

CHRISTCHURCH MARATHON – 1 JUNE 2008

PRE-RACE PLANNING & LEAD UP

A different type of build up to the Christchurch marathon/half marathon from a MMM perspective, in that we went into the race with a relatively low key approach and not carrying the burden of ridiculous pre-race predictions from a myriad of predictors and predictors mates, cousins and second cousins. This was welcomed from the 3 of us and it felt like we were skipping out of the country unnoticed.

After doing Melbourne in October 2007 I was not looking for a marathon quite so close however was tempted to do this one as PM & Dan had mentally committed to it and I was able to share some accommodation with them which cut down the costs. We all firmly committed in mid April when we purchased our airfares, and barring injury we were all going across to NZ to run.

Official marathon training started on Monday 3 March and it was lucky that the MMM program followed the types of sessions that I was after, so the lunchtime runs fitted in well ;-). Although Dan & PM got up to the lofty training heights of 175km/week, I settled for an average of about 120 kms/week for about 8 weeks. No significant injuries during training and it I was able to complete half of the battle – i.e. getting to the start line in 1 piece.

After assessing my recent form and getting some last minute advice from PM (run even and sensibly) and Ando (throw away the watch and just run as hard as you can) I was suitably confused. I decided on a race strategy of trying to run as even splits as possible and hold it together until the end. My goals going into the race were:

My A goal was to run sub 2:40 and run it pretty even going through half way between 78 & 79 mins. Anything quicker than that would be a bonus.

B goal if I couldn't go sub 2:40 was a PB (quicker than 2:44).

C goal – There was no C goal. Anything 2:44 and over would have been a disappointing result given the extra work I had put in.

I also had 2 other supplementary goals. To go sub 80 minutes in both halves and also never run a km split slower than 4 min pace.

I was pretty confident I would run a PB but only about 25% confident of going sub 2:40.

My plan was to average 3:47's or quicker with the intention of running between 3:42 & 3:47 for as long as I physically could hold that pace.

THE DAYS LEADING UP TO THE RACE

FRIDAY 30/5.

An early start as we needed to be at the airport by just after 7:00am. Took off from home about 6am and met up with PM inside the terminal. Got through customs and then found out that our flight was delayed by about an hour. Great!!!! – Could have snagged another hours sleep. Met up with Kirsten (KJ) and Juanita (JL) inside the terminal. They were also heading across to do the marathon.

Landing in ChCh late as expected, and ended up getting to the hotel at about 4:30. PM & I head off for a 25 minute ultra slow jog to stretch the legs. PM's ultra slow pace seems pretty solid to me.

Catch up with KJ & JL for dinner. It was carb loading time and a bowl of pasta, some bread & some pizza went down very well. Not content with the feast a trip to 'Pak N Save' (which could only be described as the Bunnings of Supermarkets) gave us a chance to grab a few extra supplies.

It had been a long day and conscious of getting a good night's sleep 2 days before the race we were in bed with the lights out by about 11:30pm (note 9:30 Melbourne time). Drifted off to sleep only to be woken an hour later by Dan after arriving on a later flight. Dan was up for a chat but PM was having none of it. Dan stated that this was the one time he had ever known PM not to be talking, and was amused at PM's subdued demeanour. The tables would be turned on Dan on Sunday morning.

SATURDAY 31/5

An ordinary night's sleep which was disappointing. Get up at about 7am and head down to breakfast.

Have a chat to the Marketing guy who organised accom for us about the race and also met Hanny Allston who was due to compete in the half marathon. Found out that Hanny was possibly heading to Melbourne next year and have already got her pencilled in to run for Sandy.

Polish off a big breakfast and then head out for a last jog with PM & Dan. We were out for about 20 minutes and stopped to catch some final run-throughs for Mullet Productions.

About midday we headed off to the convention centre to pick up our race packs. Pick up my race number '3231' whilst Dan & PM grab their race numbers that simply read 'Hornery' and 'Martinico'. You've really made it when you get your name issued instead of a number.

The afternoon was spent getting drink bottles ready and catching a quick nanna nap.

Out for dinner for another pasta/rice meal with KJ & JL as well as Dave Ruschena & Ben Cameron also of Melbourne, before heading back to the hotel to watch the NSW Waratahs get beaten in the Super 14's Rugby Union Final which was being held in Christchurch. On the way back however another trip was made to Pak N Save so that Mullet Productions could get some footage of this supermarket giant.

