

Melbourne Marathon 2017: the marathon I would never run

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Meeting at parkrun, a couple of years ago Simon Tu and I had promised each other that we would never run a marathon. Here is the story of the race I would never run but am so glad that I did.

The campaign

On a grey and wet Tuesday in July I arrived at AOP for the first session, excited at the idea of running a marathon and nervous at all the hard work that lay ahead. A big group of Milers had gathered to run 8 x 1km in the rain. Some were part of Bevo's stable for the 2017 Melbourne Marathon: Simon "Desi" Tu, Scott "Jumbo" Smith, James Howe, Simon Moore, Greg Roche, Mark Symes and Elisa "Elmo" Mooren - soon to be joined by KJ. As we took turns leading out reps into the wind, I knew that this bunch of runners were going places, hopefully fast. Jumbo, James and I met up early the following Thursday for a 60 min tempo run out to Burnley and back. This workout became known as the rink when we nearly took a tumble on the icy boards. As we tried the marathon pace on for size, I kept thinking how will we run like this for 3 hours on race day? We finished the week with Sri Chinmoy Princes Park where I ran over 30km for the first time and I remember feeling fatigued and that my feet were quite sore. As I crossed the finish line Ben Briggs reminded me that the marathon starts at 30km. Good advice, perfectly timed. I knew I needed to harden up.

This first week set the pattern for the rest of the training program through the winter and into spring. Runners committed to the same campaign, encouraging each other to test our limits through the different midweek sessions. While I didn't nail every session, I completed all of them which made for really solid preparation.

The magic really happened on the weekend long runs which alternated between easy running one week and a chunk of marathon pace on the other. I had already enjoyed so many Sunday runs with Westerfoldians buddies including Desi and Elmo and it was great to now head out for long runs with other Milers. Highlights included the Capital City Trail 32km in August with a huge crew. I love a good loop run, it's one of the reasons Westerfolds parkrun is home. The 36km run in early September along the Yarra Trail starting out at sunrise was also special. Not just a beautiful morning but also a realisation of the power of unspoken shared purpose. That said, running 12km at marathon pace back to Eaglemont was really tough. I then ran Sri Chinmoy Burnley which was the longest run of the campaign at 38km. James, KJ and I ran the Half at marathon pace exactly as planned and watched Roche have a blinder! Marathon pace was becoming more comfortable.

Race wise, I was going to be away for AV Burnley so turned to Sandy Point for my Half Marathon at end of August. Not being a bayside runner, I had heard the weather can be fickle so what would the running gods bring me that day? They sent me LG as a pacer and I was stoked to have the support of such a tough and experienced runner. The gods also delivered 40kmh headwinds for the first 5km and I sat in tight behind LG alongside Desi, Malibu and Dan Hall. I looked up and realised for the first time ever that I was sitting in the lead pack as Sean and a couple of other runners worked ahead into the wind. The pack grumbled about the conditions and there was talk of a guaranteed negative split with the tailwind coming home which I never realised. I let the pack go up the first significant hill and set my own pace. Approaching the turnaround, I thought to myself the race starts now but knew that I had spent a lot of energy getting there. LG patiently guided me home but I never quite held the sit so it was tough going. Nevertheless, I did kept my pace and

finished 29th overall with 86:42, a 3:20 PB in difficult conditions. Not quite the time I wanted and of course conditions at AV Burnley 2 weeks later were perfect!

On the Grand Final holiday we stared down Bevo's Badness at Princes Park: 3x6km (4km MP, 2km HMP) with 1km floats. I had heard that the earlier original Badness had broken much better runners than me or was this a psychological masterstroke by Bevo to make the 2017 version feel easier? I had run a Baby Badness solo in Noosa a couple of weeks before and came up short in the final HM pace effort. What would the full Badness be like? I felt strong and ready going in, quiet confidence is always a good sign. James and I delivered the whole 20km session like clockwork. I knew I could run a marathon but how well would I go on debut? My main goal was to run well after 30km knowing that the time would take care of itself. I slept well on the night before knowing that I was as well prepared as I could be for my first marathon.

The race

Race day morning was glorious. Arrived at the MCG early to meet my race buddies and avoid the rush. Bag drop, pit stop and we were on our way to the start line. Red shirts everywhere as we found our way to the front. I saw lots of red Miler singlets warming up in the Preferred Start area. Wouldn't mind that one day, I thought to myself but we were well positioned nonetheless.

James and I started together with the goal to run into G alongside each other in 3 hours time. I felt ready to race and conditions were perfect. No excuses here, I thought to myself. Our first 5km splits were under target pace as we cruised down St Kilda Road, staying relaxed knowing what lay ahead. Through Albert Park we went with Stevie waiting with our drinks exactly as planned and Stodds delivering a sterling pep talk. The power of Milers' on course support is beyond words - special shout out to Bella who was fired up and everywhere. Every couple of kms I saw someone I knew who encouraged me along, in addition to the anonymous "Go Milers!" shout outs.



