

The lead up

I decided it was time to do another marathon after Oxfam this year- I figured that it would be a shame to waste the base I had developed over the previous 5 months, and that at 40 my opportunities at running a really good time would be getting pretty limited. On top of this, the 2:38 that I had run in my one and only marathon in 2003 was looking more and more pedestrian as the likes of PM, House and Thorny stormed past it, while AL (who would have been lucky to have broken 38 minutes for 10k when I did that run) was also getting dangerously close.

So I set myself for the Melbourne Marathon, and for no other reason than it sounded like a nice round number, I decided to aim at 2:30 (in retrospect considerations of ability and form should really have been part of this decision).

Anyhow, having decided on my target I set about gleaning as much as I can from all the Milers who had had marathon experience (a quick apology here to the multitude that were cornered during a long run with incessant questions on training, pacing nutrition etc with literally nowhere to run).

My initial plan was to build on my base which basically meant hours of long runs and the odd speed session. This stage is painful, not just for the hours but for the little rewards you see. Throughout the entire AV season I was barely able to run 3:30 per km in a cross country race so the prospect of doing 42 in a row was looking extremely doubtful.

As the marathon neared I got some pretty handy advice from PM on sessions that maintained speed, which I combined with the AL training program and the results were instant. Suddenly I was smashing the speed sessions, and I was gradually able to pick up the pace at the end of the long runs. It was around this time that I did Burnley, and a 72:46 half gave me some hope that 2:30 was within reach, although I still hadn't run anywhere near this pace past 21km, so it was a serious leap of faith to think that my training would be sufficient to double this distance at what still seemed like a fairly intense pace. Interestingly my doubts didn't seem to be shared by many forum observers and predictors who had me down as a monty to beat the likes of Bret Coleman (never beaten him in any race) and Thorny (1 win in the AV season) and a good chance to beat 2:30- I guess I did do the Yasso session in under 2 mins 30 per rep- and we all know what a good predictor of marathon times this is !!

Race eve/day

The night before the marathon and I was extremely nervous (and fat and a little tired). I bored Jann and the kids again with different possible race scenarios to which they dutifully feigned interest, before I set the alarm and went to bed. With thoughts of the marathon going through my mind I woke up in the middle of the night to notice the electricity had gone out- which meant the alarm wouldn't work. In a panic I got up and rummaged around for the watch with an alarm on it, and under the light of the kids night light set the alarm. Half an hour later I jumped back out of bed realising that the watch hadn't been changed from day light savings time. I tried to sleep the remaining 2 hours till the alarm was set to go off, but I was so panicky that I checked the watch every 20 minutes until 5:00am.

Arriving at the G I checked in my bags and went to the preferred start area prior to the race only to be told by an official that I wasn't allowed in there. I showed him my sticker admitting me access, but the man clearly didn't get many opportunities to exert authority and he wasn't going to let this one pass—so no entry for me. So I lined up at the front of the main pack when I bumped into Thorny who (even without the sticker) simply walked under the barrier and gave the official a look that clearly meant he belonged there. To my amazement Thorny wasn't even challenged so I snuck under and tried to give a similar confident aura (not sure I achieved this but the official was losing his job satisfaction pretty fast and couldn't be bothered arguing) me). As we waited for the start with Deeks in our ear I bumped into Luke and Brett (looking resplendent in his Vic uniform) but couldn't find Dozer. For some reason this worried me (clearly I was a man on the edge at this time), but eventually the big fella turned up looking relaxed.

The final seconds counted down till suddenly we were off. Within 100 meters I was running with a pack that included pretty much only state reps, with only the Ethiopians and one or two other runners ahead. Seeing the likes of Ant Rickards around me I wasn't sure I was where I should be, but my Garmin indicated 3:33 for the first km, so the pace was spot on. After 8:10 we went past the 2km marker— a quick check with the blokes around me and it was confirmed that this was after about 2.3km. Thoughts ranging from how the f** hard is it to measure 2km to I hope they haven't stuffed up the overall distance went through my head, but realising I couldn't do anything about it I pretty much decided to ignore the km markers from that point on.

After about 4km I noticed that the pack I was in was definitely running faster than I intended (doing the last k in 3:28) I looked behind me to see where the next runners were, but they were already about 40 meters back, so I was caught between trying to keep with the pack or run solo for a bit. After toing and froing for a bit I decided on the latter, and it was pretty much from this point on that I ran the rest of the race alone (well at least without other competitors).

As the kilometres ticked by I was feeling great and really enjoying the huge support from the likes of KJ, Juanita, as well as Slips, PM and Troy and the general public. At several points I got glimpses of Brett, Thorny and Dozer— all looking very relaxed and running strong, while Luke looked like he was having the time of his life as he ambled along smiling and chatting to anyone who would listen.

