

## **Melbourne Marathon 2013**

### **Ewen "Smurf" Vowels**

This year I had grand plans and the best intentions of bettering last year's 2:42. I knew it would take a perfect run and good conditions to match that effort.

They say that the road to hell is paved with good intentions, unfortunately for me this year it was just paved with bitumen.

### **The Stuttering Road To**

The lead up to this year's Melbourne Marathon was far from ideal.

The debilitating Osteitis Pubis (OP) first reared its ugly head in the 5Ms event all the way back in March. At the end of the day I went to lift my left leg to put my track pants on and I found I had lost all power and was quite sore in the left hip flexor. This was beginning of a hate-hate relationship with my body. I foolishly tried to run through it which resulted in a long stretch on the sidelines.

Post diagnosis was 4 sessions of pain with the good people at Miritis Massage. These treatments and the break from running certainly helped with the recovery, but I was already meant to be into the 20 week build for Melbourne Marathon. I was running some decent times (Puffing Billy, 10k and Tan PBs) but just couldn't get the consistent volume of training required to get in peak marathon shape.

Burnley went fairly well (78) with no real issues with the OP. After Burnley I did two 30+ runs including 36 of hills at Flinders, however it was during the Waverley 1 Hour run that it all started to come undone again. About 45 minutes in the left hip flexor started to hurt, but since there was still two weeks to go so I was hoping a long taper would help.

Only ran the two Wednesdays in the lead up to the race and got through the carb-loading in preparation for the big day.

### **Race Day**

#### ***The Good***

Conditions were pretty good after the windy Winter/Spring, so that eliminated one excuse.

Got to the G a bit late and jogged over to the start line. Realised I'd forgotten to register for preferred start but snuck in anyway. Saw Nick Paine and Tony George looking focussed and ready to roll, and before we knew it we were off and racing. Like last year I found myself near Nail Gun (Cam Hall from MPAC) and chatted away up St Kilda Road. Pace was a fraction fast, but I was sitting in the draft of a good pack so it was fine. Cam accelerated up towards Fitzroy St and I settled back into my own rhythm. First drink stop went smoothly with a contingent of friendly Miler faces to say hi to (Slips, GG, Race, Thai). It was very nice to have support out early in the race.

Picked up Stevie Williams and his son (on a bike) at Pit Lane and continued on around the course. Once I turned around on Pit Lane I saw the 2:50 train with Nick and Cheddar flying along. Just behind with a stacked group was House and Danger. Onto Fitzroy St and pace still good and everything

going to plan. Another flawless drink handover takes place - my personal domestique grabs the drink and offers to hold it while I run – this is a luxury that few runners are ever afforded! See the family of Smurfs at a café enjoying breakfast and give them a wave.



Figure 1 - Stevie and Stevie Jnr out on course

### ***The Bad***

Stevie and I turned off Fitzroy St. At this stage I was still feeling decent in the cardio department but was starting to feel everything tighten up through the left hip, adductor, abs and groin. Stevie Williams graciously went from running beside me to running ahead to break the headwind which was greatly appreciated. A few Ks down Beaconsfield and the body keeps tightening up and the pace which was easy just a few minutes ago is starting to take its toll. 16km in and I know now I'm in strife. Not great so early on but I was hoping that backing off the pace a bit would help. Coming up to the half way mark and I knew my day was done, told Slips that it wasn't to be and he asked what the plan was from here. "Just finish" was my response.

Past Luna Park and its getting ugly, splits are slowing and pain is growing. This was a truly excellent combination for a bad marathon time, especially with 18km to go. Just before the turn around to head back to Melbourne the 2:50 train catches me and shortly afterwards I catch a glimpse of Bacchus who gives me a few words of encouragement but knows I'm toast. I tell Stevie to go run with Nick and Cheddar who are just in front but he foolishly decides to run with the loser for a bit longer. I see if I can lift at all and urge Stevie to try and get on the back of the train. We hold the gap for a couple of K but this just raises the discomfort with the left hip flexor and I again drop back to slow splits.

Back up to the Fitzroy St and I see Dozer by the side of the road. We'd had a chat the day before and he knew that it could go pear shaped. He has a wry smile on his face as he tells me that it can be a cruel sport. I think he was secretly enjoying the sufferfest. The Smurfs are just past them and they know I'm done for too but give some much needed encouragement. Up the hill to the merge with the Half runners and it's about to turn into a death march. Stevie calls it a day – oh how I wish I was

running with his light and flowing style at this point of the race... Huge amount of thanks to him for sticking with me for as long as he did – cheers!

I keep plodding down St Kilda Road and pretty soon Rog, Coalminer and James Simonetta cruise past – all of these guys are looking comfortable still. Racer offers to help but I send him off to look after the guys who are running very strongly at 33km in. First > 5 minute split comes about now and I realise that a sub-3 hour run is quickly disappearing. At 35km House and the 3 hour train confirm this as they motor past, I say hi to House (I think he wasn't expecting to see me) and he says to jump on. He tells his group that 4:30s from here will give them sub-3 so I try to match their pace but can only go 1km at this speed before the pain creeps up again. Hally and the Mithos say hi and cheer me on.



Figure 2 - I believe Slips is thinking: "How the f\*\*k can someone run this slowly?"

## ***The Ugly***

Wasn't looking forward to the road up Linlithgow Avenue, but then I remembered that I'd at least see Slips again so that was a positive. Right on queue a posse of Milers were waiting and Slips slotted in beside me as I plodded along. I was very happy for the company and we chatted to pass the time. Someone said I should have been racing if I could still talk and I replied that my race ended 20km ago. Just before the turn onto Domain Road we found the Duffman who was getting some assistance with some nasty hamstring cramps. He got to his feet and promptly ran past us. Just ahead was another person having a bad day out – he was alternating between walking and jogging – and was sadly going faster than me.

