

There are a few things in my adult life that have taken so much time, effort and mental focus as qualifying for Boston.

I ran my first marathon in 2017 and although I was within the qualifying time, I was not actually fast enough to get a bib. My marathon debut beginners luck made me think that qualifying would be easy with some more focused training but after a further 5 marathons over the next few years I had still not managed to get there. I finally qualified in 2022 on my 7th attempt.

I ran Chicago in 2023 and got my first taste of a major marathon but to arrive in Boston on race weekend you could feel that the race was special to the city and was more special than Chicago had been for me. The finish straight on Boylston, the expo, the huge crowds doing shake out runs all round the city and the finish line set up with the time to the start counting down – it all gave me butterflies in my stomach.

Race prep went well, I was in position waiting for the buses with time to spare. Watching the wave one runners loading up was a little intimidating as they all looked like “proper” athletes and had obviously run way faster than me to get there and there were a lot of them..

The bus ride and wait in Hopkinson went smoothly - it was interesting to watch the huge logistical operation working so smoothly. I found a spot to wait in the sun as the morning air was still a little cool and nibbled on a few snacks to kill time.

When wave 2 was called we moved easily to the assembly area and then started the long walk to the start.

I planned to go out way slower than my qualifying pace and stuck to that pretty well - there were long easy downhill sections but I held back pretty well. What did surprise me that there were a few short sharp uphill early in the race which I was not expecting and kinda took the wind out of my sails a little. I stuck to my nutrition plan early on and was stopping to drink at every 2nd aid station - the first few miles were already getting hot.

I passed a group of family and friends at mile 6 and then tried to settle into the mid race slog but was already feeling hot and was feeling intimidated by the hills to come. I held pace through 14 pretty well but then began to slip back - don't know if it was the heat, the big occasion getting to me or the hills playing on my mind but lost the will to fight it and walked a lot over the next few miles. Tried eating chews to get something in the tank but it was too late for my stomach to handle them so even the chews were too much. Focused on trying to stay hydrated and get whatever nutritional benefit I could from Gatorade.

I decided to push my way up heartache without stopping only to be confronted with another little uphill after that. The last downhill 5 which were supposed to be easier were still a struggle although the support, like the vast majority of the course was amazing.

I found my daughter in the crowd at mile 25 which I had been looking forward to since I qualified - I stopped for a hug and high fives and then pushed towards the end.

The turn onto Boylston and the final stretch were unbelievable, the noise, the sights, the memories and history - the horror of the bombs - it all sweeps over you in an incredible wave of emotion and then it was done - my slowest marathon to date. And it really didn't matter - just being part of it all was so special.

Lessons learned - the big occasion and the Boston peculiarities did get to me a little - next time it will be less of an issue

Heat - I was a little over dressed (as always) - a vest would have been more appropriate.

Nutrition- get more on board earlier - when it's too late, it's too late.

Have a firmer plan - loosey goosey means no plan.