.

Running my first Marathon in a Milers' singlet made me realise how lucky I am to be part of this club and community. Knowing there would be friendly faces and hearing calls of "Go Smurf" on course really helped to get me to the finish.

Personally I can't imagine having a better day for racing, the conditions and the way the body held up both combined to help me hit a 20:35 PB and go under 3 hours for the first time. I think I ran a reasonably controlled race, stuck fairly closely to the race plan (AL wanted no faster than 80:30 out) and managed to run pretty even splits for the duration of the race (only two > 4min/km splits).

As far as I can work out (from official 10k splits and some Garmin guesstimation) my out and back times were 80:37 out and 81:28 back. Garmin splits had me at ~80 and 82.

A year or even six months ago my lifetime goal of running sub 4min/km (2:47:59) for a marathon was a distant fantasy. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that I would be able to get a finish time of 2:42:05. An official placing of 42 out of 7100+ was the icing on the cake. It may take a while for the high to wear off...

### ***Thanks***

Huge thanks to AL for all the help and advice with my training plan, specific sessions, race strategy, race nutrition and getting me to push myself harder than I would have, especially when I was missing the self-belief to do what he suggested I could.

Bacchus and my sister Annabelle for providing perfect drink support on the day. This was a massive boost to morale and kept the body fuelled for the day.

All the Milers support crew (sorry if I missed anyone or failed to acknowledge you), friends and family who made it out to cheer the team on. This provides an unquantifiable but immense boost to morale as you tackle the 42.195 kilometres.

Dozer for inviting me into the Milers fold and House for encouraging me to do Winter AV with Waverley. Having these two as pacers last year (running so easily and being so helpful and supportive to their flock of runners) encouraged me to train hard this year to break 3 hours.

All the Milers and Waverley club for the training runs, advice, sledging, encouragement and motivation - there are too many of you to thank individually, just know that you have all played an instrumental role in getting me where I am today.

Lastly and most importantly. To Rach and the kids who fully supported me during a very long year of running. Rach deserves a special commendation for putting up with me during injury layoffs, when I was a frustrating and grumpy SOB.

## ***The Splits***

Official race splits 10k and final 2.195km.

Distance	Split	20K	Half (*estimate)
10	0:38:10		
20	0:38:16	1:16:26	1:20:37
30	0:38:18		
40	0:38:51	1:17:09	1:21:28
42.195	0:08:32		
Total	2:42:07		

Garmin splits (it had the course as 42.43 so add a few seconds per km)

Split	Time	5KM	10KM	20KM
1	03:42.0			
2	03:46.5			
3	03:41.9			
4	03:49.2			
5	03:53.2	0:18:53		
6	03:49.4			
7	03:43.7			
8	03:50.6			
9	03:51.3			
10	03:44.0	0:18:59	0:37:52	
11	03:43.0			
12	03:42.1			
13	03:41.5			
14	03:49.4			
15	03:43.2	0:18:39		
16	03:52.3			
17	03:51.9			
18	03:51.7			
19	03:53.0			
20	03:51.6	0:19:12	0:38:00	1:15:52
21	03:48.7		Half Est	1:20:00
22	03:47.6			
23	03:48.8			
24	03:50.5			
25	03:51.5	0:19:07		
26	03:47.9			
27	03:52.2			
28	03:52.7			
29	03:54.7			
30	03:51.2	0:19:19	0:38:26	

31	03:47.2			
32	03:50.4			
33	03:49.0			
34	03:51.8			
35	03:43.5	0:19:10		
36	04:03.4			
37	04:06.2			
38	03:59.5			
39	03:44.3			
40	03:48.0	0:19:37	0:38:43	1:17:09
41	03:51.1			
42	03:54.9			
42.43	01:22.2	0:09:08	Half Est	1:22:09

**Garmin Data**

<http://connect.garmin.com/activity/233081729>



## The 24 Week Training Plan (with huge thanks to AL)

Week starting	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Total	Notes
30/04/12	0	11.45	0	0	8.48	0	25.48	45.41	Puffing Billy 13.2km in 50:01
07/05/12	0	8.95	9.21	10.8	13.35	17.19	10.6	70.1	
14/05/12	0	12.2	11.5	11.51	0	18.09	30.1	83.4	
21/05/12	0	10.23	11.46	0	0	14.45	22.53	58.67	10km PB 36:23
28/05/12	0	10.95	14.69	14.15	15.86	6.02	23.47	85.14	
04/06/12	0	0	11.72	11.82	0	24.7	15.73	63.97	15km in 54:31, first 10km in 36:02, first 3km in 10:29
11/06/12	13.7	17.86	11.27	11.34	15.63	22.58	28.74	121.12	Tan PB 13:17, lifetime high weekly KM
18/06/12	0	11.26	12.63	8.28	0	16	23.3	71.47	16k XC in 1:00:15
25/06/12	0	12.2	15.21	12.1	15.49	8.09	24.22	87.31	5km PB in 17:34
02/07/12	0	9.55	12.52	10.14	0	12.31	0	44.52	5.5km XC in 21:00
09/07/12	0	12.81	0	10.03	0	0	21.1	43.94	Run Melbourne Half PB in 1:17:59
								<b>775.05</b>	<b>Half Marathon Complete</b>
16/07/12	7.01	8.83	11.41	8.87	0	15.07	31.96	83.15	12k XC in 47:12, "Dog Bollard Incident"
23/07/12	0	11.76	10.01	12.11	15.76	15.75	30.02	95.41	Tan PB 12:58
30/07/12	0	12.53	15.32	21.97	13.13	15.25	35.03	113.23	
06/08/12	0	13.99	15.32	11.36	0	11.1	30.35	82.12	6.3km XC in 21:28
13/08/12	0	12	14.13	14.44	11.19	15.53	34.46	101.75	5km Killer Loop in 19:02
20/08/12	0	12.54	11.44	0	0	24.74	0	48.72	Resting due to abdominal strain
27/08/12	0	7.33	0	9.02	0	0	22.64	38.99	Burnley Half PB in 1:16:37, 10km in 35:20
03/09/12	0	12.48	11.65	14.25	0	34.01	25.01	97.4	
10/09/12	11.81	14.49	14.66	6.51	0	7.6	35	90.07	Full tan PB 13:01
17/09/12	0	0	0	13.37	0	12.37	20.395	46.135	Resting due to foot injury
24/09/12	0	11.83	12.01	0	3.7	16.11	0	43.65	16km progressive tempo, average 4:1
01/10/12	0	8.77	11.17	0	0	0	14.01	33.95	Busiest week at work all year
08/10/12	0	6.7	0	6.08	0	0	42.195	54.975	Full Marathon PB in 2:42:05
								<b>929.55</b>	<b>Full Marathon Program Complete</b>