

## Tokyo Marathon 2016 – Malibu (aka Scott Stacey)

This is the story of how I achieved a 31:44 marathon PB and got my sub 3 hour marathon at Tokyo Marathon in 2016.



### - The Sumo – Pre-Milers

Being my first race report with the Milers it makes sense provide some background about me. To



sum up, I was previously pretty darn fat. The most I have weighed in at would be 110+ and I've spent much of my adult life around 95-105kg. I wouldn't say I was ever extremely unfit despite my size given I still played sports during this time (mainly rugby). But I was very far from the atypical marathoner. The photo here is me attempting a half marathon in Sydney in 2008 off a single long run in 'training' of no more than 14km. I learnt two things from this run. Running long distance without training is bloody hard and some form of lubrication or protection is necessary to avoid nipple chafe! Given how hard this half marathon was I recall at

this time ruling out the possibility of ever going the full distance, it just seemed impossible.

The spark to run a marathon did come to me at one point though. I attempted another half in Melbourne in 2012. I would have still been around 95kg at this time and was only jogging 30 min a few times a week thinking this might lead to some weight loss. After the run I was given a brochure about travelling for marathons. I thought if I was to ever do one running in some amazing place would be pretty good. Given my wife is Japanese I thought I might try to get into the Tokyo marathon. Applications had already passed for 2013 so I had to wait to apply for the 2014 Tokyo marathon. I got in through the ballot and chose an online training program. Around this time I also changed my diet and started to lose weight. I was down to about 82kg by the marathon. I ran basically to finish in a time of 3:54:25. However, I had now been attacked by the running bug and signed up to the Honolulu marathon not long after. This was scheduled for December 2014. This gave me a new target and the opportunity for a holiday somewhere other than Japan for once. I still wasn't focused on running fast as Honolulu is not a place for a fast marathon. It is hot, humid and you need to run over a volcano a couple of times. I followed the same online training program, which in hindsight was very conservative. On race day it was raining and winds were up to 80km an hour, it was very humid also and in the end I ran 3:29:44. Sub 3:30 was the target I set out to achieve so I was really happy with this result. I ran this one also quite conservatively given the heat and hills but in hindsight I found the effort level more like a very long training run rather than a race. I'd say at this point I had still not "raced" a marathon. This fact explains a lot about the size of the PB in Tokyo.

Once back from Honolulu I thought I was tired of running by myself and if I was going to continue running I needed some company. I had no idea about running groups and emailed the only contact information I could find on the website of the nearest running club to me; the Collingwood Harriers. This was Hally. He pointed out that the Milers might be a good option for me and so I agreed to meet him down at the Tan for a run. This decision turned out to be one of the best things I've done as I've come to love my time with the Milers and the great friends I found with the group. A positive by-product is that it has also improved my running.



### - Mr Miyagi – The training

Some discussion formed on the Milers forum/FB page that some people were interested in entering the Tokyo marathon for 2016. Knowing what a great marathon it is and also wanting to do an overseas trip with Milers I thought I'd enter the ballot again. Amazingly I got through again despite the 400,000 entries and only 37,000 spots (it's clearly favourable to foreigners).

At this time I felt I was close to a 3 hour marathon but likely just a bit short. I thought I would probably be able to run something like sub 3:05 on a good day and more likely sub 3:10. As runners would know, the thought of being close to 3 hours but not under it was pretty uncomfortable – a case where it may be preferable to be slower!

I was again looking around for programs to follow (I like structure). I found a sub-3 plan from Runners World UK that looked promising, although it was high intensity and included lots of speed work of the shorter variety (200m reps etc). After talking to some Milers I was anxious about whether this plan was right with some saying lots of short reps was pointless and just increased injury risk. I was now only a couple of weeks out from when most plans required me to start training and what I thought was a settled training plan was now out the window.

