

Northwest Teacher Competes in the Boston Marathon

April 28, 2010

The Boston Marathon. The world's oldest annual marathon, and one of the five World marathon Majors. 26 miles 385 yards or 42.195 km long. This past week Daryl Pearson, a teacher and vice-principal from Jubilee School in Meadow Lake ran it. This is his story.

“I decided to enter last May after I completed the Calgary Marathon with a qualifying time for Boston. The qualifying time for my age group was 3 hours and 15 minutes. I went in with a time of 3:09.”

The Boston Marathon is open to all runners worldwide, but you have to qualify or ‘BQ’ as its called. Qualifying times run from 3h 10 minutes for 18 -34 year old males to 5 ½ hours for 80-year-old females. It’s the only American marathon apart from the Olympic trials to require qualifying times.

“The race is always held on Patriots Day, the 19th of April. This year 26,000 runners took part. There were two waves of runners - one wave started at 10:00, the other at 10:30. The runners are organized in ‘corrals’ of about 1000 runners in each. I was # 5047, in the fifth corral of the first wave. You wait for 2 to 3 hours and eventually you find yourself on a street about a km away from the start line and you wait until the Star Spangled Banner is sung and jets fly overhead and the gun goes off. Then you and the other runners in your corral start to walk towards the start line. As you get closer the walk changes to a slow jog until you’re running past the line.”

All 26,000 competitors wear chips in their shoes that enable the organizers to accurately record not just their start and finish times but also where a runner is on the course. Back home, friends, family and all the staff and students at Jubilee School were tracking Daryl’s progress. And he knew it. And every time he passed one of the checkpoints he thought about the support back home.

“The street was packed. By the halfway point it was just solid people and as you got closer to the finish line it was six people deep on both sides and they were always cheering. On the street itself you were never more than six feet away from another runner. You literally ran in a crowd, through a crowd. The noise levels were incredible. At Wellesley College –a world famous college for women - the tradition is that the girls will scream as loudly as they can. Boston College is further down the road and they too were out in full force.”

Yearly attendance is typically around 500,000, with over 1000 media people from over 250 outlets covering the story, making it New England’s largest sporting event. The section in Wellesley College is called ‘The Scream Tunnel.’ With reason.

“The course is challenging because although it’s generally downhill, the Newton Hills are waiting for you in the last section, when your muscles are already shot. I could see runners wobbling off to the side on those hills as their legs gave out, but my best moment in the race

happened there, at the top of Heartbreak Hill. I crested it and saw this huge crowd cheering their heads off to encourage the runners. We all started high five-ing the crowd as we ran on. It was very emotional.”

It's not called Heartbreak Hill because of all the people who've crashed and burned there as they hit the 'Wall' – that point at which the glycogen stored in their muscles runs out. No, It's called Heartbreak Hill because in the 1936 race, John Kelley, the favourite and winner of the '35 race, condescendingly patted Ellison 'Tarzan' Brown, a member of the Narragansett Tribe, on the shoulder as he passed him. Big mistake. Brown, now totally fired up, rallied, passed Kelley to win, and a reporter gave the hill the name it still bears today, as the place that “broke Kelley's heart.”

“I finished hard and was pleased. When I crossed the line I felt that I needed to hug somebody, but you don't say anything and you just keep walking. The finish area stretched for three blocks – you just keep walking past the water tables and the space blanket tables and the Gatorade tables until you eventually get to the family sections that are alphabetical. It took a while before I got to the P section and met my wife. I'd wanted to beat my time but it was a challenging course and I finished the Boston Marathon in 3:15:07.”

The course record was beaten this year by a 21-year-old Kenyan, Robert Kiprono Cheruiyot, with a time of 2:05. He intends to use his prize winnings of \$175,000 to buy cows for his farm back home. Kenyans have won the race 17 times in the last 20 years.

“When I got back to the school the next day kids were asking me about it and saying ‘good job Mr. Pearson’ and it was gratifying to hear that. Their support meant a lot. Hopefully what I've done gets kids inspired to keep moving through the tough times. I've tried to teach kids that when things get hard you still keep moving forward and deal with it. They're lessons that I've learned from running and hopefully I can share them with my students.”

Lessons learned from running: Check out Kathrine Switzer's at <http://www.katherineswitzer.com/index.shtml>, and the Dick and Rick Hoyt story at either <http://www.teamhoyt.com/> or http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Team_Hoyt.

“ It took me four days to recover. The day after was tough. In the airport it was easy to tell who'd run in the marathon – they were all walking really, really slowly –and stiff legged like Frankenstein. And everyone looked at stairs in a very, very different way.”

