

BOSTON BOUND

In my opinion, the Boston Marathon is one of the greatest participatory events in the world! For runners, at least, it is on the same level with the Masters, the Indianapolis 500 and the Final Four....and we get to play in it! The very name is recognized all over the world and being a participant brings instant credibility.

To me, one of the things that makes Boston different is the attitude of the people there. It seems all are interested in the race and the people that are running. They even give a special pronunciation to the word: where we say “mara-THON”, they say “MARA-thin” with the accent on the first syllable. Cool!

We always try to stay “downtown” (Copley Square) where most of the action seems to be and where many, many runners stay. As runners seem to always do, we wear something that identifies us and, therefore, we are easy to spot by other runners. Other runners are always friendly (we are all heading for the same ordeal) and there is much camaraderie. Conversations are easy to begin and hard to break off. In years when the Expo is at Hynes Center it’s accessible from many downtown hotels via a tunnel that connects most of the downtown stores, resulting in a mall. Your first stop at Expo should be to get your number and tee shirt. After that, fight your way into the main floor. Make your purchases first, as sometimes sizes disappear before the last runners get there. I recommend a Boston Marathon Jacket. It will cost you \$80 or \$90 bucks but is THE thing to have while in Boston (yes, it is fine to wear your jacket before the race). There are two choices of jackets...the “official jacket” and the one made by Adidas. Both are very prestigious. My buddy John prefers the Adidas, I the other. Yes, we usually purchase one each year!

On Saturday night we usually make it to one of the great Italian Restaurants in the North End, (Advance reservations are recommended for your restaurant, especially on the Saturday night before Easter....call before you leave for Boston) and end the evening with “canoles” and cappuccino at Café Vittoria.

On Sunday morning there is the “Freedom Run”, a 2.8 mile ‘fun run’ that can be a nice warm-up. It’s simply a run, no prizes or timing. If you’ve ever had the urge, this is the perfect time you can wear your ‘rabbit ears’. The after-race food is plentiful and there are tee shirts, but they aren’t cool and have no reference to the marathon in the logo. Sometimes I run, sometimes I don’t want to get up after the great pasta of the previous evening and the ‘red’ that goes with it, or risk an unseen pot-hole.

The next thing on Sunday morning is delightful. We attend church at one of the churches in the immediate area. The Old South Church is one. It’s located about 50 yards from the Finish Line and you will have to negotiate temporary fences and barricades just to get into the church. The first congregation “gathered” there in 1669, yep, more than a hundred years before 1776. This church is what we would call a ‘cathedral’ and is

magnificent in structure and content. The ministers are aware that there are many (25-50) marathoners in the congregation and they give a blessing to the runners and generally preach a sermon based on the race...like "Run the Race Called Life" and "I Have Finished the Race, I have kept the Faith". While we usually take blue blazers and khakis, many runners are there in jeans and Marathon Jackets.

You might want to do the Race pasta dinner on Sunday night. Again, differences of opinion here. I chose to stay close to the hotel, off my feet, and have a quiet dinner and contemplate the upcoming task!

As usual, you will be restless and listless on Sunday, feeling every imaginable ache and pain. The knee that hasn't hurt since the Berlin Wall fell will suddenly be touchy on Sunday. You may want to make one more visit to the Expo, but not too long on your feet. If you are really tough, you might locate tickets for the Sox game. Historically, they play the Yankees at Fenway on Saturday, Sunday and Race Day....creating some major traffic jams between the two events. Then, after a restless night it will finally be Marathon Day.

You are obviously an experienced marathoner so I won't deal much in what you should or shouldn't do in a marathon, rather, most of my suggestions deal with the "first" of two marathons you will attempt on Patriots Day.....that first marathon is getting to Hopkinton and surviving until the start of the real marathon.

First, you already realize that Boston is a point-to-point race. It starts in the little town of Hopkinton and ends in downtown Boston. Hopkinton is a quaint New England town of maybe 13,000, but actually seems smaller. Once per year the population triples for a few hours.

We are 'bussed' out from downtown Boston on school buses. That event in itself is a remarkable logistical feat. We runners gather at one specific point, Boston Common in the Back Bay area. It's a short distance from the mid town area where we stay but we usually split a cab to save that 1.5 mile walk. The departure times are early, which results in arrival in Hopkinton several hours before the race.

My first suggestion is to start studying the weather a week or more before the race. Go to weather.com or another of the weather websites and view the 10-day forecast for Boston. Weather in Boston in mid April can run from snow to near-90s and you must be prepared for either. Of course, weather forecasting has advanced much in the last few years and you at least should know the "range" of temperatures you should be dealing with.

When the 45 minute trip from Boston to Hopkinton ends you will be at Hopkinton High School. Behind the school, on the athletic fields, are the holding pens...or if you prefer, the Athlete's Village. There are massive chain-link fences covering the grounds and giant tents erected. People sit/lay on the grass inside the compounds awaiting the start of the race. When the area under the tents is full, people just sit on the grass outside. Some even bring small tents to stay out of the elements. There are thousands (millions, it seems) of

people and to venture off for a bagel or portajohn visit is like wading through an obstacle course. There is lots of loud music and hype from a bandstand. Unfortunately, you are too late to hear Johnny Kelly, The Elder, sing “Young at Heart” (he died at 96).

We love to hate this time at the village. Actually, you will look back on it with pleasure, but it is a long wait under less than ideal conditions. The more prepared and the more people that you know, the better the situation is. We usually spread our ground cloths and form a community of friend-runners and share food and supplies we have all brought (“Does anyone want to share my cheese burrito left from last night?”)

Beginning in 2006, there are two separate holding areas, one for the blue start and one for the red. I don’t think they will be enforcing moving back and forth between the two areas.

You will, of course, need to bring your official “plastic bag” with your name sticker on it. You will use this for you extra things that you use while waiting at the Athletics’ Village. When we head for the start line, the first stop will be to locate your particular school bus where you can deposit your “official bag”. They will transport your bag back to Boston and it will be waiting for you at the finish. At your own risk should you leave valuables in your plastic bag.

OK, enough of the talk and more of what you need to carry to the Athletes’ Village.

Ground cloth

Cheap plastic poncho or something like that.

Food for lunch.

I’ll have honey and peanut butter at a minimum. A few plastic spoons/knives etc. I’ll probably bring bagels and bananas, but they usually have both.

Garbage bags

Big black ones to use for 1. warmth, if needed, 2. raincoats, if needed, or 3. trash.

Fresh batteries for, or a well charged, MP3 player.

Sunscreen

Blister-Ade (by Band Aide)

Reading Material—Something light and disposable (not necessary for me...I’m too busy gawking).

Ziploc Bag Safety Kit

I recommend a Ziploc bag of emergency stuff for you to carry in the race. Stuff it in your waist band. Among the things:

**Contact lens case—Use one side for **Vaseline, the other side for **Advil.

**Money—Remember, your Mom said never go anywhere with out a few dollars

**Band-Aids

**TP

**Tums—If you have heart burn during a marathon, try Scotch Taping a couple of Tums to each of your GU packs...if you don't want them when you eat your GU, just drop them on the ground. But they can save your life if you have heartburn!

**GU

These are a few things that can increase the enjoyment of a Boston marathoner. Remember, these are my observations and opinions and are things that work for me. They may not work for you.