Tucked away by about 10:30 and all are nervous about the day ahead.

Another crap night's sleep.

RACE DAY

Despite not getting to sleep until about midnight I woke up at about 4:15 and couldn't get back to sleep. PM was itching for a pre-race jog and headed out the door at just before 6am. I joined him for breakfast at around 6:15 and he informed me that he had just about been beaten up by guys leaving a nearby pub. Lucky he knows how to run fast.

Around 6:30 we head back to the room, with no key, and wake up a less than amused Dan who was enjoying a mini sleep in. He wasn't getting much sympathy from us since he had chosen the soft half marathon option.

Last minute preps were done and we headed off from the hotel at 8am to drop off our drinks by 8:15. All 3 of us were fairly low key now and the nervous energy was building.

The positioning of their start line is right in between their convention centre and the town hall, so it is in an A1 position. There are lots of toilet facilities and you can do your last minute stretching, pondering etc. indoors away from the cold. Down to our race gear at 8:50 and hand in our clothing bags.

INTO THE REAL STUFF

Wind the clock back to October 2007 and I had Mitho & dozer to run with for more than half of the race and keep each other spurred along. This marathon was a lot different.

The 3 of us had been granted entry into the Preferred Start area so we were able to do a few last minute run throughs in front of the field and then casually take up a spot near the front of the starting line. They started the 10km, half marathon & full marathon all together so there was a pretty big field amassed at the start.

A few run throughs before the start and the race gets underway bang on 9am. My aim is to try and get to the first km in about 3:40 and establish a good rhythm. All this meant however is that I was engulfed by a huge mass of 10km & half runners over the first km (Note however that I did see quite a few of these people only a few kms down the road as they spent their petrol tickets very early). Thru the first km in 3:37, adjust my pace slightly and go thru the 2nd km in 3:47. By the 3km mark I had found my race rhythm and was running low to mid 3:40's pace.

There was still a fair crowd until 5kms where the 10km runners then peeled off. There had been a runner sitting about 10m ahead of me for a few kms so I decided to get on his shoulder and feed off his pace. We had a quick chat and he was running the half and was aiming for about 79mins so I was happy to run with him for a while. He pushed the pace at about the 10km mark so I let him go. It was also at this point that I was having some doubts about the race. My left calf was starting to tighten, and I wasn't feeling 100% comfortable, and my initial thought was that I had gone out too hard. I figured no point slowing down now, so pushed on and hoped that I got it right.

At 11kms a marathoner (Mark Reid) caught up and ran with me. After a brief chat we established that we were both trying to run sub 2:40. We ran together for 4 kms until he started to slow down. Although it would have been good to have some company, I was pleased to get away from him. Not that he didn't seem like a nice bloke, on the contrary, he seemed to be the most popular guy in Christchurch. Running in our pack of 2, every second person on the streets knew this guy. For 4kms, all I heard was "Go Mark", "You're looking good Mark", "Doing fantastic Mark". After hearing the guy's name for the 100th time I was eventually glad to be not running with him anymore. As it turns out he ran 2:47, so struggled in the 2nd half of the race. Maybe he wasn't looking that good after all.

I pushed forward on my own and started to reel in a few half marathoners from about 17kms. This gives you a boost to know that you are still going along OK. At 19kms we had to run through Hagley Park and head to the halfway point (the start/finish line

as the race was a 2 lapper). At this point we were heading into the wind, and it was more than just a light breeze. We would continue to head into the wind for another 10kms. Went through halfway in 78:37 and Dan gave me a quick update on how he went, and how PM was travelling.

Luckily I had been able to maintain pace and wasn't feeling any worse than I was at the 10km point. The halfway point for me meant the effective start of a 21.1km timetrial where I had 81 minutes & 22 seconds to get under 2:40. There was literally no one to be seen at the start of the 2nd half. I got a glimpse of a runner up ahead and passed this guy (who was really struggling) just before 25kms. At the 25km drink stop I lost around 5 seconds looking for my drink bottle. I was pretty p1ssed off by this and got passed back by the struggling guy. Picked him back up 200m later and continued on my lone timetrial. From this point I literally did not encounter another marathon runner throughout the race, although did have to run past many many half marathon walkers.