I was also anxious because my previous 12 months had been punctuated by injury when I had attempted to ramp up training for a marathon. Getting hit by a bike in early 2015 gave me a short time to try to train for the Gold Coast Marathon which I had entered at the start of the year. In the end it proved too short a time to ramp up the kms and I got injured. I was able to run the Gold Coast Half on limited training and get a PB of 89 minutes. Melbourne Marathon was then the next target. However, ramping up again for Melbourne I got injured. I resolved based on this to only do easy running for a few months and focus on being strong enough for Tokyo. I did a lot of this solo so I wouldn't be tempted to run too fast. The only effort runs I did were the odd parkrun at tempo pace.

On a Wednesday Tan run I was talking to Bevo and trying to get some advice about developing my plan given the plan I had in mind was now out the window. At that time JC was looking to do Tokyo rather than Wang and I mentioned I might just tag along to whatever JC was doing. After that run I got a message from Bevo asking if I would like a plan put together. I immediately jumped at the offer. To be honest it is not something I could have asked for myself as I felt it was an imposition on Bevo's time. Also being a runner at the lower end of the Milers speed scale I really didn't feel worthy of having Bevo's support. But I wasn't going to say no and let this opportunity pass. I did feel uncomfortable for a reasonable period of time being included in the now famous 'stables'. But everyone was great and it was a very supportive environment despite the differences in ability.

This turned out to be the best thing that could have happened for my running. Under the tutelage of Bevo-san my running has improved dramatically. While it is possible that I might have achieved a sub 3 hour marathon at some point, it would not have been at this marathon if not for the support and direction of coach Bevo. The guy is born to coach (and run pretty fast also it seems).

While the individualised plans are of course a part of the story I believe it is only a small part. It is the support, guidance and accountability that are the biggest drivers. The plan had me running less than 100km a week at my request as I didn't feel I could safely handle more. The biggest difference for me compared to some of the others in the stables was I didn't do a mid-week long run and kept this to 13km. I think this worked very well as it meant I wasn't destroyed for my Thursday session and so

could get more out of it. I also ran more 30km+ runs than I had done in the past with seven runs over 30km, topping out at 36km. I also had several long runs with marathon pace work at the end of them. Another key thing I focused on was ensuring my easy runs were genuinely easy and so allowing for proper recovery. For this reason I ran almost all of them solo so I could run whatever pace felt comfortable on the day. JC seemed to struggle with this idea. On a weekly basis he would ask me if I am coming to WKK and I would refuse each time with the same reason being that I wanted to run my own pace. Gotta love his perseverance though.

The real turning point for my training I believe came during a couple of sessions around Christmas time. To this point I was finishing sessions thinking I still had something left in the tank. Basically Bevo gave me permission to blow up in the forthcoming sessions to test the limits a bit. I didn't blow up in these but also exceeded my target times by a fair amount while also getting to the end knowing I had nothing more to give. This was how to run sessions. I was also fortunate enough to never run an intervals session solo. This meant I was always encouraged to keep pushing.

At this point it would be remiss not to acknowledge JC. I called JC Bevo's assistant coach as out on the Tan or the track he continued to encourage me and push me to my limits. JC is very strong at sessions and it was my goal to keep up with him as much as I could. I expect this will continue! Another Miler that has given me great support is Rog. Rog, along with another mate Sean Helmut, provided me with readily available sounding boards for those things I couldn't bother Bevo about, and there were lots of those!



Training was going very well with very little in the way of potential injury concerns etc. However, a conflation of factors led to me falling victim to a virus a few weeks out from the marathon. These were: our biggest weekend of training, my daughter going back to school (and so bringing germs home) and my 2yo son deciding sleep was over-rated again. This was really frustrating given I knew I get hammered when I get sick so had tried to avoid that prospect by hitting immunity vitamins every day and laying off the booze. All to no effect it seems.