I went through the half in 73:40ish —definitely faster than I intended, but I was still feeling good and there didn't seem to be any good reason for slowing down. I was now ticking off the kms in almost identical time (3:31s) and had moved up to 14th place as a runner stepped off (weak bastard).

At the 28km mark Slips past me my drink and ran alongside for a bit. Apparently all the Milers were doing well and PBs all round were well on the cards. I checked my watch at the end of this km and discovered that I had done a 3:38— I didn't notice any change of pace, so put it down to having the drink. At 30km I checked my watch again— another 3:38— I was still feeling fine, but my pace had inexplicably decreased. At this point I had 45 minutes to run 12.2km, so I knew that as long as things didn't blow out I was still a good chance of getting under 2:30. I tried to relax my stride and just ride out this

little hiccup. Over the next 5kms things didnt improve- I was now starting to feel quite fatigued and my pace had slowed to 3:45-3:50 per km. Whilst I still had 25 minutes to do the last 7.2km (which would have been pretty close to my original target), I knew that 2:30 was now gone and I would be lucky to get under 2:35.

As I went along City road towards the tan things started to go from bad to worse- I was starting to get a bit light headed, and the fatigue was becoming all encompassing. I started counting breaths and focussing on the 4 meters in front of me to help take my mind off the pain. It was about this time that Mike McIntyre breezed past me with words of encouragement. Mikes a lovely guy, but I seem to remember thinking f*# off you patronising old bastard or something similar as I turned to head up the outside of the tan. It was shortly after this that I came to Grunters drink station- Grunter later apologised for not having a drink ready for me, but to be honest I didnt even think that a drink was due as I remained focussed on those 4 meters.

This next stage becomes a bit hazy, but it wasnt long after this that I came to the Magpie drink station- all I could think of at the time is geez theres a lot of people here when Mitho (I think) thrust a drink into my hand. Suddenly PM, Slips and Troys voices were around me lending encouragement, but it wasnt long after this that the fatigue became too much and I had to walk. The guys continued to encourage me to keep moving, and reminded me that I had done the work and could still get a decent time which was enough to get me going again. This pattern continued 2 or 3 more times to the top of the hill, as I inwardly cursed the genius who thought a hill at this point in a marathon was a good idea. As I headed back down towards St.Kilda Road the guys kept spurring me on (although there was a fair bit of what they were saying that I couldnt comprehend) and I gradually got into some sort of rhythm. Around this point Thorny and Brett ran past looking extremely strong (at least for the 4 meters they were within my range), and PM, Slips and Troy handed chaperoning duties over to GG and Dizzy.

At some point in the last 4km GG dropped off and I was left running in a complete blur while Dizzys voice would suddenly give some encouragement from one side of me then the other (I dont actually recall seeing Dizzy during this time, but assume that I hadnt created a phantom supporter in my fatigued stupor).

Finally after what must have been the longest 3km I have ever run, I entered the tunnel to go into the G. What an amazing feeling that is- the whole atmosphere of the place, and the buzzing of the crowd (at least I think it was the crowd) was enough to carry me through the last 300 meters. As I approached the line I was wrapped to see that I would get under 2:35, and managed one of the most unimpressive fist pumps ever seen, before staggering to the mighty power aid drink station.

The post mortem

Its getting pretty late, but I would like to finish off by saying thanks to the Milers that helped me in the lead up to the race and on the race day itself. At the end of the day I have a new PB, and a pretty good one at that. The support I received in the last 7km in particular was awesome, and I seriously dont know if I would have been able to finish without it.

For those who want the gory details my km splits are below

Split Time

1 0:03:33
2 0:03:33
3 0:03:30
4 0:03:28
5 0:03:30
6 0:03:25
7 0:03:26
8 0:03:36
9 0:03:25
10 0:03:23
11 0:03:27
12 0:03:26
13 0:03:27
14 0:03:30
15 0:03:31
16 0:03:31
17 0:03:32
18 0:03:32
19 0:03:32
20 0:03:32
21 0:03:31
22 0:03:30
23 0:03:31
24 0:03:28
25 0:03:32
26 0:03:31
27 0:03:31
28 0:03:31
29 0:03:38
30 0:03:39
31 0:03:49
32 0:03:46
33 0:03:48
34 0:03:48
35 0:03:47
36 0:03:58
37 0:04:44
38 0:04:20
39 0:04:05
40 0:04:18
41 0:04:10
42 0:04:09
42.2 0:00:41

Cheers, Smoothy

Not Peer Reviewed