

## **Gansett and Boston Marathons by D.Holmen**

### **April 2012**

Over the weekend of April 14-16, 2012, I traveled to New England and ran the Gansett and Boston Marathons. The Gansett Marathon is held in Narragansett, RI. Since Narragansett is only about 80 miles from Boston, and both races are held on the same weekend, I couldn't resist doing both. I figure I'm getting to do two races for the price of one place ticket.

Both of these races require running qualifying times in other marathons before you can enter. I qualified for both races with a time of 3:04:58 in the 2011 London Marathon. Other than that similarity, the races are quite different. Boston is a huge race in a large city. Gansett is a small race with small town charm. Both races, however, are well-supported by their communities.

I flew into Boston the day before the Gansett Marathon and rented a car. After stopping at the Boston Marathon expo to pick up my race packet, I drove to Rhode Island. After a brief stop to check into my hotel, I picked up my race packet for Gansett and stayed for the pre-race dinner.

I have a lifetime goal of running Boston qualifying times in every state. Since I had never previous run Boston qualifiers in either Massachusetts or Rhode Island, I saw this as an opportunity to cross two more states off my list. To do this, I would need to run both races in 3:30. When I entered these races, I was assuming I would be in peak shape. Instead, I lost a lot of my conditioning while I was recovering from a hamstring injury. In the week leading up to these races, I was confident that I was healthy enough to race, but I wasn't sure if I could run fast enough to meet my goals.

The Gansett Marathon is a loop course along the Atlantic coast. The weather was almost ideal. It was a little warm, but the wind helped cool us off. The course is a 16.5 mile loop, followed by a 9.7 mile loop. Every half mile is marked, so it easy to check your pace.

Bib numbers are assigned according to your qualifying times. Men had blue bibs and women had pink bibs. The fastest male and female qualifiers each wore #1. I was the 26th fastest male qualifier, so I had bib #26. It's easy to see who the faster runners are, and some runners set a goal of placing higher than their bib number.

There are so many fast runners in this race that I started too fast, even though I lined up in the middle of the pack. Then I backed off a little, but was still going faster than I planned. One of the runners ahead of me was dressed as a giant cheeseburger, and after running a block or two behind him for several miles, I finally decided I had to speed up because I didn't want to get beat by a cheeseburger. After running the first loop a little fast, I wanted to keep pace in the second loop. I ended up finishing in 3:20:54. I got my Boston qualifier for Rhode Island. I was pleasantly surprised to be eight minutes faster than my previous race, but I was worried that I didn't leave enough gas in the tank for Boston.

There was an awards ceremony after the race with a pasta buffet, giving us a chance to refuel quickly. Later, several of us met for a dinner at a local tavern.

The next morning I drove to Boston, returned my rental car at the airport, and took the subway to my hotel. In Boston, it's much more practical to use the subway than to drive.

After checking into my hotel, I went to the finish line for a Marathon Maniac group photo. Then a group of us had lunch at Durgin Park, my favorite Boston restaurant. Later in the day, I met some friends from New York for drinks.

The weather forecast for race day was for a high in the upper 80s with sunny skies. Since the race starts at 10:00, it would already be hot when we started. The B.A.A. was so concerned about the heat that they were offering to let runners defer their entry to 2013 if they chose not to run. Less experienced or less fit runners were encouraged to defer. Those who chose to run were encouraged to adjust their goals. The B.A.A. also did everything they could to ensure the aid stations would have enough water and there would be enough medical aid. I think this was a responsible way to handle the situation. There have been several other races in recent years that were cancelled abruptly when it got hot. I much prefer the approach of making runners aware of the risks, but letting each runner make their own decision.

I felt surprisingly good the morning of the race. I didn't have any residual soreness from the Gansett Marathon, I was confident that my hamstring was healthy, and I was full of energy. I was no longer worried that I wouldn't have enough gas in the tank. While I was wary of the heat, I was determined to take a shot at 3:30.

I'm not sure what the temperature was at 10:00, but it was a bright sunny day, and I was getting hot just waiting for the race to start. My strategy for beating the heat was to drink both water and Gatorade at each aid station and cool myself by either putting ice in my hat or pouring water on my head. With the increased fluid intake, I also needed to take electrolyte pills. I didn't have the foresight to pack any, but Bob Hearn gave me some before the race.

Because I had a fast qualifying time, I was in a start corral with other runners who could run in the 3:05 range. The first two miles are downhill, and we went out fast. My two mile split was 14:01. After that, I eased up a little, but I was still averaging about 7:40 per mile. I needed to average 8:00 per mile for the race, so I was putting quite a bit of time in the bank. Ordinarily, it's much smarter to run at an even pace throughout the race. Because I was expecting rapidly rising temperatures, I didn't know if I would be forced to take walking breaks in the late miles to avoid overheating. I decided as long as I was coping well with the heat, I would put time in the bank in the first half, which is mostly downhill, and then I could afford to ease up later in the race.

At first, I drank a cup of Gatorade and a cup of water at each aid station. When I saw how many spectators were handing out cups of water, I gradually switched to drinking the Gatorade and dumping the water over my head, while supplementing with water from spectators. There were also many spectators spraying water from hoses, and I took every opportunity I saw to keep myself wet.

At 12 miles, we passed the screaming women of Wellesley College. Many of them hold up signs saying "Kiss Me." While it's a tradition for many of the runners to stop for a kiss, I kept running, but got an energy boost from the cheering.

By the time we reached Newton, and its four hills, I had well over seven minutes in the bank. My fast early pace took a toll on me, and I was forced to slow down, but I never had to walk. I maintained a slow steady grind, while keeping an eye on my mile times. I gave back a couple of minutes, but still had a big cushion.

From 21 to the finish it's mostly downhill. At first, I was still giving back time, but as I got closer to the finish, I picked up my pace. I finished in 3:24:49. I got my Boston qualifier for Massachusetts with five minutes to spare.

Later in the day, I had dinner with other runners, and we compared notes. Several of my friends also had good races. Some adjusted their time goals, some changed their goal to finishing, and a few ran surprisingly fast times, in spite of the heat. There were also a few who needed medical attention after the race.

The first time I ran the Boston Marathon, I didn't feel the need to keep coming back. Now I understand why people do. Besides the history, the tradition and the mystique of the course, Boston has the best spectators. I was blown away by how the people of Boston and the surrounding communities did everything they could to help the runners cope with the heat. I also discovered that everyone living in the area understands the race, whether or not they're runners.

I will probably return to Boston. If I do, I'll probably also return to Narragansett.