Basically while unwell I was really not able to do anything more than easy runs. Unfortunately 5Ms is not an easy run and was scheduled for this period. Coach Bevo wanted us to run 5Ms so I had already signed up. I kept thinking I would start feeling better but would then get worse. The day before 5Ms I was very worried that it would destroy me and tried to withdraw from the event. Despite the great efforts of Slips, Dozer and many other Milers a replacement was not available and I would have to run to avoid letting down the others participating. It was a great day and I enjoyed it. I got through with the help of Codral and also my great team mates allowing me to take on the easier stages. It did have an impact on me though as the following Tuesday I felt horrible and was in bed all day. I was also smashing every conceivable cold and flu remedy at this point. By the following weekend I felt about 95% and so decided to give a scheduled parkrun a crack. The night before I had thought I would just run a tempo at parkrun but felt well enough that morning to have a go. While still clearly unwell I was able to run 17:59. Not a bad result considering and a 48 second PB for me. However, again, it knocked me back a bit and I felt horrible during the final long run of 26km the following day – I even stopped at certain points to rest – not a good sign.

During this period I'd continually think I was almost at 100% and then feel sick again after doing any running other than easy running. The weekend before the marathon I spent in bed. Oh dear. Will I be able to even run the marathon? Surely the sub 3 hour target is well and truly gone now we are only one week out. I took it very easily the days before my flight to Tokyo. My only run was a 20 min

tempo that I wanted to do pre-Tokyo. One option was to attempt it in Tokyo but I also wanted to ensure I had recovery time in case it set me back again. I came out of it feeling no worse, so I guess that was a win. By this point I was reasonably OK but still had the tingle of a sore throat and knew I wasn't fully 100%.



### Lost in Translation – Pre-race in Tokyo

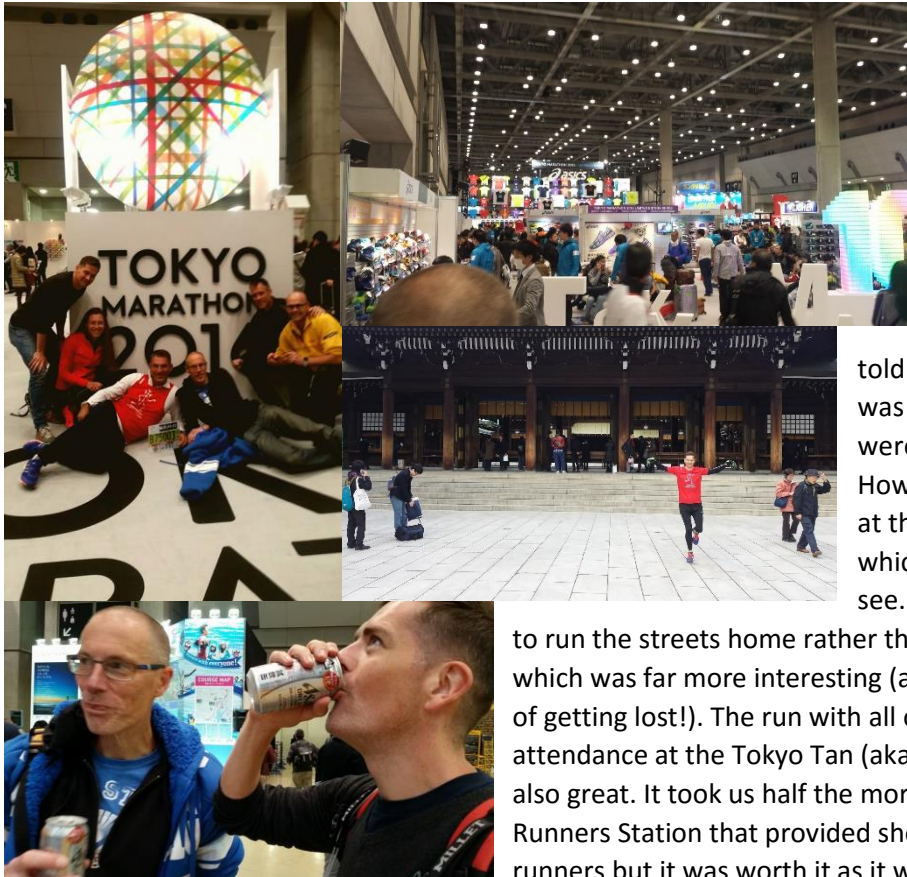
I arrived in Tokyo on the same flight as Katie and Duff and we made our way to our respective hotels. I was sharing a room with Duff and Katie was at a different hotel. I was worried the flight might have knocked my health around as I had limited sleep but I felt surprisingly good.

