

I think it was Confucius that said something like:

There are 3 ways by which humans learn and evolve  
First by innovation which is the most difficult  
Second by imitation which is the easiest  
But most commonly by experience which is the bitterest.

I've reflected on that a fair bit over the past 12 months.

Oxfam restored my confidence that I still had the mental toughness and endurance to get through the marathon. I wasn't so sure I still had the speed to have a crack at my 2007 time.

Allowed myself 2 months to recover from Oxfam, and set out on my first 20km run in June. The body responded well to the base work, so early July I committed to MM. Having really enjoyed the team aspect of Oxfam, I was wrapped to hear a few other Milers were also targeting MM.

Mental preparation:

The initial goal was 2:40, the same goal as 2008, only because us runners get obsessed with round numbers. The thought of running at 3:48 pace never sat comfortably with me, nor had it in 2008, and created lots of self doubt. The penny finally dropped that I needed to focus on a pace goal rather than a time goal. And so it came to be that 3:50 pace was my target, and my mind was at ease. Amazing what a couple of seconds difference can make, the pressure valve had been released and I was comfortable with my goal. For the sake of conversation I would quote 2:42 as my goal time. It was interesting to see people's responses to a number that wasn't round!

Endurance preparation:

By race day I had 6 x 30km+ runs in the legs, had trained in some nasty conditions, and apart from a right adductor which has given me grief all year, the body had stood up remarkably well.

Spent the second last week holidaying on the Gold Coast, and although into taper mode, having a few runs in the extra heat and humidity gave me a chance to be ready for a repeat of last year's conditions.

Speed preparation:

Ideally I would have done a couple of AV races in the build up, but this was not possible. Instead I pushed myself big time at lunch time sessions. A near tan PB and a 2:38 Yassos (sceptics take note!) 2 ½ weeks out, all the indicators were pointing in the right direction.

The race plan:

- Aim to settle at 3:50 pace.

- Inevitably the first few kms would be a bit quicker, so probably out in 80 mins, back in 82 min.
- Look after the legs on the downhill at City Road, and take advantage of my hill strength and being on familiar turf coming around the tan. Hopefully pass a few guys along there and get some momentum from that to take me through to the finish.

A really good day would mean I wouldn't cough up the initial quick kms in the back half, and could come home in 80 mins for a 2:40.

My dream run would see me feeling fantastic at the top of Domain Road and come home strong for a negative split, 80/78 for a 2:38. This was fanciful stuff though.

If things get rough, I've wasted my time if I don't get inside 2:45.

Race day:

Friday before the race I was very toey, but a pretty busy day Saturday allowed me to get my mind off it. Had a surprisingly solid night's sleep and awoke to find absolutely perfect conditions. Drove to the G with Anna (lives 2 doors down) who was running her first half, arriving about 5:30.

I was obviously getting into game mode as Anna suggested we go our own way. I took the chance to sit in the members stand and just soak up the atmosphere for a while, and I was feeling remarkably relaxed. Found a quiet place for a stretch, had a chat with the Mornington Peninsula guys (Sunday morning long run buddies), bumped into Nick Paine (debut marathon) and decided to hang around the G rather than head for the start line. Didn't arrive at the start until 5 minutes to go, quick hellos all round, and we were off.

Straight away Lukey was chatting! Funny stuff as we settled, and still I was feeling remarkably relaxed. Never saw the 1km marker, or 2, or 3. Wasn't wearing a Garmin (I prefer my lighter watch in races) so had no idea about the pace. Was feeling very comfortable but strange that Thorny wasn't pulling away. Decided I couldn't use him as a benchmark since not even he knew what pace he'd be running, but figured at least it meant I wasn't below my pace goal.

Found myself alone 10-20 metres behind a pack that included Thorny and the leading women. Thorny was noticeably hogging the camera action. I was so ridiculously comfortable that I decided to push up into the pack. By the time I got there Thorny was off the front. The pack then seemed to move between Thorny and I for a while.

