

The Boston Marathon aka The Superbowl of Marathons

By Candes Gentry

The year 2008 celebrated the 112th anniversary of the Boston Marathon, an historic endurance race. As a runner, you are often asked if you have competed in the Boston Marathon. And, thankfully now I can proudly say "Yes!"

Similar to the rumors that I had heard prior to the Kona Ironman about the "Energy Lab," I had heard many rumors regarding "Heart Break Hill." As in Kona the overall race proved to be more challenging as a whole rather than any of its individual segments.

The dreaded Heart Break Hill is about one-half to three quarters of a mile between mile 20 and 21 and climbs from approximately 150 feet elevation to 300 feet. What they don't tell you is that the course is a series of rolling hills from start to finish. A friend had suggested running Tantalus hill repeats in order to train, but that seemed overkill to me. Now, I wonder if perhaps she was subtly trying to prepare me for what lay ahead.

The race itself is a logistical phenomenon. There are 25,000 participants annually, similar to the Honolulu Marathon, but somehow, maybe due to the fact that all 25,000 runners finish within a 3.5 hour time frame, rather than a 10-12 hour timeframe, you find yourself weaving in and out of runners throughout the entire course.

Never at any point did I feel as though I could settle into a comfortable stride because I was cautiously attempting to avoid the runners that surrounded me. At one point in the race as we approached Beacon Street in Boston a runner cut across the field to high five a friend, which caused the runner in front of me to swerve and in turn caused me to clip her heels and we both almost went tumbling down as if it were in slow motion.

Luckily, as I neared the asphalt I was able to regain my balance and we both looked into each others eyes apologizing silently as the morning had drained us of any spare energy to speak.

Participants are split into two waves, the first which begins at 10 a.m. and the second wave at 10:30 a.m. Although I was in the first wave, it took over 10 minutes to reach the starting line from our corral.

The morning began with a cup of coffee and a bagel at 6 a.m. By 6:30 we were in line to catch one of 500 buses that were scheduled to transport the 25,000 runners from Boston to Hopkinton. By 7 a.m. we boarded the bus and after sitting in traffic and watching buses pull over on the side of the freeway to let runners who had over hydrated relieve themselves, we arrived at Athlete Village in Hopkinton by 8:15 am.

It was a 10 minute walk to the starting corrals and then an hour and a half wait for the gun to go off. Needless to say, you can imagine how exhausted the multitude of runners were before the race even began.

I found myself day dreaming of how at any other race I would have already been sipping a warm cup of tea at the finish before this race had even begun. It was definitely an experience. Waiting in the corral for the unknown and feeding off the anxious energy of the other participants was invigorating.

The weather was chilly 40 degrees F in the morning but by 10:30 a.m. it heated to a cool 60 degrees F and the sun burned off any clouds in the sky. I quickly stripped myself of the many layers I had piled on to keep warm in

the morning and ran the rest of the race wishing I had put sunscreen on.

In addition to the multitude of runners, it was estimated that more than half a million spectators line the streets along the course from Hopkinton to Boston. Marathon Monday, as they call it, has become a holiday of sorts and families, students and communities line the race course with their pets and some even with their beer and BBQs to cheer on the participants.

Never have I been so overwhelmed by spectator support. At some points, I was even overcome by emotion as the sound of the spectators could be heard so vividly as we ran into yet another rural town along the course. The descent into Wellesley, (1/2 marathon) where the Women of Wellesley College were out in numbers, was by far the most memorable. The sound of their cheering is forever engraved in my memory.

At about mile 18 we started up yet another steep hill and I thought to myself, maybe I had remembered incorrectly, this must be Heart Break Hill. It seemed to go on forever on my tired legs. But alas, it was not, and we quickly descended the back side of that hill and came upon the dreaded Heart Break.

I didn't want to draw any false conclusions though, so I quietly asked the girl running next to me if indeed this was THE HILL and she glanced my way with a perturbed look, gave me a slight nod and put her head down to tackle the hill. Once past Heart Break hill it was a rolling descent through Newton, Brookline and finally Boston.

As I turned the last corner onto Boylston Street, I glanced at my watch one last time and, to my surprise, I was still five minutes ahead of my goal so I ran as strong as my weary legs would allow to the finish line.

It couldn't have been a better race for me. I finished with a time of 3:25:03 and was thrilled to finally have completed the Boston Marathon. Congratulations to all other OCC runners who competed, especially Laurie Sloan who finished with a time of 5:18.11.

I would highly recommend the Super Bowl of Marathons to any runner. It is worth the experience and is all and even more than it is made out to be. It is a fantastic race rich with history.

Candes shows off her Boston Marathon finisher's medal.

