

2015 VLM - Fishing with dynamite

"If you're not on the edge then you're taking up too much room" - Macho man Randy Savage RIP.

If I have told you the story already then you might want to skip this and read the next article. If I haven't told you the story then you also might like to skip this and read the next article. Or if you're curious to wonder "how did Nick Barber run a 4:28 marathon at the 2015 London Marathon?" then read on.

During the now distant, cold darkness of winter, embracing the bitter winds and horizontal downpours, like many I continued to pursue the rich rewards of runners endorphin rich exhaustion. The satisfaction of having embraced the conditions and ticking of the weekly high milage. Which seems to be a requirement when preparing for a marathon is beautifully consuming and a real indulgence. Mix that with an enthusiasm for CR hunting on strava and you have a rich elixir for the most hedonistic. Yes sometimes you feel tired but once out the door the wind blows that away and soon enough you find your required pace and the endorphins start to flow.

I love training and after a few weeks the rewards begin to show. You feel the benefits, you have days where you burst out the door and your pace is great. Other days it takes a few miles to warm up but you finish strong, The long runs are less formidable, combined with strava, new runs in different areas creates excitement. I eagerly anticipate the long sunday run, planning my next strava bashing robbery which will take place in new daylight territories.

Now lets press fast forward in this story approximately 18 weeks and about 900 miles further. Now there remains only 26.2 left to complete. It's the night before the marathon and via text messages I'm receiving a pep talk.

"Have a good un"

"I'll try"

"you can do better than that"

"I'll try"

"Stand up be proud of who you are and what you stand for - Be prepared to suffer! Suffer for us, suffer for you friends and for your club and think it could be last race you ever run. Give it everything for all of us, we are there with you. Smash it!"

"I hope you don't go saying that to everyone"

"Nah mate, I just say good luck to them"

It had done the trick. In my opinion much of a marathon is the psychological build up. The demands it takes on the mind to concentrate for your expected

period of time. I think you go into an outer body state, you have to otherwise you would probably stop pretty early on. It's this outer body state that I enjoy.....where you know that the body has performed as your brain has trained it too. You set off and let the body do it and over ride the whinging that the body makes, you over ride the pain receptors.

So winter has ran its course and on this cool spring morning I find myself standing at the start line of the worlds biggest marathon. The only marathon that matters, the only marathon that everybody has heard of - **London**. I have every intention of performing a personal best. But something is telling me that a PB will not be enough. I want to perform at my peak, I'm at my peak I want to perform a PB that will stand on a permanent basis. I don't want to knock off a little from my previous effort and then come back next year and knock a little more off. I want to lay my cards out, slap them on the table and say, "Royal flush, there it is, my PB, Booyah!"

I feel relaxed, prepared.

People around me are performing warm ups, strides, drills and leg swings. My brother who is also running a good for age time asks when am I going to get warmed up. I have no intention of wasting a single drop of energy I explain. As we enter the starting pen I dispose of my bin bag body cover and make sure the shoulders of my Tod vest aren't twisted. We are all sizing each other up and figuring the order of where we should stand (how close to the start tape) I ask a few folk what time their going for and soon find myself on the start line with the start tape against my waist. It must be the adrenalin but on this cool April morning I'm already beginning to sweat.

And then we are off, I'm running fast but not hard. I have a minimum pace in mind and this is faster than it should be but I know I have a tendency to start fast - I figure its the adrenalin and assume that I'll settle into things and the pace will ease.....but it doesn't! Ok whatever I gain here will give me some time for the latter miles and allow me to run at an easier pace. I grab a drink here and there, wet my whistle, take a swig and throw it to the side of the road. I'd been hydrating all week avoiding caffeine and alcohol and my wee was clear. As I tick off the miles I try to engage with the crowds and at around mile 7 I pass Paula Radcliffe for next few miles the crowds are roaring. I wish I'd written Paula on my number instead of Nick I thought to myself, I stick with her group briefly but it feels easy so stride on.