Turning into Fitzroy St and still no km marker! Finally, after 7km, I see a marker. 25:35 on the clock. Grab a bottle from Slips and then start trying to figure out what pace I'm on. Uh oh, better slow down. The women's pack seemed to slow remarkably through the drink stations which enabled me to stay with them, but the noise and fumes of the motorbike were annoying me.

Across the 10.5km timing pad in 39:03, way to quick but oh so comfortable. Although I'd missed some km markers, I had no reason to doubt the accuracy of the ones I'd seen so I was constantly trying to slow myself down now. Thorny was starting to put some space into the womens pack, while I was being dropped alone off the back. I don't think anyone passed me after this point.

The turn around on Pit Lane allowed me to get a look at everyone, Ant and Smoothy were flying, missed Fat Ass, Thorny look comfortable but seemed surprised to see me so close, Lukey was obviously enjoying his Sunday stroll grinning from ear to ear and yelling out something.

Stacey (Mrs Dozer) and the kids give me an enthusiastic cheer as I enter Beach Road, then another bottle from Slips/PM a bit further along. Another missing marker at 13km but a 6:32 split at 14km. What the?

Another u-turn so again spot everyone. Smoothy travelling well though I thought he was sweating pretty heavily. Thorny looked very comfortable, Lukey loving it, and House booming out his support with about 100 runners in his pack. JL & KJ were very vocal in their support, and I reckon this had been the 3rd time I seen them already. It was becoming like a game of Wheres Wally there were so many Milers out there. A great day to be out running.

TW jumps alongside for while, advising that the boys had introduced themselves to Mrs Dozer down the road a bit. Splits hovering around 3:45 no matter how many times I tell myself to slow down.

Across the half way timing pads in 1:16:45. Huh? That was pretty much my half time at Devil Bend. Admittedly the conditions were chalk and cheese, and although I was working now, I was feeling ridiculously good. I realised 3:50 pace from here would deliver something south of 2:40, but figured I better find that 3:50 pace before my luck closes out. It never occurred to me that the half way mat could possibly be in the wrong place.

Back past Stacey and the kids, another bottle, mum cheering me on a little further down, then Natalie, Steve, Coops and kids (neighbours). The support was amazing and I was in a happy place, able to say gday on the way by. Splits continue around 3:45. Bloody hell Dozer, slow down.

Into the car park at Elwood, a few twists and turns and the legs start voicing their disapproval. As I exit back onto Beach Road there is an official arguing with a motorist who wants to drive into the car park. I have to swing wide around the car and for the first time the stress starts to show as I yell at the car driver. Seeing Bacchus down the road calms me down.

Another u-turn and I notice the official arguing with the motorist is good ol Barb from Carlton cheersquad. I have a laugh, this lady is everywhere. Relaxed again, tiring, but enjoying myself.

Suddenly a 3:50 split appears on my watch, and now I'm having to fight a little to hold it. PM, Slips and Troy jump along side and I grab a bottle from Steve at 28km. Enjoyed having some company and I was still quite chatty. Pass another runner for the first time in a while which does no harm to my spirits.

The guys leave me to my own devices at Fitzroy Street. A couple more scalps to be taken up the hill gives me something to focus on. No problems as we merge with the half guys, and there's plenty of space for everyone as we head up St Kilda Road. More missing km markers, and some strange splits. I was pretty sure I was holding my pace nothing to be concerned about.

GG joins in along here and I'm wrapped when he points out we are inside the last 10kms. Tiring, but confident. Grab a bottle from Grunter then prepare for the descent down City Road. Nothing too steep, but always vulnerable downhill and sure enough the warning lights start flashing on the dash board as signs of cramp start to appear. Left foot has been numb for a while (maybe the shoe laces were too tight), right foot is hurting (I suspect in the last couple of weeks I have developed some PF), adductor is noticeable. Mentally I'm in a really good place, but a small cramp (right calf) bites. Fortunately this passes but I know I'm on borrowed time now.