We basically survived Tokyo through a combination of my broken Japanese, previous experience in Tokyo, google maps, and remote advice from my amazing wife (which included her finding and booking restaurants for us from Australia). The story seemed to be that I would follow what my wife told me and everyone else would follow me. Seemed like a good plan and worked most of the time. Duff's laissez-faire attitude to everything did mean I had to monitor him as if one of my children. He would frequently lag behind and I'd find myself having to wait or go back and get him as at least I had some fear of him getting lost. For those that do an international marathon with Duff in the future I recommend a leash or tracking device of some type.



Being married to a Japanese person also means I understand that there is a proper way for things to be done in Japan and it is important for this to be followed in order for everything to work in an orderly manner. LG was fantastic in testing the boundaries of this. The highlight being his deliberate efforts to ignore all instructions when eating all you can eat shabu shabu. Rather than wave a single piece of thinly sliced meat through the hot broth for it to cook, LG threw entire plates of meat in and allowed them to stew. Large chunks of meat were then transported to a bowl that mixed sauces that were meant to be kept separate and used for dipping rather than soaking. This is demonstrated in LG's bowl to the right here that looks more like miso soup. When he then asked the waiter if it was OK to pour beer into the broth I gave up and just went with the flow. If you do an international marathon with LG in the future be aware, he's a trouble maker! I also got to meet some other runners from Melbourne at this dinner, Matt Callaghan and Joe Vaughan. Despite neither of them being Milers they are both good guys (I was surprised too!).





The other highlights included a run through Yoyogi Park which I had thought was supposed to be a runners area in Tokyo but Duff and me were told twice (yes we had to be told twice) that no running was allowed. Perhaps we were in the wrong area? However, we did a stop off at the Meji Shrine here which was interesting to see. It also meant we had

to run the streets home rather than through the park which was far more interesting (and included a high risk of getting lost!). The run with all of the Milers in attendance at the Tokyo Tan (aka Imperial Palace) was also great. It took us half the morning to find the Runners Station that provided showers and facilities for runners but it was worth it as it was a very enjoyable

last hit out prior to the marathon. I also met The Fury for the first time here despite knowing of his existence through the training plans he would send through each fortnight. After this it was off to the Expo to collect race bibs and spend up on souvenirs. It's a great expo and is part of the whole experience of the Tokyo marathon so I recommend you set aside a decent amount of time (and money) to get around it if you attend this marathon.

Lots of walking and relatively late nights compared to my usual sleeping habits over the previous couple of days meant that the day before the race I was feeling quite tired and also a little sore in some places from the run the previous day. We kept the Saturday pretty quiet venturing out mainly for groceries and also some bento food for lunch and dinner to eat in our room.

### TOKYO MARATHON 2016 - The Race

Race morning the usual nerves started to kick in. Given our hotel was right at the start line and the start time was a very respectable 9:10am there was no need to rush. We got through the security and baggage area and headed to our start block; which was block B. We just went straight to the front of this group. After about 5 seconds standing here Duff said he was going to try to get into the A block at the front. I was quite hesitant but followed nonetheless.

