

2014 Boston Marathon

Run Strong, Run Proud, Run MIT!

Dear Friends:

I write this with fond memories of Officer Sean Collier who died protecting us and as I am sure he now knows, not in vain. He has brought us together in ways he never could have imagined, and although we are sad he is not physically with us anymore, his spirit is stronger than ever. Like many others who interacted with Sean, I was deeply impressed with his friendly nature and sincere caring for our community of which he was an integral part, and deeply hurt by his savage and tragic death. I often run with advisees and students and feel running is one of the most pure ways we can connect with our past and live for the future. I thus believe that those who ran in the 2014 marathon for Sean will be with him...

The MIT Strong team was thus created to honor Sean and raise funds to allow others to remember his goodness and do good things themselves! Many thanks to all my friends who made it possible for me to run the 2014 Boston Marathon as part of the MIT Strong team! Overall the team raised about \$200k for the fund, and this amount allows their to be an endowed fund set up which should yield about \$10k/year in funds for some activity. One strong possibility is to support community engagement that Officer Collier himself was so well known for with his frequent trips with the MIT outing club.

On to the race: Training in a New England winter for a distance event like a marathon or triathlon is especially challenging. No, swimming is not a problem as the pool is indoors. *Swimming?* Yes, swimming is a great addition to marathon training because it helps with cardiovascular training while working the little muscles in the legs and that prevents cramping when running.

Biking is problematic, but is handled with many hours on a spinner, which normally would rot the brain, but I have a music-stand type device that allows me to do emails and other light stuff while peddling. Its not nearly as good as a real ride, its kind of like giving a starving dog a rubber bone! *Biking?* Yes, biking is great training for a marathon because done properly with clip-in pedals and an even power stroke it works the quadriceps, hamstrings, and glutes. The calves get mostly an isometric workout. As an older runner, putting in 40+ miles a week running is not such a good thing to do if I intend to keep racing into my 80's, hence the biking helps a lot.



Spinning for a long time can twist your brain sideways!

Which brings us to running in the winter in New England. There is of course the treadmill with its nice spongy surface, programmable speed, settable 2% incline to yield semi real running emulation, and brain deadening monotony! Yes I did about a quarter of my running on treadmills, but mostly I tried to run when traveling for work to warmer places, or running on the roads and trails around my house in NH. This means bundling up just enough to be able to get warm after a mile of running, but not freezing when making a pit stop.

On one memorable long run with my student Folkers Rojas, we passed a snowmachine trail running off into the woods. Folkers said “lets see what’s up there” and I whined “we do not have YakTrax (slip on spikes) and I do not want to slip and get hurt, I have the Boston coming up ya know...”. “aw come on dude, don’t be such a little whiner...” “OK, lets just gently trundle to the top and see whats on the other side of the hill” I gave in. of course it was so much fun slipping and sliding running up the hill, that when we got to the top we had to go see what was over the next hill!. Two hours later we exited the woods for a total of a three hour run! One of the most awesome runs ever!

Of course it was so much fun that I had to tell the team, which had been doing a run that weekend along the Boston course. Folks were psyched and we planned a team run the following weekend. The weather loomed large and we had to move running from Saturday to Sunday so only two folks were able to come (Tom Gearty and Ryan Borker). It was as monumentally fun, even when we broke through some ice on a swampy section and got lower legs soaked with 5 miles to go!



Over the hills and across the streams we go!



One deer track and three geek tracks!

Three Geeks and a Hill!

One week before the race I ended up in San Francisco with son Jonathan and we went for a nice 7 mile run. We took the cable car back up one of the steep hills for the experience, and I kept thinking though “there are no cable cars on Heartbreak hill!” That weekend we walked another 12 miles so it was a good pre-race loosening!



Enough fun with training, time for the race!

Race Day!

Having done many marathons and ironman triathlons before, and with Texas Ironman looming May 17, I was able to actually feel relaxed and reflective on Boston Marathon 2014. Yes, I had a lot of respect for the race and its famed intensity, but I felt calm and peaceful for some reason. It was indeed terribly sad that Officer Collier and race spectators were murdered, and hundreds injured, and the race character forever destined to be a security pain; however, all these people had come together to take our city back. To celebrate together that we were Boston Strong, and indeed as it is such an international race, we were World Strong!