Running down St Kilda Road at 37km came a most unwelcome split of 5:57. Woolies has joined Slips and myself and I welcome the chance to take my mind off the hell that has become this marathon attempt.

At this point the left hip flexor is causing me a serious amount of pain with each step. To top it off it feels like I'm getting knifed in the lower abdominal muscles and all I can do is just convince myself that it will be over soon.

Another couple of Ks down and the final nail in the coffin is drilled into my already shattered ego. 6:07 is not a split I ever expected to see in a marathon again. Slips and Woolies try to lift my spirits and get me to push it home but each time I do it just flares up the pain. Heart rate is laughably low (130) but I've lost all power through the hips. The adductors are tight as guitar strings and the body is just saying stop.

I've had some tough races in the past so I'm not unfamiliar with pain and exhaustion. I've done a 3:57 marathon @ 95kg, had a bad patch at 85km into Oxfam and I hit the wall earlier in the year in Two Bays 56km. At no point in any of those races did I think of stopping. Now those thoughts of stepping off are quite enticing, but it's not in my nature. Given the fact that the Milers still give Racer grief for stepping off the Tan and TW grief for stepping off a Mile race - I don't think I could live down the sledging if I took the soft option.

Woolies and Slips bid me farewell on the downhill to the G. In all honesty I could have used a hug from Slips – the day had well and truly gone that way. A bit further down the road John Dixon then Licka cruised past me offering a few encouraging words. Just before the ramp up to the haloed turf was a half marathoner who had collapsed and was unconscious. Poor bastard - not the awe inspiring run around the G he was looking for, I felt a small amount of guilty consolation that at least I would finish. Finally arrived on the MCG and looked at the watch and realised I'd have to summon something to scrape under 3:10 so I shuffled around and just made it.

Saw some very happy Milers around the finish line said hi and congratulated them on their great runs. Saw LG one of the White Kenyan Kanter stalwarts who'd done a great comeback half! Unlike last year I just wanted to slink off, so I quickly made my way down the race with LG.

I had an awkward emotional moment (sorry LG) when the child handing out the medals gave me mine. Firstly it was the bitter disappointment of six months of hard work for little reward. I won't say I was devastated but I was certainly very dismayed by the way the day had panned out. I knew I

wasn't in shape to run a great time, but I wasn't prepared for such a big miss in terms of what I thought I could manage.

The real reason for the waterworks was the fact that that last 10km of the race were so pain filled, demoralising and utterly miserable that I was just overwhelmed with the relief that I didn't have to run another step. I had finally made it to the finish line without quitting and at the end of the day that was the best I could do.



Figure 3 – Running ugly!

## The Aftermath

I grabbed a quick massage and required help to get off the table as the abs were shot. Slunk out of the G with my tail between my legs but bumped into an ecstatic Vince Yeo and Roger Mellie (well done you two!).

After the race my left leg was limited to about 20% knee lift and getting onto the bike to ride home was not pleasant.

Hindsight is always 20/20. Although my Burnley time suggested a 2:45 to 2:50 was on the cards I just wasn't in the right shape to do it. Going into a race carrying a nagging injury and trying to run flat out isn't the greatest idea either. Finally the taper was too light, I needed to run a few more times those last two weeks to keep the body from seizing up so much. Live and learn I suppose.

After a week of reflection all is not lost.

I started the race when it would have been easier to pull the plug.

I finished when it would have been far easier to stop. My third fastest marathon but the only one I haven't enjoyed.

I kept my Spartan streak alive at 6 out of 10 completed Melbourne Marathons. When I started running marathons, I always admired the Spartan Singlet clad warriors out on course. Finishing this race to get one step closer to being a Spartan was a big motivation when the going got really tough.

I will aim to get my body sorted and hope to be back for a more fulfilling marathon in 2014.

## Thanks

When you are running well and knocking out PBs, everyone is keen to support you and urge you on. Last year the Milers welcomed me into the fold and did that for me.

However when the chips were down the Milers were really there for me this year. That's the beauty of the club. I had a horrid day out and the support on course was unbelievably important in getting me to the finish line. I made a conscious effort to smile and acknowledge all the Milers that I saw out there. Apologies if I missed anyone.

Thanks to Thai for the photos (I tried to spot you and smile). Racer and GG at for drinks at 28km and general support on the day.

Most importantly thanks to my Miler and Waverley club mates Stevie, Slips and Woolies.

Stevie ran with me for 20+km and saw the transition from good to bad.

Slips provided perfect drinks support all day. Slips and Woolies were there at the end when I needed it most.

Finally and most importantly my family for putting up with the ups and downs of my running and training all year – especially the foul moods due to injury breaks.

## Splits

Overall Rank	Category Rank	Gender Rank
442	251	406

### HIDE SPLITS

LOCATION	SPLIT			RACE TIME	ACCUMMULATIVE		
	TIME	DISTANCE	SPEED/PACE		OVERALL	DIVISION	GENDER
10k	00:38:19	10.0km	15.66 / 3:50	00:38:22	69	50	65
13k	00:15:07	4.0km	15.88 / 3:47	00:53:30	70	51	66
20k	00:24:22	6.0km	14.77 / 4:04	01:17:52	82	58	77
30k	00:44:41	10.0km	13.43 / 4:28	02:02:34	153	103	140
40k	00:54:26	10.0km	11.02 / 5:27	02:57:01	363	215	339
42k	00:12:57	2.2km	10.19 / 5:53	03:09:58	430	241	394