

Melbourne Marathon 2013 – David Mellings

I was never planning on writing a race report, but the chance of a free beer is not to be taken lightly; unless it is a light beer. In the aftermath of MM2012 I immediately retired from marathons having achieved what I'd wanted; a sub 3 hour performance. By Wednesday I'd already begun planning for the next Canberra Marathon. However much like MM2011 I completely failed in the post marathon recovery phase. I'd suffered some groin issues in the lead up to the event, and by early December I was pretty much shot. An evening at Albert Park where I attempted the 800m and then 5k was the tipping point. Adductor tendonitis was the diagnosis. Pain was the remedy.

If there was a positive it was that it forced me to actually take a break and let my body have some rest that it obviously needed. By January I was back and logging some decent mileage. The focus was to get ready for a strong AV XCR season. One thing was certain; I was not going to run MM2013. At this stage my adductor was still bothering me, but not stopping me in any way. I'd taken to regular remedial massage where I was assured that the adductor was fine. I reckon it was about June before I stopped noticing it altogether.

The XCR season began pretty badly but gradually improved. I was doing more sessions than I've ever done, and showing more speed than before. A 37:25 at Albert Park was certainly the highlight for me. However it was the talk of people like Damo, Gerard and Vince about MM2013, and I felt the urge to be a part of it. So on the last day for early bird entries I signed up. The thought of crossing the line with Damo with his 1st sub 3hr in particular was very appealing.

Usually I cop a fair bit of grief for the time I'm out running from her indoors, but at about this time my wife actually visited a psychic. He or she apparently spent the majority of time talking about me and my running. They explained that it was something I was going to be doing for a long time, and that they could see me running overseas as well. Alright then, time to sign up for the ballot to do Tokyo 2014! I must give that psychic the \$500 I promised.

I knew I had a lot of work to do. At this stage I was still around 3-4kg over my weight of the previous year. I could tell myself that was attributable to muscle gain, but it was obviously a complete lie. I also began to really suffer some back issues, which it seems were largely derived from hip flexor issues. Nevertheless I was getting in a few longer runs, and an unplanned 35k one Wednesday at a very comfortable 4:30 pace had me thinking I was in fair shape for a good crack at MM2013.

10 days later and another 33k run and things were looking up. I felt that a PB was certainly on the cards. However the next day, a week before Burnley and 6 weeks before MM2013, things were turned on their head. Vince and I headed out from the bottom of Warrigal Rd on the beach trail for a gentle recovery run. About 3.5k in and with me following too closely I failed to see a tree root in the path. I went over on the ankle and stayed down. The speed with which it blew up I couldn't believe. Thankfully Vince was able to go back and get the car so that I could get ice on it quickly. But it was pretty obvious that it wasn't great. Vince was sensational in helping; providing immense support. For some reason he felt responsible; but it was entirely my own doing.



Burnley was clearly out. I iced it very regularly, and was thankful my desk at work was so close to the kitchen. But being stubborn I didn't entirely rule out running. On the Thursday I did about 8k with Lurch around the lake, including a couple of kilometres tempo. And while painful I got around ok. In the end I opted to turn up and see how things went, with the intention of pacing Vince to a nice chunky PB. Ideal conditions met runners, and things went pretty smoothly. Best of all was a huge PB for Vince. After pacing a friend through the Shepparton Half only a few weeks earlier and I'd begun to understand the attraction for House of his regular MM pacing. No pressure!

The ankle continued to noticeably improve over the next period despite the swelling being ever present. Of my calf and back I could not say the same. I found myself in something of a dilemma. Having committed to the marathon it becomes somewhat all consuming. But with me being unable to log any good mileage and my body battling I felt my chances of running a good race diminishing greatly. I decided to set myself for the Sri Chinmoy half marathon at Burnley 3 weeks prior to the marathon to be the decider.

In the lead up I continued to struggle and finally decided to pull the pin on the marathon one evening. Rather than do it then and there though I left it until the morning. And wouldn't you believe it; the deadline for refunds was that midnight just gone. I offered the entry to a few people I knew were likely to run but who had I thought not yet signed up; and both had just made the commitment. Looks like I was stuck with it then. The option to change to the half wasn't available as it had sold out long before, and I couldn't see the use in doing the 10k. So on we continued.

The Sri Chinmoy half came around and I hoped that I could at least break 83 to give me the feeling I was on track. Instead I barely snuck under 85, knowing pretty early on that I was in strife. Fair to say my mood darkened. Probably the only saving grace was that I'd run more than 2 consecutive days for the first time since the ankle injury, and that I'd done a couple of hard sessions as well. So I certainly couldn't say that I went into the race overly fresh. But I had expected more, and the fact I never felt good at 4 minute pace was not a good sign.

I continued with training, having discussed with Dozer the best course of action; being a short taper of 10-14 days. I was having to take Voltaren on a rather regular basis which is something I don't like at all. I did though have a couple of encouraging runs including a solo lap of the tan on the Monday prior to the race. While 13:51 isn't quick for most, it is only 2 seconds off my PB. It gave me a little burst of confidence anyway. That was quickly sapped by my regular massage therapist who explained that the calf issues I was experiencing were likely caused by damage I'd also done to my achilles when I'd rolled the ankle. He did think I'd be ok though to get through the marathon. So of course I wrapped myself in cottonwool until the big day.

On the Saturday a lunch of chicken rice with fellow marathoners Gerard, Vince, Amy and Matt Callaghan was thoroughly enjoyable. Later that day I finally put my number onto my miler singlet. And in what I consider a very odd move from me, I used the pins that I did for MM2012. I don't actually consider myself superstitious; but there you go.