One nice thing about Boston is that it starts later, which means one can sleep in. We were to gather at MIT to take an 8 AM bus to Hopkinton, so I was able to sleep in till 5:30 before driving to MIT to get the bus. At MIT the team had gathered and was nibbling on bananas and bagels that had so generously been provided to us. We were stretching and slathering sunscreen on and getting psyched! Once on the bus we had a fun team time chatting about all sorts of silly things as runners do before a race! The loooooong ride out made us appreciate how long 26.2 miles was, and as the bus pulled into the unloading area, to board a school bus authorized to enter the race village area, it dawned on all of us that it was really happening!



The weather could not have been more beautiful with clear blue sky and in the 60s. Some may want overcast to prevent overheating when running in the sun, but I was actually glad to have a clear blue sky as it brought out the colors all the better and hence a sense of renewal.



In the race village there was a giant tent in the middle of the holding area, and lots of water and food (bagels and bananas) stations, and thank goodness portapotties! In the race village the team pretty much split up as we sought our own shortest lines. It was about an hour before our wave was called and then we mostly regathered to walk from the holding area to another stage before being released to walk about 1 km to the holding corrals. We were essentially the last set of runners to be released so by the time we got to the corrals near the start line, the entrance gates were fairly porous and so we just went knowing that our start time would be recorded when we ran across the starting line mat.

There is a lot of banter and camaraderie before crossing the starting line, but once it is crossed, it is time to go into focus mode, where the mind and body become one with the goal of maintaining a steady pace where the whole body is relaxed expect the legs of course which must run! Focus focus focus.... And in the case of Boston, the first 10km are mostly downhill so one must avoid the feeling like this is easy, speed up, do not let THAT chunky person pass you! If one does start running at a faster pace downhill than planned, one can burn out the quadriceps which are used mostly for running downhill as brakes. I resisted the urge to splurge and later in the Newton Hills I passed many a walker who used to be a downhill runner!

The race was reallllly crowded though, and it was hard to pass slower runners unless one ran on the edges. The left side of the road was generally faster but I still

had to run a lot on the dirt or sidewalk to safely pass. This just meant be extra careful as this region had potholes and obstacles, a collision with would end my race.

At the 5 km mark I checked my time and it was a little over 30 minutes. A marathon is about 42 km so this meant my time would be between about 4:10-4:20. I had been thinking it would be nice to finish in under four hours, so if I was to do that now is the time to speed up a bit. I sped up a bit but after a few km felt I could do this but then I am going to be totally wiped out, and I do have a full iron triathlon distance race in 4 weeks. So I dialed back to about a 30 mins / 5 km pace as that is easy to check because the race venue had big signs and the time posted every 5 km. This also became a convenient reminder to take a Gu energy gel, I brought plain and also peanut butter flavor, as maintaining sugar levels is important. Of course with each Gu I took a cup of water. In general every other water station I would take at least a few sips.

Chugging along the course was lined with cheering people who when they saw the MIT Strong jersey I (we) were wearing they would chant MIT MIT MIT and so when the cheer was not right near me and yet I heard it, I knew one of my team mates was nearby. Whenever we entered a town, banners would proclaim the town name and the crowds were really thick and supportive. It was such a great feeling!

Then of course there was the mythical Wellesley College campus ahead where the rumors had it that along the race venue the women students would be lined up with "kiss me, I am ___" signs! It was true! Was I as a strong buck male in heaven? Did I trip, fall, break my neck and ascend to the approach to the pearly gates? Obviously not, because as pretty and soul inspiring and entertaining as the ladies were, I had no intention of stopping and giving up even one minute for a kiss, especially since I knew what was waiting for me at home (most awesome wife as well as two giant slobbery Great Pyrenees dogs and the cutest CockerSpanishagirl one could imagine). BUT I sincerely did appreciate the ladies being out there as their smiles and signs of encouragement were very rejuvenating (knowing they were ALL out there JUST for ME!).