We walk right into the A block. This is too easy. No-one checked. Surely it's not this easy? Now we are in Duff starts to get anxious while I am far more relaxed. I'm popping my head up to look for Rog and LG who are rightfully meant to be in this block while Duff is telling me to keep my head down in case we get busted. I suspect Duff believes the staff have photos of everyone that is meant to be in Block A and we will get busted this way. Eventually we see LG and Rog come towards us and it's great to see them and we wish each other good luck. I'm feeling particularly proud to be a Miler at this point. With about a minute or so until the gun goes I toss my warm gear which of course reveals I'm nothing but an interloper, but the damage has been done now, the race is about to start.

As the squeeze that commences just before the start occurs I fall just behind the others. Given I don't intend running their pace I don't try to push ahead and just start on my own. The gun goes off, the confetti is shot into the air, and we are running.



The early stages are very comfortable as we are running downhill. I knew the garmin would be off from previous experience but I am surprised to hear my 1km alarm go off well before the 1km marker on the course. Garmin has me running the first km in about 3:43/km pace but when I reach the course marker the time is just over 4:00/kms. I've got my 5km splits written down with me so this is what I will focus on rather than garmin pace.

The race plan is to look to hit 20:50 for each 5km split. This is in order to build up a small buffer for the last 8km when we hit the bridges at the end. Given the course profile it's my view you won't run your fastest by negative splitting this course. The objective however is to minimise the size of the positive split.

At about 4km Katie comes along side me. I find out she also snuck into the A Block. Katie is running a touch faster than I want to and I tell her I'm just going to stick to my own pace and she can go on if she likes. This is what happens. Official splits show I get through 5km in 20:29. Slightly ahead but that's OK given the downhill here.

At about 7km I am fast approaching on Katie again. I can see her calf is giving her trouble by the way she is running. She tells me it's gone and I just proceed forward wishing her good luck. We are on the flat now and it feels noticeably different to the downhill which was super easy. My mouth feels dry so I grab some water at an aid station and pretty much choke on the water and find myself coughing for a few hundred meters. Mental note at this point was to drink more cautiously. I remember also for next time to squeeze the top of the cup.

I go through 10km in 41:01 (20:42 for 5km). This is ahead of schedule but for some reason I think I am behind so pick it up a bit. I can't explain why I thought I was behind, I must have read my split time wrong. At 10km I remember I had planned to have gels every 10km so I take one now. I'm able to get some water down without choking also.



The next 10km are pretty uneventful really. The main issue I am having is getting an accurate picture of the pace I am running at. Sometimes I'd look at the watch and the lap pace would show 4:45/km pace and the next moment I'd look down and it would show 4:05/km pace. This meant I was having to calculate what my approximate time should be for each km between my 5km splits to ensure I was on track. I was probably stressing about this a touch more than I should have.

When in doubt I just ran at a pace that felt right.

I get through 15km in 1:01:30 (5km in 20:29), this is 1 minute ahead of schedule and then to 20km in 1:22:13 (5km in 20:43), which is again a bit over a minute ahead. As I go through half way over a minute ahead of schedule I start to worry if I've run too hard and I'll blow up at the end (given we had already incorporated a buffer). While I feel OK I also don't feel like I am simply cruising or anything. I notice I am breathing a bit harder. The thought also briefly crosses my mind that I could potentially run a great time here, something around 2:55 if I didn't crash at the end.





From 20-25 I am looking to try to link up with some other runners. There are points on the course where there is a noticeable headwind. Teaming up could help with this and also potentially relax me a bit. Teaming up proves impossible though. Every time I run on someone's shoulder they quickly move ahead or back. Not sure what's the deal with that. The other major feature of this portion of the race are the cheers for Baikinman (on the right here). Constantly I hear 'Ganbatte Baikinman'. Kids screaming and people going generally just a bit crazy. All this because a runner has a soft toy version of the tv cartoon character Baikinman on his hat! I even try to run with Baikinman, but he's not interested either and drops back. I hit 25km in 1:43:03 (5km of 20:50, the only split that is bang on target) compared to a target time of 1:44:10 – still on track and a bit ahead of pace. I had my gel at 20km on target also, I felt this one actually gave me a bit of a boost.



