

# OUTDOORS...



Eddie Metro | For Fort Collins Now

The Boston Marathon: "It's all about the promises."

BY FELIX WONG

For Fort Collins Now

Considering how I was jumping with joy and speaking in rapid-fire English while telling some friends that I was going to run in the Boston Marathon, I suppose they could be forgiven for being mistaken about my motivations for participating in the race.

"Are you going to try to break your personal record?" prodded one of them.

"Will you beat Lance Armstrong?" asked another.

A friend's 6-year-old son had the best question. "Are you gonna win?"

"Um, no," I replied. "I am just going to have fun! I'm going to look around, shoot some photos, and revel in the experience."

Thoughtfully, I added, "Oh, and beat Mike Huckabee."

It was an easier answer, after all, than to explain exactly why I was so excited to run in the annual 26.2-mile race in Beantown, the Cradle of Liberty, the Athens of America. To explain the allure of the Boston Marathon would require giving a history lesson.

For instance, the race is the oldest annual marathon in the world, beginning in 1897. Inspired by the first modern-day marathon competition held in the 1896 Olympics, the Boston Marathon also pays homage to Paul Revere's midnight ride warning of the movements of the British Army in 1775. In fact,

the event is held on Patriots' Day, the third Monday of each April—a Massachusetts state holiday.

The race's 112-year history is also filled with lore, ranging from the exploits of John A. Kelly—the 1935 and 1945 winner who'd eventually complete the race 58 times, including as recently as 1992 when he was 84—to the scandal of Rosie Ruiz, who "won" the women's race in 1980, only to be disqualified days later when an investigation concluded she did not run most of the race.

It is its marathon's history that makes Boston holy ground to running enthusiasts around the world, a Mecca to where a pilgrimage is almost a sacred duty. The race is also a rite of passage for distance runners because it is the only major annual marathon in the United States that requires a qualifying time respective to one's age.

For example, men younger than 35 must run a certified marathon course—such as the Colorado Marathon in Fort Collins that was run on May 4—in no more than 3 hours, 10 minutes and 59 seconds. In my case, I qualified by running a 3:03:24 at the St. George Marathon in Utah last October.

Another—but much less common—method to get in the marathon is to apply for one of a limited number of spots granted to charities. This is how Mike Huckabee gained entry.

I reflected upon how it seemingly took me 112 years of training my butt off to qualify as I gathered at the start of the

## Beantown's P

*Boston's famed mar  
of me and Lance Ar*

Boston Marathon on Monday, April 21 in Hopkinton, Mass.

"This is it, this is big time," observed my friend Eddie—one of 23 runners from Fort Collins—as we found ourselves in a horde of nearly 25,000 of the fastest marathoners in the world. Looming overhead was one of the ubiquitous Adidas signs with inspirational messages. This one read, "Gentlemen, start your legends."

The mobility-impaired (including wheelchair) racers started first. The elite runners began next, followed by a procession of runners from their respective corrals. Based on my qualifying time, I was seeded in Corral No. 3, meaning that I started the race a couple minutes after the elites. Each footstep over the starting line was greeted by whoops and cheers by spectators and the runners themselves.

The first half seemingly went by quickly, as the course was predominantly downhill and the legs still fresh. I clicked off most of these miles in the low seven-minute-per-mile range, still feeling good by the midway point of the race.

This was especially true as we passed by Wellesley College, where the shrieks and screams of the lovely, young Wellesley women reverberated off rows of overgrown trees towering above the pavement. Ah, the famed "Scream Tunnel." Here I ran on the right edge of the road and high-fived 99 percent of the women lined up on that side. Those who did not offer their hands often blew kisses, and for once in my life I felt like a superhero for doing nothing more than running like a man being chased by a rabid dog.

If I ever started to feel like I had possessed any superpowers, however, that illusion was quickly extinguished as I began to crest over the Newton Hills between Miles 16-21.

By Mile 18, my quads were on the verge of cramping with every step and—with eight miles to go—it was already time to limit my losses. My velocity had slowed to a mere

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nine-minutes-per-mile. By Mile 21, I crested the blip in the road lovingly referred to as Heartbreak Hill without a shattered heart, though barely.



Felix Wong

From there the course was almost all downhill, and it was just a matter

of keeping my legs churning while hoping that my quads would refrain from locking up tighter than a vise. As Boston's famous red, white and blue Citgo sign came into full view, I knew the finish was getting close. I also knew that completing the race was still not a matter to take for granted when—with a mere half-mile to go—I saw paramedics lower an injured runner onto a stretcher.

But as I rounded the final corner onto Boylston Street and saw the final blue-and-gold Boston Marathon banner, I knew I would get there. As I shuffled my feet toward the finish line, I looked around and basked in the raucous applause by crowds at least 10 people deep, knowing that—finally!—I had made it to, and completed, the fabled Boston Marathon.

My final time was 3:28:46—a result I am pleased with considering the hills and the Cramping Quad Crisis of the last eight miles. And if you must ask, no, I did not win the race, and yes, I finished nearly 38 minutes adrift of Lance Armstrong in what was also his first Boston Marathon appearance.

But I did make good on my promise to beat Mike Huckabee, if only by default. It turns out he dropped out a few days before the race, claiming a knee injury. Maybe another year, Huck. ❧

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