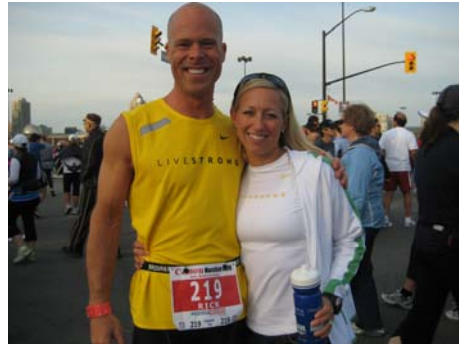




Mississauga Marathon 2008 – Boston Qualifier

While I write this I still have a shitty grin on my face from yesterday's race....and from the fact that it took me a long time this morning to make it down the stairs!! I am pretty sore today but it's a welcomed discomfort as I finally accomplished my ultimate goal in running! It's been 8 marathons and 4 attempts at qualifying....and yesterday I finally beat my qualifying time to run the Boston Marathon! Before I replay all the events of yesterday, I want to back up a little and explain a little bit about my journey.



With Sue and me training for Ironman Switzerland this year, I had to find the right way to fit a marathon into my training program and not take too much away from my Ironman program. However, I had long decided that qualifying for Boston was the most important goal of 2008. I'd tried twice before to run a marathon after doing an Ironman with little success. So, on the advice of a friend (thanks Gary!) I thought I'd try to reverse the order and train for the marathon before the Ironman this time.

After years of trying to qualify for Boston on my own I finally gave in and hooked up with Marathon Dynamics (MDI) to help me reach my goal. For years, Kevin Smith has tracked my progress and assured me that he could help me achieve my goals if I would just sign up with MDI. Patiently he knew I'd end up coming to him....but he never pushed! Kevin's track record for success is impressive and a lot of my friends who have used Kevin and his programs say that the work is hard but the result is worth it.

So, let's start with "the work" that I needed to do in order to achieve my goal. I consider myself a strong and consistent runner. I've never considered myself a fast runner. To me qualifying for Boston has always meant "fast". And I'm ignoring those of you who can run under 3 hours....that's a whole different level of "freak"! Anyways, I had to basically undue everything I'd learned about running and how to train in order to "break" through my "running bias". In English, I've always run a 5 minute km so I'd have to re-learn how to run at a different speed.

Sounds easy, but it wasn't. The first 5 out of my 6 workouts I blew up on the treadmill and was unable to complete my workout. The first few weeks were brutal. Looking back now, I think I was unable to complete my outdoor workouts for about the first 4-5 weeks. Worst part about it is that Sue would have to listen to me complain and question whether





I could actually do what I had set up to do. By week two I decided that if I didn't think I could achieve my goal on race day I'd pull out at 30K in the race. Yep, that was my strategy....I'd treat the 30K as a "training run" and then pick another marathon and go for it again. Not a great strategy!

Two things changed my mindset and got me back on track. First, Sue passed along a comment from my triathlon coach to the effect of "Rick has the wrong attitude and already has a plan for not succeeding....he needs to change this and go into the race with the attitude that he will make his goal no matter what." Second, my running coach Kevin told me that I needed to exercise patience with the workouts and that my body will "adapt" to the higher pace. Kevin also told me to get off the treadmill and run outdoors from now on as it's easier to complete these types of workouts outside.

I think it was the 5th week when I was out for one of my tempo runs when it happened. I came home and was pretty excited to share with Sue that I think my body had finally adapted. It was weird, but it's as if someone had flipped a switch and overnight I could finally handle my workouts. This was a huge milestone for me both mentally and physically. Mentally, I had committed myself in week 3 to seeing this all the way through and by week 5 I now felt somewhat relieved that I could actually see myself achieving my goal. Physically, my body was now able to handle my higher heart rate and instead of backing off when things were "uncomfortable" I was able to push through it and keep going.



Coincidentally, my neighbour Joseph had also wanted to qualify for Boston and decided to start joining me on my long runs. It was nice to have the company and I was able to share with Joseph everything that I was going through and what my plan was for achieving my goals. Since Joseph is a faster runner than I am it was a perfect match and besides, it'd make going to Boston that much more fun if we're able to do it together.

Fast forward to the "taper" part of my program. This was hardest. I'd just come off of a 39K long run (which was the longest I'd ever run in a training program) and now had to unwind for the next 3 weeks. Since we were going on vacation I figured this wouldn't be too hard. But doing my last runs down south in the heat presented some challenges. In lieu of me not getting my runs in down south that I was hoping for...or, I should say banking on....the fitness I'd accrued during my Ironman training would take me through the taper. It was hard to slow everything down with our Ironman race only 2 months away.