The climb up to Domain Road goes exactly as planned. Grabbed a bottle from Mitho at the Collingwood table, lots of great support through here but I was no longer taking in who was around me, just focussing on the road and a couple of scalps ahead.

More strange splits and I've given up watching the time, just running to the finish line now. Down Domain Road and the Milers cheersquad continues to pop up. This is awesome dudes.

GG joins in again along St Kilda Road. It's him doing all the talking now, and he escorts me up to the re-merger with the half. Around here my self pep talk starts, shamelessly inspired by the AFL series ads, every session, every km, every Airlie St, every Botanical, etc, etc.

I still feel like I'm travelling ok, but little cramps are popping up in both legs. The re-merge with the half is annoying and there is not enough space for everyone. Marshalls seem to be trying to look after the marathoners, but I'm needing to yell out to make space. I know I'm having a blinder, and start to think I've got 2:40 covered.

Turn up Flinders Street and shortly afterwards my left calf cramps big time. Oh no, don't you bloody do it to me now. Hurts like hell and every time I put my left foot down I'm just hoping it will come back up and not collapse. Trying to lift my toes in my shoe and after about 100m it eases.

Past the 41km marker and I realise I'm looking at sub 2:39, no hang on, sub 2:38, bloody hell, get going. For the first time I'm lucid enough to enjoy the closing stages. Sore and tired but I'm all there. Into the G, oh man, I gonna do it, get out of my way you bloody half dudes. Decide to run 3 wide for a clear

run, get to that final bend and see the clock at 2:36:40, no bloody way, get there Dozer, get there.

Absolute elation as I cross the line at 2:36:53. Cant believe it. I check my watch, check it again, and again. I look back at the official clock to be sure. Try to find someone who might be able to explain what the bloody hell just happened, but theres no familiar faces. Unable to spot anyone in the stands, so I just walk around dumb struck.

Eventually headed off down the race and saw Slips up the top. He asks me about my time. I try to tell him, but the numbers still wont come out of my mouth. I look at my watch again for confirmation, but still cant tell him. Find Smoothy shortly afterwards, totally oblivious to what hed just been through, he asks my time and I show him my watch cause I still cant say it. Man hugs!

Into the tunnels, drinks, food, etc and head for the massage tables. Smoothys distressed state becomes apparent and he decides not to wait in the queue. Not to long before Im in the hands of 2 masseurs. I lay down, hide my head under a towel, sieze up big time, and smile. You little ripper. Learning of the team result a bit later was the absolute cream on the cake. Milers rule!

I may or may not ever run a faster marathon, but I can't imagine I'll enjoy it more than this one. Thanks ever so much for all the support, drinks, copmany along the way, it was bloody awesome.

Splits are below based on the course markers I saw, good luck making any sense of some of them. Makes you think though, would I dare to run one without a watch?

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7 25:25 0:25:25  
8 3:44 0:29:09  
9 3:45 0:32:54  
10  
10.5 6:09 0:39:03  
11 1:04 0:40:07  
12 3:36 0:43:43  
13  
14 6:32 0:50:15  
15 3:39 0:53:54  
16 3:42 0:57:36  
17 3:45 1:01:21  
18 3:44 1:05:05  
19 3:45 1:08:50  
20 3:47 1:12:37

Not Peer Reviewed

21 3:46 1:16:23  
21.1 0:22 1:16:45  
22 3:20 1:20:05  
23 3:45 1:23:50  
24 3:44 1:27:34  
25 3:44 1:31:18  
26 3:43 1:35:01  
27 3:50 1:38:51  
28 3:49 1:42:40  
29 3:50 1:46:30  
30 3:50 1:50:20  
31 5:19 1:55:39  
32 3:33 1:59:12  
33  
34 6:39 2:05:51  
35  
36 7:29 2:13:20  
37 3:51 2:17:11  
38 3:50 2:21:01  
39 3:47 2:24:48  
40  
41 7:41 2:32:29  
42  
42.195 4:24 2:36:53