

When I was a kid I ran every morning with my sister Cathy and our public school track team. It kept me active and probably helped burn the excess energy I had as a kid. For some reason I stopped running in high school but ten years ago, when I was 30 I picked it up again and the sport has changed my life. I still remember my first run back; I covered 16 kilometers. I was sore for the next week but something inside me wanted more and I set out to train for my very first marathon. Ten years and ten marathons later I finally made it to Boston.

Rewind to last spring and my training for Ironman and the Mississauga Marathon. I was in the best shape of my life and with a new running program in place I was able to break my long term running habits and push more on the run to finally qualify for the Boston Marathon with a time of 3:18. Better yet, I was able to share the experience with some of my other running and training partners who'd also qualified – Joseph, Pat, Jenn, Rooster, Linnea, Laurel, Tiff, Jamie, Dave and Lisa. Boston here we come!



By the time December had rolled around I hadn't trained a whole lot. Given my racing schedule from last year I struggled with motivation even though this is something I'd be working towards for so long. What's worse is that I sprained my ankle in January causing me to be light on my feet for 3-4 weeks. Eventually, I ramped up my mileage and my speed came back even though I was only running 3 days a week. I took the pressure off of myself, dropped my time goals and decided I was going to 'run' the Boston Marathon rather than 'race' it. Which is exactly what I did.



We headed out for Boston the Friday before the race. Sue, Becca and I ended up driving down to Boston and staying in a hostel with Sue's cousin Laurel right by the finish. Highly recommend the hostel! Filled with other marathoners from around the world, the location and the price you just couldn't beat it. Well, ok that I was staying in a hotel room with 3 women.....could it get any better than this?

Off to the Race Expo Saturday morning to pick up my race package Saturday. Still no nerves! Dropping my time goals made me realize that I had nothing to prove and everything to soak in. All I kept hear was how tough the course would be so I was uncertain how tough it really would be...but I managed to keep the butterflies in check...for now! Sunday was a nice relaxed day with a baseball game at Fenway (thanks Joseph and Sang for the tix!), an early dinner and off to bed.

Monday am rolled around pretty quickly and before I knew it we were off to catch the buses. We ended up going earlier and that might have been the second best decision of the day! By the time we boarded our bus and were under way the park was filled with other runners trying to make their way out to the starting area! So glad we weren't caught up with everyone else! An hour later and we were in Hopkington at the Athletes Village getting ready for the start.

The only thing that was stressing me out was what to wear. The race started at 10am and it was cool in the shade and the wind but I didn't want to over dress. Finally got it figured out with the help of Laurel and I was on my way. Laurel was awesome to have by my side pre race and helped me keep everything in check. She even walked me to the start when it was my turn to go. The F18's flew over the starting area and I'd never seen planes fly so low. The noise from the fighter jets were ear piercing but exhilarating and brought out the butterflies instantaneously!!! All of a sudden I was humbled by what lay ahead of me and my thoughts turned to the 113 years of history and those who'd run before me.

As the gun went off my mind switched gears focus from keeping my butterflies in check to keeping my pace in check. I'd set a goal finishing the course somewhere between 3:30-3:35. I needed a pace to follow and even though I'd be happy with whatever the day would bring me I knew I'd be somewhere in this range given the amount of training I'd managed to get in the months leading up to race day.

My pace felt painfully slow but the first 10k were straight downhill. I saw people blowing by me but I didn't get caught up in it. I felt sorry for the people passing me but leaning back stopping themselves with each stride; I knew they'd pay for it later. I tried to focus on form by leaning forward and going with the hill while not running faster than my plan and most importantly, looking around to take it all in. It was pretty emotional for me and a reality check that I was finally here with some of the best runners in the world.

Around the second km mark there was a biker bar on the left hand side with people in front beer in hand. Too funny! What a great way for everyone to be celebrating Patriot's Day (which is why the race is on a Monday every year) not that you need an excuse to have a cold beer and support 25,000 of your closest friends who are just 'passing through town'!! To say that everyone watching the race was 'into it' would be a total understatement. The fan support for this race is unparalleled...although New York definitely deserves an honourable mention!

The first 10k went by pretty quickly and I stayed on pace maybe even played it a little conservative for being 1/4 of the way through the race. Definitely the best decision of the day! I remembered the race course preview video at the expo on Saturday and the recommendation was to use the second 10km to 'find your stride' as this part of the course was relatively flat. Not a problem, except I could feel my quads already and I hadn't really pushed it! I was good on my fluids but erred by taking in too much salt all in one go at one of the aide stations. Something I'd pay for a little later on in the race. Nothing new on race day....so, why hadn't I trained with salt knowing I'd need them during the race!

The flat section of the course was great and it gave me a chance to soak in everything that was around me by the half way point I was right on pace with a 1:45:59split. This is when I decided to stop looking at my watch! I didn't want to be a slave to the time and figured whatever that day was going to deliver me I'd deal with as it came. This is also when I really started to have fun!! I knew Wellesley College was coming up and the infamous 'Wall of Sound' and more importantly Sue and Becca would be at the top of Heart Break Hill to provide the much needed support as I'd be pushing through 'the wall' and focus myself on bringing it in! But let's not skip too far ahead!