From 25-30km I feel like things are starting to get a bit harder. Surely this is too early for it to feel harder? Isn't that supposed to happen after 30km? Like this picture of Hello Kitty here I didn't know if the race is going to be like a cute cat and just progress nicely or an evil cat that will scratch your eyes out – both are possibilities at this point. Don't trust cats. At around 28km I was feeling like it was quite tough and I was running low on energy. This is confirmed post race by Rog who said he saw me at this point and I looked like I was struggling a bit and he was worried for me. I had a gel at 29km rather than the scheduled 30km in the hopes it would get me going again. But with no water here I would have to wait until after the 30km marker to take on fluid. 25-30km was done in 21:01, only 10sec off target for the 5km but obviously I am slowing. I am still ahead of the overall target by about a minute though.

30-35km start to feel really tough. I am having to push now and know I have a fight on my hands. I tell myself that I just need to get to 35km close to on target and I should be able to bring it home from there. My focus is on keeping to sub-3 hour pace, or 4:15-4:16/km on the garmin. I'm reasonably successful at this with a 21:23 5km split. The legs feel like they are gone though and energy is low. My legs feel like jelly at one point. This is going to be very tough. I really worry that I've blown it by going out slightly faster than target pace. At 35km I take another gel that I had on board just in case.



36km is where Tokyo marathon gets tough. From here on in there is undulation every km until 1km to go. These are in the form of a series of bridges with the first being the longest. The first hill was harder than I had expected pre-race but I felt I got up it well enough. I even felt like I was running well going over the overpass. This feeling was very short-lived though. From here on in things got very hard.

In these last kms I saw many runners stopping and dropping out. At times I needed to change direction to avoid runners stopping in the middle of the road in front of me. My focus now was simply on doing whatever was needed to not lose my chance at a sub 3 hour marathon. I didn't want to come this far and lose it when it was within my grasp. However, I had a very strong desire to stop running. It was about this time that I did the: 'I'm never running one of these things again' charade. I just kept telling myself to keep running and hold it together. If I could hold it together I'd make it.

Knowing I had some time up my sleeve I walked an aid station and so ensuring I got some water in me and I think also to give myself a mental break. It was feeling much warmer now and I had removed my arm warmers and gloves earlier before 35km. I tipped some water over my neck also in these later stages (it was about 17 degrees, so still not too bad). This was the slowest km according

to garmin for the race, but I knew I was still on track so long as I could keep going, I wasn't overly worried, just hurting.

At times I tried to focus on form, which is what I tend to fall back on when the going gets tough. But that would last for about 10 seconds and then I'd just think about wanting to stop running. Again, I am just saying to myself: keep going, don't stop, hold it together.

From 5km to go they start to count down the kms. Just a parkrun to go, you can do this I tell myself, you can run 5km. On the inclines of the bridges I started to feel minor cramps. Uh oh. I've heard of people cramping close to the finish line and missing their targets, if I have to stop for cramp I'm gone. I've not had cramp issues before so this is not an experience I'm familiar with. My 5km to 40km is 22:30. I've slowed a fair bit. At this point though I am no longer focused on my target splits and am simply trying to hold it together as best I can. I don't know how much I'm behind target any longer but instead I'm looking at how much gap I have for sub-3. I was calculating how slow I could run each km in for sub-3 to be achieved. This helped to remove some of the stress of it all.

There is one last hill with 1km to go, it's steep and not fun at all. Once I hit the 42km marker my calves go into full cramp mode. They just seize on me and become as tight as rocks. Surely it can't end for me like this so close to the line? My strategy faced with this challenge is to just keep running and hope like hell I can keep going. I am now starting to push harder with the line so close, I just have to get to the finish and I can stop. It seems I am able to get the pace back to something like 4:15/km for this last little stretch (equivalent to a sprint at this point) and I was just running to the line praying the calves let me get there.

