

Melbourne Marathon 2010

By Colin "Thorndog" Thornton

What a great day for running! Mild, overcast and not a breath of wind. Melbourne, for the 2nd year in a row, had turned on magnificent running conditions. The support and encouragement on the course makes for such a fantastic experience for local runners surely, there is nothing quite like a home-town marathon.

Pre-Race

The build up had been good. I missed a couple of crucial weeks before Burnley (6&7 weeks before Melbourne) but other than that, all had gone to plan. Form was not sparkling but I was quietly confident that I had done the work so should get results. It was about 10-days out when I went into an absolute hole! I had heard that tapering could cause lethargy but this felt more like chronic fatigue syndrome. I became convinced that I was over-trained (not sure how that could have happened during a taper) and that I wouldn't recover in time for the race. Normally when I am feeling tired I feel better after a couple of easy days but this dragged on for about 6 days. I did a session last Tuesday on the track and it felt terrible - I got dropped on nearly every rep and didn't even finish some of them. It wasn't a good feeling and I resigned myself to running a shocker (if I could complete it at all). Something about that fast session must have woken me up a bit because the next day I felt good again. Over the next few days my enthusiasm lifted in line with my confidence. By Saturday I was overwhelmingly positive and excited about getting out there.

Goals: as previously mentioned, my big goal for the 2nd half of this year was to get selected for the Vic team. Once that was shored up, the goal within that goal was to be in the top-3 for the state to score points in the national champs. I wasn't too hung up about times - I just wanted to run well and thought a PB should be achievable, at the minimum. My best case scenario was 2:25 and as such, my computer password at work the last couple of months had been "Melb225" just to drum in that message! Seems it worked in retrospect maybe I should have made it "Melb224"? 😊

A baby and a marathon due on the same day, although an amusing anecdote, is not a good situation to be in and I would encourage people to avoid it! Throughout the pregnancy, Louise and I had an idealistic scenario in our minds about how the day would unfold: I would run a big PB at the marathon, get straight in the car to come home, Louise would be in early labour when I got there, the baby would be out in a couple of hours and, who knows, I might even have been able to sneak down to the Geelong Region presentation dinner at the Barking Dog to catch up with the guys and wet the baby's head (although, I hadn't mentioned this last part of the plan to Louise).

It wasn't until we actually got to the few days before race-day that we found just how horribly our priorities were conflicting: I was trying to get good sleep and take it easy for the marathon, Louise was obviously trying to get mind around the imminent labour. I imagine that mentally preparing yourself for childbirth is something quite similar to preparing for a marathon they should not both be done in the same household on the same weekend. The day before the race was the worst - I was aware that my energy should be committed to helping Louise but obviously I had to get my own head right for the race. I was secretly quite nervous about having come this far and not being able to run. Once we got that out in the open, things seemed to smooth out a bit.

The Race

Felt pretty good from the start. At 21K I felt like I hadn't even started running yet. It was great running with House - we both had similar goals for the first half of the race (3:27-3:30/k) although House had talked himself down for the 2nd half of the race and said he might fade a bit. There are no guarantees for the 2nd half of a marathon so I thought we would cross that bridge when we got to it. Running through the Elwood SLSC car park at about 25K, House tripped and fell on the single speed hump on the 42,195m course. Who was this clown wearing the same uniform as me? I thought it best for my image if I distanced myself from him so at about 27K I upped the tempo and ran for home. This was about the same point that Mike McIntyre accelerated last year so I thought that while I was feeling good, I'd may as well go with it.

My K rate didn't increase a lot until I got to St Kilda road and noticed that I was generally closer to 3:20 than 3:30 I felt fantastic. Still I felt that I hadn't really started hurting yet - my mind was clear and my legs felt good.

Turning left off St Kilda road at the Arts Centre last year I recall the descent there as being quite brutal on tired legs. This year, I was past that and under the Arts Centre before I realised that it hadn't bothered me at all. It was similar to the climb around the Tan - I was running it at a faster rate than we had been doing the 3*3K reps in the last few months and it felt fine. It was good to have the Fury on the bike at this point to carry my drink bottle and keep me company.

It was back on Domain road that I started to get a bit uncomfortable. Maybe I was expecting it to get easier on the gradual downhill? Also, it seems like a long way home from there - it is still nearly 5K to go but you feel like you should be home already. I was trying to get Fury to do some thinking for me and give me a finishing time estimate but he didn't give me much: "You should be right for about 2:26-ish if you hurry up" was the best I got. Isn't he an accountant?

Back onto St Kilda road and into the Half-marathoners. It was much better than last year. I would have finished with the 85-minute H-Mers so there wasn't too many of them and they weren't really going that much slower than me, anyway.

The finish in the MCG was also MUCH better organised than last year. The runners were kept separate and there was no need to cut through the throng of H-Mers with 30m to run, either.

The wash up

Extremely satisfied with the result! I achieved everything I set out to, and more: Vic selection, Vic team top 3 point-scorer, State level individual bronze, an Athletics Australia Team Gold medal and a 4-minute+ PB.

Could I have gone faster with more even splits? I don't know. Theoretically, that probably would have been a more efficient way to run it but it would have meant I was either on my own for the full run, or gone out with Rowan Walker's group and done the first half in 69-minutes. It was great (and quite entertaining) to run the first half with House and the feeling of running on in the second half was awesome.

The really encouraging thing was that I finished the race feeling like I can go faster. Only 12-months ago I was absolutely over the moon with a 2:32:50 on the same course - nearly 8 minutes slower than this year. Give me another 12-months and I reckon I could take another good chunk off this year's time. I was also encouraged that I have pulled up without the slightest bit of stiffness or soreness - doesn't feel like I have run a marathon at all.

Where to from here? I am now officially in my off-season. 3 weeks of rest and very easy running before refocussing on some good 3K/5K track races over summer and then onto Boston in April. Seems funny to have a break when my motivation is so high but I know if I don't take it now, I will definitely not make it to April.

Thanks to Brett for carrying drinks on the bike and driving me home; Luke for bike support around the course; PM and Dan for arranging those totally awesome drink bottles (you are on a winner there guys!); House for dropping said drink bottles at the briefing and saving me a trip to Melbourne on the Saturday; and House again for the company during the first 27K of the race. Also, everyone else out on course, thanks, again it made the day that much more special.

Speaking of guys out on the course, did anyone see this guy out there? He seemed to be following us around and knew my name:



know who I am talking about?

Most importantly, I would like to thank/apologise to my wife for having to put her own needs on the side-burner while I pursued my own, selfish dreams on race weekend (not to mention the preceding months).

The splits again:

17:10

17:29 (34:39)

17:22

17:28 (34:50)

17:13

17:20 (34:34)

16:51

17:06 (33:57)

07:01

Total: 2:25:03

Half splits: 1:13:18 & 1:11:34