Early on at Albert Park, thumbs up. Photo: Hutz

James and I had a little pack of our own going down Beaconsfield Parade. Runners thinking that these guys must know what they're doing, which we did. My mate Scott Trickett joined us for a few minutes as we headed south and I was running in cruise control. So far, so good and Bevo was happy with our progress. We went through half way in just under 90 mins, a minute ahead of schedule. "Race starts at 30km", I said to James.

Malibu came past as we ran down to Elwood and I was pleased to know that he was indeed running his progressive and we weren't slowing down. James and I were still locked on our target pace as we passed the 25km marker. After we passed the turnaround, I reminded myself to stay relaxed knowing it would get tough any minute now.

I saw Rosco on the Fitzroy Street corner and settled into my rhythm to get up that hill. As we hit the half marathoners coming out of Albert Park, I shouted to James "We've got this!" and navigated our way through the crowd of runners that were taking up the whole street. I kept my pace steady turning into St Kilda Road and pushed ahead as James was beginning to struggle. My main race goal was to run well in the last 10km and now it was here. Did I have what it takes to deliver when it counts? Yes I did.

Approaching the turn at the Gallery, I passed Roche who already knew he was having a stinker. Through the underpass I ran not noticing the 35km marker - it was harder to monitor my pace now. Up Linlithgow Avenue where I knew the Westerfoldians would cheer me on even though I wasn't running in fluoro green. On to Birdwood Avenue where I felt the pinch of the gradient but remembered to keep my effort steady. Bevo popped up again at 37km to help spur me home as did Bella. God bless the United States of America! I could see Duff going down the Domain which was encouraging as I hadn't seen the 3 hour bus since we left the bay but they were quite a way ahead.



Birdwood Avenue, all business. Photo: Hutz

Down the Domain and up Dallas Brookes Drive I ran strong and steady, passing other runners still wondering if I was going to hit the wall. Then as I entered St Kilda Road I thought I've got this. I increased my effort but felt too fatigued to go any faster. The last 2km were a blur and I felt like I had nothing more to give and was hurting for sure. Damn you central governor! I knew I would make it to the G now and put in a sustained effort upon entering the stadium and was at my limit crossing the line.

The finish area was a sea of red. Red mats covered the MCG grass and red singlets were everywhere as a lot of Milers had run around 3 hours. I was pumped to share the joy of finishing with the buddies I had trained so hard with especially Desi, Jumbo, James and Elmo who all ran amazing times. I ran 3:01:26 on debut and achieved my goal of running well after 30km, improving my overall position by 85 places and up to 30th in my age category. I had executed my race plan so well that it took a while to sink in. My mind had been so prepared for things to go wrong and now what was I to do? Celebrate!



Finish line celebrations Photo: Elisa Maree

Thanks

Thanks to Bevo for his leadership and advice. Thanks also to the many Milers who ran with and encouraged me along the way especially Elmo and Desi, Jumbo and James, Duff and Jessie and my Westerfoldian mate Scott Trickett. And to Leon Adkins from Melbourne Sports Medicine for the massages that kept me in good shape through the whole campaign.

Marathon program

Week	Date	Distance	Long run	Race
1	17-Jul	90.6	30	
2	24-Jul	92.1	30	
3	31-Jul	96.8	32	
4	7-Aug	93.1	38	
5	14-Aug	92.9	34	
6	21-Aug	80.1	30	Sandy Point HM 86:42
7	28-Aug	100.8	36	
8	4-Sep	91.5	36	
9	11-Sep	103.5	38	
10	18-Sep	102.2	34	
11	25-Sep	96.4	24	
12	2-Oct	65.5	18	
13	9-Oct	75.1	42	

Marathon race

Dist	Split	Race Time	Pos	Div	Gen	Speed/Pace
5k	00:20:54	00:20:54	361	37	335	14.35 / 4:11
10k	00:21:37	00:42:32	394	39	371	13.88 / 4:19
15k	00:21:46	01:04:18	410	39	386	13.78 / 4:21
20k	00:21:28	01:25:47	401	39	378	13.98 / 4:18
21k	00:04:01	01:29:48	398	38	375	14.94 / 4:01
25k	00:16:55	01:46:44	380	37	360	14.19 / 4:14
30k	00:21:45	02:08:29	364	38	345	13.79 / 4:21
35k	00:21:42	02:30:11	338	32	318	13.82 / 4:20
40k	00:21:56	02:52:08	292	30	273	13.68 / 4:23
42.2k	00:09:17	03:01:26	279	30	262	14.22 / 4:13