Just past the half way point I started to hear some something in the distance, and Laurel told me I'd hear them from a mile away, I assumed it was the girls at Wellesley and wondered how much noise these women could possibly make. Boy was I in for a surprise! There were full on billboard sponsored by Adidas for what was about to greet you; "Enjoy the Scream"....ok this is cool! Before turning the bend you could hear the thunderous screaming/cheering, it was unbelievable. The entire school was there to support everyone and it seemed like everyone had their own "Kiss Me" sign to waive in the air. It was electric. I ran along the crowds giving high fives only to be cut off by another runner who when in for a kiss only to get his ass slapped as he left. I couldn't stop laughing....was this for real?! My ears were ringing as I left the "wall of sound" and everyone around me were talking about what'd they'd just seen. It was a fabulous distraction from my legs and my stomach which was giving me issues now because of the salt tablets I'd taken over half an hour ago.

The first 18 miles of the course were straight and I was approaching the first 90 degree turn indicating that the hills of Newton lay just ahead. I knew that there were four hills that I'd have to climb, Heart Break hill being the last of the four. It was right around here where I ran by Rick and Dick Hoyt. For those of you who don't know who they are, you need to check out YouTube video that explains it all <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wy8hOOvM0t0&feature=related>. It'll make you think twice about complaining when you race and there's a lesson in there about life as well! When I saw them there were so many things I wanted to say, so many times they've inspired me, so many races we've seen them from the sidelines but I all I could get out was a quick 'thank you'. Two words that had a lot of meaning!

We hit the first hill and it was a long slow grinder. By this time in the race, I was wondering how much of a beating the third 10k would put onto my body since it was predominately up hill. However, the crowds at this point in the race had thickened and everyone was so 'into it'. The crowds really helped pull you up the hills.

By the time I'd hit the 3<sup>rd</sup> hill I asked the guy next to me if this was Heartbreak and I had this sinking feeling when he said no. Apparently, the first hill as you climb into the town of Newton didn't count so Heartbreak was still ahead. If you hear about the Boston Marathon you more than likely hear about this famous hill. However, it's not about how steep it is, or the fact that you hit it at 20 miles into the race where most people hit 'the wall'. It's the hill where in 1936 defending champion John A. Kelley caught race leader Ellison "Tarzan" Brown and patted him on the shoulder as he passed. Brown's competitive gesture apparently caused him to rally and pass Kelley, going on to win the race – in the words of Boston Globe reporter Jerry Nason, "breaking Kelley's heart".

By the time I hit Heartbreak the first part of the race had taken its toll on my body. All I could do was think about seeing Becca and Sue knowing they'd help recharge my batteries for the last part of the race. Up the hill I went and the hill is long. Worse, you get to the top or what you think is the top and it dips only to go up a little more. The crowds were super but because there were thousands of people I couldn't find Becca and Sue. I even slowed my pace and looked behind me thinking I'd missed them as I

creased the top of the hill. My morale sank instantly and I thought I'd go the whole race without seeing Sue....my biggest support and the one person who knew how much all of this meant to me.

Being the low point in the race, it only lasted for about 2 minutes. I felt a slap on my shoulder and it was my training partner Joseph!! No way, how the heck did you find me?? As I turned around I saw Becca and Sue down the backside of the hill!! My spirits peaked as I ran towards Sue and I got a lump in my throat when I slowed to kiss her. There was so much I wanted to say as I kissed Sue but her misty eyes stopped me in my tracks, shut me up and I totally lost everything I was going to say including the 'Thank You' she so much deserved for all the support she'd given my. A huge thanks to Becs too for being on the course and for driving all that way just to support Laurel and I. You guys are rock stars and you unequivocally made my day by being at that point in the course when I needed you the most!!



Joseph and I continued on our way and quickly got caught up on what a fabulous day we were having and how tough the course was; something I had heard about but didn't totally understand until I was there. The great thing about Boston, aside from the crowds and the history of the race, is that once you crest Heart Break Hill it's all behind you and it's pretty much downhill to the finish. I can't tell you the number of racers I saw on the side of the road

massaging their legs or pounding on them trying to get life back into them in order to push onto the finish. At this point, even though my legs were shredded I knew I was going to finish.

Joseph and I got separated as we covered the last 10k towards the finish. I made my way past Boston College and it was wall to wall fraternity and sororities out on the course....beers in hand of course! The hardest part was smelling the bbq burgers and hot dogs; I think I made have actually started drooling at some point! At this point in the race I needed nutrition and my clothes were caked in salt. Even though I got my 'stomach back' I didn't want to tamper by taking more salt even though I knew my body needed it badly. Next time I'll train with it!

So, the second thing that screwed me up that day was the damn Citgo sign as we entered Boston. Everyone told me about how you see it off in the distance but to beware as it's an optical illusion as it seems so close but takes you forever to reach it! Somehow at this point in the race my mind wasn't 100%. I was so focused on just reaching the finish line that I got lost counting the mile markers so when I hit mile what I thought was 25 it was actually 24....an extra mile I hadn't counted on. Oh, that sucks!

