

It had been a while between marathons. My last being the inaugural MCG finish in 2007 where I met my expectations when finishing in 2:51:25. This experience was better than my 2:59:16 first attempt two years earlier when I vowed never to put myself through such torture again. But as my running improved, being a 2:59 marathoner didn't sit comfortably with me so I went back for another. From there the goal turned to a sub 2:48. If, and only if, I thought I was capable of a sub 2:48 then I would be back again. And it didn't take long to entertain those thoughts as my running immediately improved, however a combination of Achilles tendonitis, Plantar Fasciitis and Osteitis Pubis across 2008/09 left me totally shot by the end of each AV season. I actually registered in 2010 but missed a crucial training period with an ankle problem and downgraded to the half. I questioned whether my body could still withstand the training required for a marathon so in 2011 I decided to take on half a marathon preparation where I would train up to the Burnley half and then abort it. I came through this unscathed and went on to have a good AV season, so 2012 was the year!

My training program went smoothly. This involved 6 days of running per week consisting of 3 sessions or 2 sessions and a race, a long run preferably at Churchill Park, and a longish midweek morning run, an easy run and two short and easy double runs. I maxed at 140km for the last week prior to a 3 week taper. No injuries and no excuses.

As always the Burnley half was going to be a key indicator of where I was at. My time was 1:18:05, a 90 second PB set in 2007, but I took further confidence as I finished full of running whereas my previous best I wondered how I was going to get twice the distance. I thought a 2:46 was on the cards but I thought there was a genuine chance I could surprise myself, however I always maintained sub 2:48 was the goal.

My race plan was to keep it comfortable and simple. Find a good pack to run with and don't get caught up with my pacing in the early stages as the outcome would take care of itself. Nevertheless, I expected the first half to be in around 82 minutes.

The race got away without incident in ideal conditions with a slight uprising to begin with which ensured a sensible pace. Dozer with Smurf in pursuit gradually crept away from me once we turned into Flinders St with runners coming and going at a rapid rate throughout St Kilda Rd with no real packs forming around and just runners all across the road. Things had started to open up by the turn into Lakeside Drive with a one pack of three containing not far ahead and another pack of about ten containing Smurf a bit further up again. At this stage I just had one other runner for company who was hoping for 2:45 and suggested without going over the top that it would be wise to latch onto one of the packs ahead, so we gradually started to close the gap.

I grabbed my first sports drink from Bacchus at 7km. He expressed his displeasure at the performance of Pierro but our encounter was so brief that I didn't have the chance to respond. Not to worry, there'll be other opportunities throughout the morning.

My first cause for concern came at around the 8km mark when I could feel a blister forming on the inside of my left toe. I hadn't broken in my shoes as much as I would have liked and I had concerns with the 2nd half of the race, but I expected my feet to hold up for much longer than 8km! It had the potential

to ruin my day but it wasn't a performance issue for now. Through 10km in around 39 minutes, gave myself a nod of approval and pressed on towards the pack while passing the occasional runner that Smurf broke.

I caught the pack of 3 runners at around 16km in Beaconsfield Pde. This contained Kirsten Molloy from Team NSW with another male Team NSW runner who I assume was pacing her. I felt this would be a good group to stick with as they seemed experienced and running to a good plan but after a couple of kilometres some triathlete guy who was looking at his garmin every 5 seconds started to pull away so I decided to go with him. There was still a pack of about 6 coming back to us however it disintegrated before too long.

The 2nd 10km split was again around 39 minutes and the half split around 82:00. I was feeling good and the blister wasn't causing any grief. Approaching the Elwood hairpin I was able to observe those in front for the last time. Woolies was chatting to the runner next to him and looked comfortable. Smurf looked in total control, but Dozer had dropped off from his Peninsula buddy and appeared to be battling. Shortly after the hairpin I was overtaken by Han Quach who is well known to some of the milers. I don't know Han personally but we have had countless battles in AV, especially in XC races, where we have traded places numerous times throughout the run which are often decided by a sprint finish (he usually wins the sprint finish by the way). He past me at a rapid rate and proceeded to put 100 metres on within a couple of kms.

Unfortunately Dozer's terribly timed illness had taken its toll and I overtook him around 27km. I was still feeling ok but it was becoming clear that the battle would be to hold it all together and any optimism of feeling good enough to pick up the tempo over the concluding stages wouldn't be happening. I grabbed a sports drink as scheduled from Bacchus at 28km and tried to get as much down as I could and continued on towards Fitzroy St.

Through 30km with a 10km split again around 39 minutes. I was keeping it together but it felt like I had worked harder for that split. Further ahead Han was coming back to me as quickly as he gotten away. Just as I was on the verge of catching him approaching St Kilda Rd, a stitch made itself known which quickly spread to my entire abdominal. The real battle was about to begin. I had to back off slightly but fortunately it subsided after a few minutes but by now I was struggling to find my rhythm. The pace still felt reasonable as I continued on towards the Art Centre with Han now for company.

We momentarily merged with the half marathoners upon exiting St Kilda Rd. Our pace wasn't dissimilar so it was good to have a few more runners around, however the hammies were starting to cramp. I was already struggling with my rhythm and Bacchus would be appearing with the last scheduled drink shortly. I couldn't decide whether to take water or sports drink as I suspected the latter was the cause of the stitch. I decided to take a mouthful of sports drink and hand it back to Bacchus in the hope he would reappear with it at some stage. Even the one mouthful was enough to leave me grasping for air.

The half marathoners had now taken a different turn and the back of the tan was very quiet and peaceful. I still had Han for company and we worked together up the hill. Suddenly I was starting to feel good again as Han fell away during the downhill section. Turning into Domain Rd I was feeling very

comfortable and I felt like I could hold this for the remaining 5km. Bacchus reappeared towards the end Domain Rd and I took another mouthful of sports drink. Again I was grasping for air and my rhythm shot again. Bacchus ran with me for a km. While I appreciated this, I wasn't as interested in talking about Pierro now.

Turning into St Kilda Rd for the last time I looked into the distance but everything was blurry. The road directly in front was still clear so I kept my head down and just needed to nurse myself home. Passing through 40k revealed I was tick over 40 minutes for the last time. Good enough and I just needed to keep it together for 2:46. I was now in a good state of mind. I wanted it to end but knew I would run it out and was comfortable with timing so left no need to try and find something extra. I could see the G in the distance which looked to be in a cloud of fog through my blurred vision.

Into the G and I held my pace, possibly increasing only slightly. With the finish now in sight, footsteps emerged from seemingly nowhere. I wasn't interested in a sprint finish so I let them have it without a fight. It was Han!

I crossed the line in 2:46:12, quite happy but more relieved that all in came together on the day. I had a quick chat to Smurf and Job at the finish before making my way towards the refreshments to address that dehydration issue. It was then a slow hobble back to the car to get home and finally get those shoes off. I was surprised to find a bloodless sock, but underneath wasn't so pretty with the skin on the inside of my left big toe hanging by a thread.

From here I don't intend on racing another marathon. I have been running long enough to know my capabilities and I think I can live with a 2:46 lifetime best. I'm looking forward to 2013 without the desire for a marathon and to joining the support crew on the sidelines.

And lastly, whether it was on the day, during training, offering advice, or just taking an interest in my progress, thank you very much as you played a part in my achievement.