At 10 mile I run a PB and at half way another PB and I'm feeling good, I'm continuing to engage with people. I'm enjoying the atmosphere and support. I see my niece and brother in law in the crowds and this warms and energises

me for a few miles. Again a PB at 15 miles and at 20. I've been consuming gels every 45 mins and taking the occasional swig of water but not with any defined consumption rate - just taking a swig here and there (I don't want to take a second gulp as I think I need the air more.) I've ignored all the voices of doubt but somewhere after mile 21 a couple of runners pass me and for the first time I allow myself to walk three steps. Immediately my legs turn to jelly and I hear a big "oooohh!" I'm not sure if this was from the spectators or if it was in my head? In response to my inability to walk I decide to resume running.

My pace has dropped....drastically! I come round and I'm lying down in a first aid tent. *!^@* I think and probably say out aloud. This is not a first time, I run at the edge and I'd dropped off. Heat exhaustion and dehydration - the usual thing. How could I do this I'm thinking. I'm not thinking about PB's now I'm thinking how could I do this to my wife, my family, my Mam and Dad, my brother who will be at the finish, my niece and brother in law. The Toddies other friends who have given support and encouragement. But mostly I'm thinking about Katch - my wife. I know that she will be tracking me and I know that she'll be getting upset and anxious.

"I need to get to the finish".

"You don't need to get to finish".

I'm getting anxious, the first aid team explain that they can get me to the finish at 5 o'clock when the roads re-open.

I'm getting anxious my train is 4:05 (I don't tell them this). There is no way that I can spend the next 3 and a half hours in this tent with this guy who really means well but can't actually do anything else to help.

"It'll all be alright in the end" He tries to reassure me

The first aider must see in my eyes, I'm sure he's thinking exactly the same thing (No way can I spend the next three and a half hours in here attending to this guys anxieties). "It'll all be ok in the end " he says again. "Bollocks" I think. I'm sat freezing in my vest and shorts wrapped in a tangle of space blankets. I get the Doctor to approve my discharge. He doesn't approve of my plan to go the finish. But I know that at the finish I can fix everything - get my bag, get some food, let family know I'm ok and get my train and still catch the antiques roadshow. So off I go initially legs like jelly, I grab a lucozade enroute and don't throw it to the side. There I am swerving through the masses, clutching a space blanket, lucozade and Doctors notes (just in case). Mile 21-23 takes 1 hour 55 mins (probably because a bit of a stop). My legs have loosened back a little but I'm not interested in pushing it now, I'm running at about 7-8 minute miles. During these last miles the crowds are going nuts, screaming for the bloody nipples charity runners - they are really

suffering. Cramping up and stretching against the railings. Its like a gladiators arena, the more pain, blood, sweat and suffering they see the more the crowds seem to roar. I'm pleased/relieved to getting to the finish. I pass the finish in 4:28 but keep running. I grab a goodie bag (I want the calories) and keep moving. I want to get to my bag and phone asap. It's at the last collection point, I'm relieved to see waiting for me is my brother.

Quickly I make some calls and I'm relieved to hear Katch on the end of the phone and a tearful reassurance is shared followed by a disapproving bollocking from my parents? Next we head for the train station. I make my train and during my journey back I have a few sniffles and pick up my messages. I make it home in time for the Antiques Roadshow and it's a bloody repeat. I manage to eat a little and then sulk off to bed.

The marathon captures the nation, the non running public who wouldn't appreciate the efforts involved in getting around many of the other races I've completed. My friends, family, colleagues, students were excited to see the weekends event. Work had tweeted a message of support in the days before and when I get home I see a post on Facebook of me in front of Paula Radcliffe being escorted off the course. The following days werevery rich. I got lots of hugs and kindness from lots of very caring people. Writing about it now still puts a lump in my throat. So many kind messages, The next day I wear my marathon t-shirt for work - it's a dress down day and I feel it hangs on my scrawny beaten body.

So did I leave it all out there? Yes I bloody did and I want it back !!

The following stats are not official from the race - I haven't looked to see my position but I believe I beat Chris Evans.
Times are taken from my Garmin/Strava

30k **Best estimated 30k effort** (1:47:10)

Half-Marathon **Best estimated Half-Marathon effort** (1:14:44)

20k **Best estimated 20k effort** (1:10:48)

10 miles **Best estimated 10 miles effort** (56:37)

15k **Best estimated 15k effort** (52:44)

10k **Best estimated 10k effort** (34:53)