I cross the line and see 2:58:00 on the garmin. Official net time 2:58:02. I've done it. I'm now a sub-3 hour marathoner.



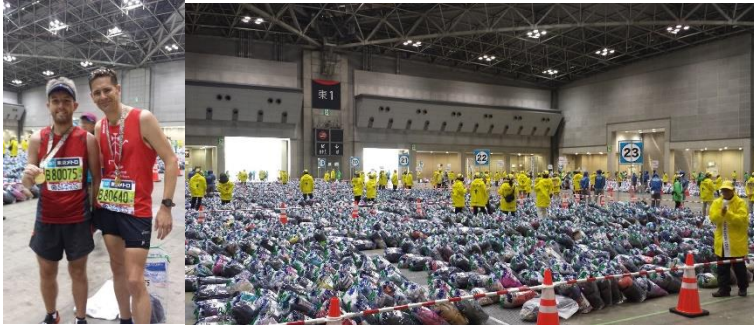
While it was very hard, it is clear that the race plan went off perfectly. If I had targeted 2:59 I likely would not have made it given the difficulty of the bridges at the end and the inevitable slowing. Even if targeting 2:59 would have worked it would have been a high risk strategy and likely caused a fair bit more stress.

### **Post race**

I feel pretty stuffed post race (what a shock!). While I am able to walk I don't feel particularly stable. I see Joe Vaughan who I'd met at the shabu shabu restaurant. He has finished about 15 seconds ahead of me. It's great to see a familiar face. We then make the long walk to the changing area. At this point I really just want to stop. I just want to rest but we have to keep moving. I smash a sports drink offered to me and immediately feel I've got too much sugar in the guts. Now I need water, something real. We get this and a few other goodies.



When we enter the huge baggage collection area (shown below) we are pretty much the only runners entering at that time. All of the volunteer staff are clapping us. It was a very surreal experience, the volunteers at this marathon are fantastic. When we get to the change area I tell Joe I just need to stop for a bit and I lie down on the floor where some other runners are gathered, he keeps walking for fear of seizing up. I try to give coach Bevo a call at this point to inform him of the result but it turns out he was driving back from Wangaratta so I leave a message.



I stand up again and we head for the changing area, changing direction when told about the free 10 minute massages. Post massage we head to the foot bath and I finally see the other Milers. I enter the area and get directed to a spare foot bath, but I point to the other boys in Miler singlets and she tells me I can sit with my team. We get there and I embrace the lads. Again, so proud to be a Miler and wearing the Miler red. I hear about the amazing times run by Duff and Rog and also that LG has a PB but was still disappointed with his time. I later discover he had hamstring issues. None of us want to leave the foot bath but when I see people lining up to get in I suggest we make a move (I've been well trained in Japanese courtesy by my wife it seems).

Getting back to our hotels proved to be far more challenging that we might have imagined. While they provide you with free transport on metro lines the two train stations near the finish we went to are not metro lines, making the ticket unusable there. After failing to get on a train I mentioned that I'm going to get a beer from the convenience store. Others agreed that this was an entirely sensible idea. We ended up spending about an hour outside that convenience store drinking beer and eating pork buns and karaage and watching a stream of runners walk past. We also got to see Katie and Matt Callahan at this point.



We eventually decided to just go to the nearest train station and pay rather than use the free ticket. I walk down the stairs to the station with Rog and we get to the bottom and realise that LG, Duff, Katie and Joe are nowhere to be seen. Rog indicates he will go have a look for them. While he is doing this I get a call from LG telling me that they jumped on a train already and so will meet as at the stop we are supposed to change lines. I mentioned to Rog that we should perhaps make our own way back to the hotel. I then realise that if Duff is in my care. If he is to make it back to the hotel I'm going to have to meet up with them and escort him back. Come on Duff, let's get you home.