A dreadful night's sleep (or lack thereof) ensued. It should be noted that I'd been providing a little guidance to Vince and Amy about race day and ensuring that it is all a very relaxed affair. Pack beforehand; know exactly what you're going to eat and drink; how you're getting to the race, where you're going to park. I packed my bag in the 5 minutes before I left the house.

My ultimate plan was to run with Gerard aiming for 2:55. I was hopeful that I could hang with him for the first 30k, but not overly optimistic of even that. Gerard was clearly in great shape, as evidenced by a 13:23 tan lap (26 second PB). I was very concerned that I'd be holding him back. I make it clear in our warm up that there will come a time when we will likely have to separate and that there should be no remorse in doing so.

As usual I'm on the start line and wondering what the hell I'm doing there, and why I'm about to put myself through this. One great thing though is that conditions are frankly ideal.

But we're off. 4:08 is the intended pace from the gun, and that's pretty much where we quickly settle. As we round Flinders St into St Kilda Rd I position myself beautifully for the cameras; but I still can't bring myself to pose in the style that Vince has made all of his own. You've either got it or you don't. I don't.

By about 4k and Gerard has dropped back a bit. I'm fairly certain I'm not going too quickly. I just maintain my pace expecting him to come up alongside me fairly soon. A few glances back over the next 3k or so and I can't see him, so the only thing to do is now concentrate on my own race. No doubt he'll come storming up to me at some point.

Thankfully having started a little quicker than last year and I'm pretty clear of traffic. I can't say I felt too flash through the first 6k or so but I get the opening 10k done in 41:35, only 15 seconds behind schedule. At about 6k I found I really settled into a nice rhythm and picked the pace up. At 14k Racer passes me my first gel and makes a comment about me having foxed a few people in the lead up as I'm well ahead of my predicted time at that point, more than a minute and a half in fact. I don't want to get ahead myself but I'm thinking that this is going ok.

Slips joined me for a short spell and told me that Smurf wasn't going overly well; something that seemed painfully obvious to me outside pit straight. I know he's had groin issues and can only assume that is the problem. Running is a cruel game.

I'm continuing to move really comfortably, going beyond a lot of people. I get through 20k in 81:55, about 1:40 up on last year. The 2nd 10k is a fairly swift for me 40:20. I keep looking at my watch, something I promised myself I wouldn't do, and wondering what is going on. Oh well, just go with the flow. Woollies joined me for a kilometre or so around the 20k mark, another nice distraction.

From there I start chatting with a few folk around me; the miler top is always a good conversation starter. Mark Stodden and I swap some stories; he's located at the Alfred, so I do the hard sell on joining the milers. We hang together for about 6k before I move beyond that group. He's aiming for his first sub 3hr marathon and is obviously well on track to beat that comfortably. Best of all he's keen to come along to a miler session.

At the turnaround in Elwood I'm happy to see Gerard coming the other way and maybe 200m behind me. High five time, and thankfully I don't do a James Faulkner on him. I can also see that James is nicely placed.

I've certainly dropped the pace, but it is still pretty healthy. I get to 30k in 2:03:15 meaning 41:20 for the last 10k, or spot on the intended 4:08 pace. And overall I'm about 45 seconds ahead of schedule, and 73 seconds up on last year. Obviously I had no idea of this at the time but I knew I was going ok.

At the bottom of Fitzroy St Dozer lets me know that Smurf is just ahead. I go by him with Steve Williams not long after the turn into St Kilda Rd. Much like last year with ironically with Dozer it is very hard to know what to say; but in typical Smurf style he's urging me on.

I continue to move ok, just trying to concentrate on staying as relaxed as possible. I'm very happy to see the back of the tan, and then I've got Tony Russo for company for a little way. I'm just hanging on, but my pace is staying ok. There are a few drops of rain for a short spell that actually come as a nice relief.



And before you know it I'm heading into the MCG. There's a group of 4-5 probably 15-30m ahead so I give it a bit of a crack over the finish and get all but one of them.

It's over; it's 2:54:15 and a 74 second PB. Satisfaction and relief is the overwhelming emotion. Rafa is the first familiar face I see, and after I've stopped wobbling we have a nice chat. Before long he points out that Gerard is finishing, comfortably under 2:57 and a big PB. There are big things in store for him.

And now comes the wait for Vince. I try to get close to the finish but one official in particular is constantly moving me away. Unfortunately I missed him crossing the finish, but it is clear he's achieved his goal. The joy on his face is immense, and it marks the highlight of the day.

I've pulled up pretty well thankfully, just the calf really being the only true sore point. I'll take it pretty easy for the next 3-4 weeks and then build up towards Tokyo in Feb; where Gerard and I will have some unfinished business. I find it fascinating that in 2012 the period up until 6 weeks prior to the marathon was rather troubled, and then smooth sailing from there; whereas this time around things went well until 6 weeks prior whereupon they seemed to fall apart. No doubt I made much more of it than perhaps I ought to, but hypochondria can do that to you. I'd like to think even at my age I can still improve and perhaps get close to 2:52 in the next few years. But perhaps best just to try and focus a little more short-term.

My thanks to Racer and his team for the magnificent support, and to Dozer for all his advice. My congratulations to all those other milers who ran so well.

Overall Rank Category Rank Gender Rank

125 13 112

KM	ACCUM	SPEED / PACE	SPLIT	OVERALL	DIVISION	GENDER
10k	0:41:41	14.39 / 4:10	41:41	239	22	222
20k	1:22:01	14.63 / 4:06	40:20	178	18	163
30k	2:03:21	14.59 / 4:07	41:20	160	16	147
40k	2:45:16	14.52 / 4:08	41:55	132	13	119
42.2k	2:54:21	14.52 / 4:08	09:05	125	13	112