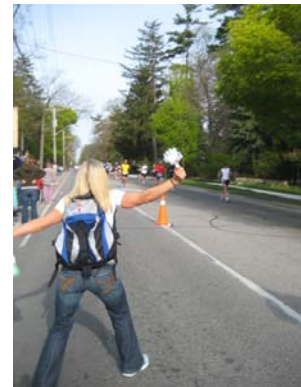




Race morning; it's go time! Sue's sister Becca came all the way down from London to cheer me on. We basically had our own support crew for the day which was comforting! I was excited and somewhat nervous but glad the day was finally here. I hadn't been this nervous for a race in years....it felt good! The anthem, the countdown and then cannon...boom....we were on our way. Out of the gate my heart rate spiked and I had problems bringing it down. I'd planned on a slow start and I was right

on pace but something wasn't right with my heart rate. Oh well, nothing I can do about it now! Sue and Becca were positioned between 2km and 3km....I could hear them 300 metres away! It guess it was easy to spot my bright yellow Livestrong jersey (thanks Becs for my present!).

Around 7km into the race I still couldn't get my heart rate under control. I told Joseph to go without me as I was struggling for some reason and didn't want to push my heart rate any higher. At the 10k mark I stopped at a porto-pottie and at that point Joseph was long gone. Now looking back, I hydrated a lot before the race but didn't take in enough fluids on the course. Maybe that's why my heart rate was high. Anyways, onto the 15k mark and again, Sue and Becca were there in full force cheering me on. At this point I don't think I was hiding the fact I was having a difficult race even though I was right on pace.



As planned, at the 15k mark I was joined by my good friend Pat. He was carrying my fuel belt so that I'd have access to my gels and drink whenever I needed them. Did I mention that Pat had just finished the 2008 Boston Marathon 3 weeks prior to today? Pat's not just fast; he's a 'freak'! =) Man, it was great to have the company and Pat helped take my mind off my watch. At this point there was nothing I could do, I was going for it and there was no turning back with or without my heart rate in check.



By 21k I started feeling a little better and started enjoying the course....which is fabulous by the way!!! At the 25k split, I was right on pace and knew that things would get a little harder as the sun started to disappear and the wind started to pick up. From the 25k mark to the finish we were mostly running into a fairly strong headwind. Pat continued to talk to me and keep me distracted from looking at my watch. With the wind picking up I was starting to get worried.





At the 35k mark I ran over the timing mat and knew that I was a minute off pace. I was starting to slow down....or, so I thought. Pat could read my mind and kept encouraging me telling me that I was going to Boston....“Can you taste it Rick?” Just after the 35k mark we caught up to Joseph and he joined. At this point I apologized that I wasn’t my normal chatty self. No apologies needed, Joseph fully understood.



The km’s between 35 and 40 were a complete blur to be honest. I just wanted it to be over. Some of the mile markers were off so I was getting inconsistent readings on my pace. At one point around the 38k mark I did the math and actually thought I may not make the 3:20:59 cut off. At 41k we saw our friend Linnea on her bike and she rode in front of us and helped clear the path by ‘gently’ suggesting people walk on the right and let those running pass on the left (thanks L!). This was a huge help as all the half marathoners were now on the same course and the path was very crowded.

Mario Iozzo also jumped in and ran with us and now I kinda felt like P-Diddy running the NYC Marathon with his entourage. Mario ran the half marathon in 1:11....enough to come in 2nd place overall. Freak! =) But Mario’s words of advise telling me to keep my head down and run with my arms was well timed advice (thanks Mario and congrats on your spectacular finish).

I could hear the crowd now and regardless of what my watch said I just wanted to be finished. Pat told me that he was going to peel off and let me run in by myself. I didn’t want him to leave. As I ran down the finishing chute I was trying not to zone out...but it was hard. I was totally exhausted. I wanted to take it all in...but I just wanted to finish. I saw our friends Tal, Jeff, Phaedra, Gary, Kim, Mark (with the kids) and then I saw Becca and finally Sue. A huge smile came across my face and I wanted to stop to give Sue a kiss but it wasn’t happening. I couldn’t stop, I had to finish.

It was a tough day and a tough race for me. It’d been 20 minutes since the last time I’d looked at my watch. I’d “accepted” that this was all I could give and that my time would be my time no matter what it was. I think I dug the deepest I’d ever dug so I was surprised to see 3:18 on the finishing clock. Holly shit, I did it. I’m going to Boston! I can’t believe it...I’M GOING TO BOSTON!!!!!!!!!! Where’s Sue?? I needed to find her but she found me. Ah, her beautiful smile and warm kiss made me well up inside....shit, I hope I don’t cry in front of all my friends!!! Joseph wasn’t too far behind me and I immediately went over to congratulate him. We’re going to Boston together! Nice!! What a perfect way to end a fabulous day.





So, my journey has come to an end and a long time goal of mine was finally reached. I know I'm leaving people out but I couldn't have done it without a few key peeps. First to Kevin and Marathon Dynamics, you're words of wisdom and coaching advice kept me in the game. To Pat for taking the time out to run with me....not sure I would have been able to pull it off without you buddy!!! And last but not least to Sue; my tower of strength. Thank you for believing in me at times when I didn't. And for telling me to 'suck it up' when I didn't want to hear it. Your encouragement and support was unwavering. I am so happy to be sharing this with you! I love you!

Rick-

Race Statistics:

103rd overall out of 1400 marathoners

Official chip time = 3:18:26

Avg pace 4:43/km

Overall in age group 23/144

Overall male 95/805

21k Split =1:39:22 **Means I ran an even split i.e., I didn't slow down in the second half of the race like I'd thought!**