Fairly typically it was around 28kms where the first main fatigue started kicking in. My pace dropped slightly and I was working hard to keep it together. With the fatigue, my calf started tightening up more and by 32kms it was not that enjoyable any more. With 10kms to go I knew something roughly just under 4 min kms would be enough, and I was doing everything I could to maintain a pace between 3:50 & 3:55. My feet were now burning from a couple of blisters

The last 10kms were just one big grind. Actually fairly uneventful, apart from the fact my feet were burning and my calves were seizing up. Strangely enough (and I can't really explain it) my quads were fine throughout the race and even pulled up OK the next day. It was just a matter of putting my head down and counting down the kms and I was able to maintain a pace around 3:55/km. With 2.2kms to go I had 9:24 up my sleeve for a sub 2:40 so I knew I was there. It didn't make it that much easier however and I was just craving the finishing line and wanting to stop. With 400m to go I could see the finish line. If I had anything left I would have picked up the pace and run under 2:39 but the legs just had nothing to give. Dan ran the final 200m beside me with camera in hand getting some close up video footage. A big fist pump and a yell of relief 10m out and then I was there. The clock read 2:39:09 as I finished and officially it was a net time of 2:39:06.

Dan was with me at the finish and PM rushed over within 20 seconds. It was then that I found out how fast those guys ran (PM – 2:24:10) (Dan 66:54) and I couldn't believe it. They both finished 3rd and got some cash to take home with them. Fantastic effort. KJ didn't end up finishing the marathon and was on hand to take a photo of the 3 of us shortly after I finished. It will be a photo that will be going straight to the pool room. The 3 of us just look elated with what we have achieved. Pure joy.

POST RACE

Some post race photos and a few high 5's. After about 5 minutes of standing around it was getting pretty cold so grabbed my clothes bag and changed out of my race gear which was a relief.

Stepped outside to see the last of the sub 3 hr runners come through and see the joy on their faces to be followed by the frustrated looks on people who ran 3:00:???. One of the more bizarre things I witnessed however was the first guy who missed 3hrs. He was about to finish in around 3:00:10. He stopped before the finish, grabbed a mates camera, took his own photo of the finishing clock and then stepped across the finish line.

Temporarily lost PM & Dan so walked/hobbled back to the hotel with Dave Ruschena. Called home to deliver news of the race time and then when the lads returned did some post race interviews for Mullet Productions. This was then followed by the tasteless popping of the blood blister which was all caught on the DVD.

The presentation ceremony was held at the Town Hall in a multi tiered theatre at 2pm. This was a lavish affair with a brass band, too many speeches and then lots and lots of prizes (including the 2.5 & 5.5kms junior races). Dave (2nd in the marathon) PM & Dan all received prizemoney as well as a Magnum of local Champagne each.

POST RACE CELEBRATIONS

Once the presentations finished it was time to unwind. We were all pretty hungry and were all well and truly sick of carbs so headed off to a café for a meal, the most popular being the all day breakfast of bacon, eggs, mushrooms, sausages & hash browns.

The 3 of us plus KJ, JL and Dave then decided it was our duty to consume the 3 Magnums of Champers. 6 skinny, dehydrated & tired marathon runners consuming the equivalent of a standard bottle each plus a few beers equals some interesting footage for the DVD. The real good stuff however may not have made it past the editor's cutting room floor.

THE NEXT DAY

Quads, hips, knees and hammies are fatigued but generally feel OK. My left calf however is a different story. It pulled up very sore and after some physio is better but still tight 10 days later. Very different story to my previous marathons where my hips the next day have been filled with rust.

PM woke up like he hadn't even raced and was still walking on air. Dan was the same.

Big thanks to:

Kylie for putting up with all the training and allowing me to head over to NZ with the boys.

PM & Dan for the invite. It was a great weekend and if you get a chance to have a look at the DVD you will see that we had a ball.

The whole MMM group for their support, particularly the lunchtime regulars who keep me pushing to keep up with them.

For those that love splits, here are mine:

5km – 18:26

10km – 18:49 (37:15)

15km – 18:37 (55:52)

20km – 18:35 (1:14:27)

25km – 18:49 (1:33:16)

30km – 18:42 (1:51:58)
35km – 19:10 (2:11:08)
40km – 19:27 (2:30:35)
42.195 - 2:39:06

I've done 4 marathons now and as I've said before my respect for the race grows everytime. It is a tough tough test of your will to push through fatigue. Can't wait until October when I can casually stroll around the course and watch a few milers tackling the Melbourne course.

No plans for my next one in the near future.

Cheers

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