

Gold Coast Marathon Report

I had two goals I wanted to achieve at the Gold Coast on July 4th, 2010. One was to run my second ever marathon in under 4 hours (previous race time: 4hrs 34). My other goal was to run the whole way – no stopping for a chat like last time! Both were challenging goals for me, but there is no point setting yourself 'easy to achieve' goals.

My marathon preparation this time was very different to last time. I'd only ever trained on my own, I hadn't yet joined Balance, and so didn't have a bike or do any cycle sessions – only running (and lots of it). I just focussed on gradually increasing my distances and time on the road, and not really worrying about speed. Unfortunately, I maybe pushed myself too much and got sick with pneumonia a few weeks out from the Sydney Marathon. I still raced, but not to my best potential.

So I felt I had something to prove to myself and had to do another marathon. I chose the Gold Coast because of how flat it was, and hoped that would help me do a fast time. One thing I've learnt is that hills are actually not such a bad thing, if you prepare for them. 42.2km almost completely flat is kinda boring, and definitely hurts as your muscles don't get a chance to work in different ways like they would up and down hills.

While building up for this race I was really paranoid about getting sick again, especially since this time most of my training was early mornings and winter. I managed to make it to the start line in almost 100% form, but maybe (in hindsight), I hadn't done quite enough training, or specific training.



I was lucky to have someone run with me who is very experienced (Spot Anderson), and I gained some valuable knowledge during the race. Not to mention being entertained the whole time by his commentary of local spots he used to frequent, and the antics he used to get up to 'back in the old days' when he lived on the Gold Coast.

Hi, my name is Spot – I love running marathons & do 1 each year no matter what condition I am in! You can pretty much learn something about life when you do a marathon, no matter how fast or slow you are. My job at Gold Coast – the Kenyan pacemaker! As I am doing Busso Ironman later this year, this was the kick start I needed & I knew the race day "training experience" would be invaluable - I was excited! It's only an easy long run I thought – famous last words...

We timed it perfectly in the morning, with me having to go to the loo about 100 times pre-race (better than going during the race which is what Spot did!). We got to the start line and edged our way as far forward as possible just a couple of minutes before the gun went off. It all seems to happen so fast after thinking about it for months. Next thing I know, we're running!

I looked at my new Garmin watch more often than I looked at the road in front of me for the first few kilometres. We set out at 3hours 59min pace (5.40/km), zigging and zagging a tiny bit as you have to do at the start of big races. The race plan was to maintain that pace for as long as possible, (rather than trying to negative split the race). If I couldn't keep it up, then I was never going to break 4 hours, but I'd have known I did my best.

I focussed on things like running through drink stations (previously I've always walked), learning to time my entry and exit and grab 2 cups, fold the top (if it's cardboard) and sip little bits as I run off. It was amazing to see how much ground I could gain on other runners doing it that way. They'd then have to speed up to catch up to us, and I learnt that surging is a bad technique, as it wears you out quicker than keeping a steady pace.

It was entertaining seeing all the other runners too – one guy was running the whole race backwards, carrying a big flag (why?!?), and a couple of guys were in a full hot pink lycra. A Japanese couple were in wedding outfits. There is a good camaraderie on the course too, most people are friendly and have a little chat as you run along.



Spot and I also had a little competition of who can get a good photo taken. I tried a couple of times – the first time a guy in front of me dropped his ipod and stopped right in front of the cameraman! The second time I ran ahead of Spot and posed, but little did I know he was right behind me with his arms up – they are funny photos anyway!

So we ran steady for 25km and I felt pretty good. I had a very annoying weird pain in my left hip flexor that I've never felt before. I managed to 'think it away' eventually (after more than 15km!), by using a modified meditation technique. Or maybe it vanished because other bits and pieces started to hurt more! Either way, the pain went and I could run freely again.

I was very happy to record my 2nd fastest half marathon time ever – just under 2 hours as planned in the race plan, but it felt relatively easy.

Things were going great – we had stuck to race plan & crossed half way just under 2 hours.

Sarah had been getting the mandatory phantom pains, I remained silent & let her deal with them, which she did. I was learning a bit about my little friend & how she deals with things – she gives herself an uppercut! I learnt a long time ago when running with someone that is hurting badly, SILENCE is the best option!

It was a beautiful sunny QLD morning, cool to start off with but getting warmer as we ran and the sun rose higher. I tried to remember to admire the scenery – quite a bit of the race is by the beach and it's an impressive view. The crowds were very supportive – most of them were outside their houses cheering in their pyjamas!

At about 23km the 4 hour pace group caught up to us and we ran with them for a while. The pacer was brilliant – such a great motivator, talking to the group constantly and keeping everyone focussed. But he was running a 4hour 'gun time' pace, therefore slightly quicker than us, and negative splitting too. I'm not sure if it was the increase in my pace whilst running with them, but I got a terrible stitch/cramp in my right side at about the 25km mark and could hardly breathe in or out. I slowed right down and tried to stretch it out. This obviously ruined our 5.40/km pace for about 2 kilometres.