After Wellesley we crossed into Newton turned onto Commonwealth Avenue and the hills began. I took several salt pills because it was a bit warm in the sun, and wanted to make sure I did not cramp. The first long uphill was fine, I kept a pretty steady pace, and the crowds shouted a lot of encouragement. Many a runner though did start to walk. The second hill was the same story, and then came the infamous Heartbreak Hill. More walkers but I had planned my race and was racing my plan so I kept a fairly steady pace up. Coming off the top of Heartbreak hill I felt good and I was ready for the home stretch.

I took my last few salt tablets as I could feel I had been losing salt with sweating. I decided to start taking sips of Gatorade from the aid stations followed by sips of water. I felt good with no pains or any hints of anything breaking down. All I had to

do was keep a controlled fall forward, landing mostly on my forefoot so my knees would start getting pounded, and let my Newton running shoes do the rest. I diverge a bit, but Newton Running shoes encourage one to run with a forefoot plant, which is done by taking slightly shorter strides, leaning forward more and having thus a higher cadence. The result is that the impact loads are less and one's knees are happier so one should be able to keep running for many decades. In contrast many of the folks running around me were heel striking and knowing the stresses that were being imposed on all those knees could only bring joy to a knee surgeon.

In the distance I could see the Prudential Tower! Soon I could see the Citgo sign I knew was in Kenmore square. I heard my name called out and caught glimpses of students I knew. I was getting psyched and the horse could smell the barn! Coming into Kenmore square the road widened and the crowds were really thick and cheering! My teammate and prof pal Dave Newman came up just behind me and called out my name! I was psyched and think I said "Ok, lets bring it home" and renewed my focus and pace. I later realized I had sped up but she then crossed the finish line soon after me.

Turning onto Boylston street with the finish line bridge clearly in the distance I felt that endorphin rush that makes marathon running *oh so ummmm yeah yummmm ahhh ooohhhh ahhhhhhhh yeah baby more* of an event ! The joy was tempered a bit knowing a year ago terrible explosions happened about now, but it just made my will stronger!

I crossed the finish line in 4:21 and never felt better after a marathon! Walking forward getting a water, finisher medal, proudly made in Massachusetts, I waited for Dava who soon showed up and then we had our pictures taken. Then it was off to get a nifty stay-warm cover shawl and I went in search for Debie in the meeting zone. I waited about 10 minutes and started to get chilled so I decided to head back to MIT where she would know to wait for me at the Zesiger Athletic Center. I walked down Berkeley street to Beacon Street where there was supposed to be a shuttle bus back to MIT every 15 minutes. I got there but the air was so clear and sun so warm I decided to walk back along the Charles River and just enjoy life, as my legs felt good.

Walking along the river I was passed in both directions by joggers who called out "congratulations!" I passed a homeless man enjoying the sun and realized that a simple thing such as enjoying the warm sun is about as good as it gets in many ways for all of us. I also felt so thankful for all I have, and yet resolved to redouble my efforts as a professor to help educate people so that more could reach their full potential.

Walking along the river memories of many a training run for many a race came back. Memories of many a trot and talk with students to discuss life the universe and everything flooded my mind. And of course memories of my time as a student at MIT and thoughts of when my parents used to walk around the basin before I was

even born! Life runs by in an instant, and it really dawned on me that to be able to run to the point of massive endorphin release, to the point of glycogen depletion that the brain thinks different is to really live life to its fullest!

And as I walked across the bridge to MIT and looked at the blue water of the Charles River, I felt so thankful for all those who donated to support the MIT Strong team as it meant that the funds would be there to bring together students and staff to do things like outings and runs which undoubtedly will catalyze great thoughts to make the world a better place. This is the gift for which Officer Collier and the Boston marathon Bombing victims paid the ultimate price!



Epilogue:

Back at the Z center for some chocolate milk and a shower, where Debie and our friend Dee (they had gone to a Red Sox ball game earlier) met me. Son Jonathan and

his friend Colleen met us and then we all went over to Ashdown House graduate dormitory for a post race yummy hot meal, and some red wine of course for me to dilate the blood vessels and promote healing!

The next day I was sore, but I used my bumpy foam roller, knowing that Day 2 after a big race was the most sore time. Still it was not so bad and day 3 I swam 2km and then had a intense core workout. Day 4 ditto. The weekend I had intense yardwork days planting trees and now I feel fine and fully recovered! I certainly am looking really good!