Finally made it to the Citgo sign and I knew I only had a mile to go. By this time I was digging deep, really deep to stay on pace and tried not to think about my legs. At this point I couldn't even look at the crowds, I had to focus on the finishing chute, something we'd gone to see the night before the race. That mental image paid HUGE dividends as I knew I'd soon be running down Boylston Street and finally done. It was right about this point when it became evident how windy it was and that I'd been essentially been running into a head wind the entire race!

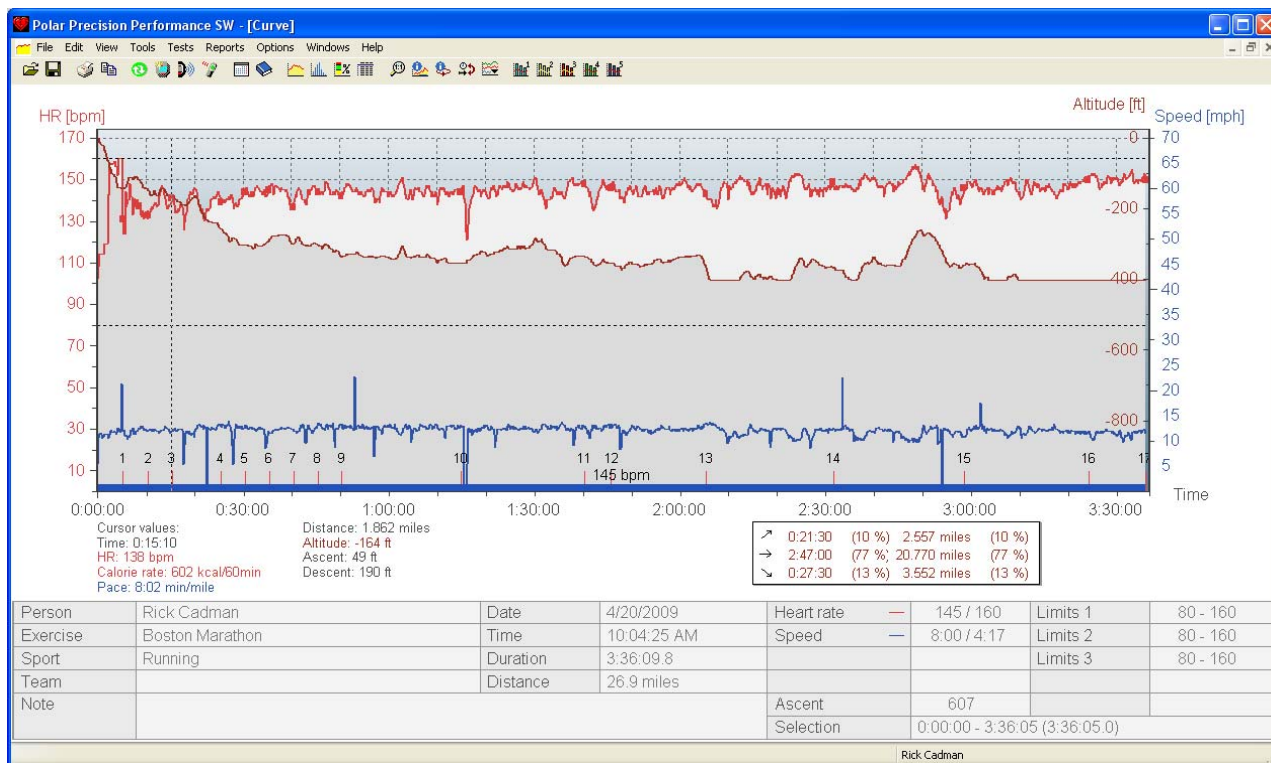


Didn't matter, I turned the corner and saw the finish; time to 'capture the unicorn'. The streets were jammed 10-20 deep and the crowds were so loud. This was it. I did it. Across the line in 3:36:03 and I was done! I'd completed the Boston Marathon. A mix of emotions throughout the day and all I could feel was elation at this point as I returned my timing chip and had my medal placed around my neck. I picked up my bags and took out my Boston jacket which I refused to wear prior to the race and my eyes welled up. I called Sue immediately and left a vmail since she was on the subway telling her that I had my jacket on but I could barely get the words out. What a feeling!

Post race we met up with Laurel, Becs, Sue, Joseph and Sang back at the hostel and had a picnic in our room. The plan was to have our picnic outside but the day was cold and we were all frozen from running. Given the weather, we cracked the Champagne and brought out the beer right in our dorm room. What a blast. We chatted for hours and ended up celebrating our day well into the evening. I'll go back again one day to Boston and learn from my first experience. But I have to say, the adage is true you never forget your first and my first Boston Marathon was everything I expected and more. I'll definitely be back!!!



## Technical Data



Race Profile From Polar Watch – Check Out The Drop In Altitude!