I got going properly again after a drink station and a huge cheer from a group of supporters who felt like friends or family, they were so encouraging! Despite reassurance from Spot that we actually hadn't lost too much time and that we'd be able to make it up gradually over the rest of the race, I just couldn't get back under 6min/kms.

Unbeknown to Sarah, I was starting to tighten up & here is my story...

No matter what, you can't go into a marathon underdone & not treat it with the respect it deserves! Now motivated to train but only 1 long run under my belt, I had been snapping out loads of hard runs over hilly courses with my own running buddies. As an older athlete, these runs were still in my legs on race day as I don't recover like a 20 year old. Whilst I backed my training off in the week leading in, I also broke the taper rule & starting having a few drinks each night, eating like a pig & wacked on 3 kgs! Additionally, I got on the drink on both Friday & Saturday nights before the race. Yes – I know what you are thinking...



This was my low point in the race where I realised that I wasn't going to do a sub 4hour time. We ran along in silence for a while (rare!). I had a good talking to myself in my head, and then snapped out of it and said to Spot "I'm running a marathon. And not everyone does that." He said "YAY!", and we were off again!

This all happened as we were nearing the 30km mark too, which is hard as the route takes you past the finishing area – psychologically that is tough! But I saw my sister at that point and she boosted me up a bit, as well as Spot reminding me we only had less than a City to Surf to go!

Alright, I was seriously hurting here – like Sarah earlier, it was now my turn to have phantom pains. As a good triathlete with loads of excuses, I blamed the breaststroke I had done in the week leading into the race. I did NEW things on race week (a cardinal sin) & put pressure on different parts of my body – in this case, my groin muscles. It was going over & over in my head! Every km seemed like 10km & I simply used this as Ironman mental training! This is exactly why I do my yearly marathon & if it wasn't for Sarah, probably would have started walking after 30km! As for drinking before the race - I was now paying for this!!!

So we set off on a steady (slow!) pace and started to enjoy the atmosphere and scenery now that the time pressure was gone. As we got closer to the end (from about 35km on) we started to overtake people. As Spot said – it was like a war zone! People were struggling on the side of the road and it felt like we were flying past!



I decided with a few km to go that surely we could step on it and get 4hours 15, so we ran our 2 fastest km splits since the 24km mark to the finish, but it wasn't quite enough. The crowd near the finish line were amazing, the music was pumping out 'the party don't start till I walk in!' which we thought was appropriate and danced our way across the finish line. I'd promised Mark the Plumber that I'd finish with nothing left to give, and I certainly did that! Spot even allowed me to cross the line first in a 'ladies first' gesture!

I was so proud of Sarah & yes, she officially beat me – congratulations!

(only by 1 second!)

It was bitter-sweet. I finished the race in 4 hours and 18minutes, and although a bit disappointed with my time, I was very proud that I didn't stop and walk when the going got tough (I still managed to chat of course!). I also had to remind myself that I'd just done a PB by 16minutes! So it was my fastest marathon ever and Spot's slowest! I really appreciated all his help and advice before and during the race.

I've since learnt that my training wasn't exactly right, I should have done more speed work, at a much faster pace than race pace, and more interval training as part of my long runs. So now... I'll have to do another one! The elusive 4 hour barrier must be broken!



Spot's Post race analysis:

* Being objective, Sarah undertook the safest training plan to race day.

The #1 goal when you set a goal for a longer race like a marathon is to get to the start line in 1 piece.

Many people get injured OR do their race in the weeks leading in as they cram the training in & she made some wise, conservative decisions in the build up, especially after getting sick last year.

* Unfortunately her new race time goal should have been 4:10, not 3:59. Here is why...

* 3:59 was based on her May half marathon time at the end of a triathlon season with loads of quality running, triathlon training & racing.

* 5 weeks out she did a big 3:30 run which was perfect. Unfortunately in being cautious & wisely recovering from this, never got another longer run in – this hurt her preparation.

* She subtly missed her quality runs in this last 6 week period – this was critical! Sometimes you can miss 1 or 2 Wednesday runs & all of a sudden you are swapping a hard QUALITY squad session with a lonely run before work by yourself! This went under the radar...

* As you build endurance often higher intensity heart rate sessions are sacrificed. You can usually increase your anaerobic threshold in this period, which in effect means you can run for longer at the same heart rate without going into oxygen debt!

* If you have someone you trust helping you, use them! I wasn't officially coaching Sarah & felt bad as I knew a few things were lost in translation in those last 6 weeks. In short, I would have got her to do 1 more 2:00 - 2:30 EASY run 3 weeks out & I would have flogged her on the track (that is always fun). We ran together 1 week out & her heart rate data didn't match up well with 5:40 pacing.

*You really have to be careful doing a post race review & not getting hard on yourself – we always think we can do better!!!

Sarah ran a 16 minute PB (incredible achievement), achieved her goal of running the whole way & more importantly, had a good Ozzie go when the chips were down. This ALWAYS makes the coach happy & I was soooooo proud of her, especially when she smiled & thanked all the aid station workers when things got tough!

2010 – my marathon done & hopefully I can go quicker at Busso!

THANK YOU Sarah for adding to my yearly ritual!