

11 races that have defined my legs

An analysis of what would be my top-10 races likely would be inextricably linked to what were the races in which I ran my fastest times, but this is not always the case. There even have been training runs that have stuck in the memory. I ran my first race, I believe, on 1 January, 1974, aged seven, my father having entered me into a 5K New Year's Day race in Erith, Kent. I've been running ever since, between 5K and 100 miles, that first 100-miler having been in June 2021. I think I have probably run the equivalent of twice around the world, or getting there, as I stride through my 47th year as a runner. Here are 500 words for each of my 10 favourite runs ... (I might add an eleventh, or more, at some stage.)

Certainly a lot of people to thank, notably my old mate Alex Carlisle—Kent 1,500-metre champion and my school's star cross-country runner when I was growing up—Kenny Linsky, Alex Mitnacht and Ellen Fitzgerald, all of who separately I have trained many miles with, Richard Burton and Carl Selya-Hammer, both of whom I know from running in New York City but then inexplicably bumped into separately in London, the three of us all moving here unbeknownst to the others, the members of my official running clubs, New York Flyers and Dulwich Running Club, the Brooklyn Road Runners Club for always allowing me to train with them in Prospect Park, the good people at the New York Road Running Club, especially Mary Wittenberg, now the president of the EF Education First–Drapac p/b Cannondale cycling team, and all the members of the most amazing running club of all, The Turtles—alphabetically, Jamey Allen, Terence Baker (that'd be me), Jim Brown, Patrick Duffy, Jamie Dunham, Ken Marks and Brian Mayor. Admittance is impossible, so please do not ask. We're not sure how we became members so cannot possibly advise you how you could. Our call to the starting line is "Ego Profundo Tumultus"—"I Predict a Riot," which is no doubt imperfect Latin, but we're training too hard to care. All rise!

Chicago Marathon, Chicago, Illinois, USA 2002

Inevitably, the run I look to first, foremost, is my marathon personal record, or personal best as I forget to refer to it back home in the United Kingdom. I have run Chicago twice, the first in 2002 in 2:44:56, the second in 2003 in 2:53:08. In 2002, I remember succinct moments, such as reaching 10 miles in approximately one hour and seeing Cliff Held, coach of my running club, the New York Flyers, signalling frantically to slow down. At 13.1 miles, eight or nine runners breezed by as though I was walking, and we laughed as a spectator said we were halfway. I took the potentially race-destroying or -making decision to sit on this group's tail for as long as I possibly could and slowly but slowly I started pipping most of them off. At the 20-mile mark (I reached it in 2:03:30), I turned around to a runner and raised my hands as though to say 'look where we are!' but I immediately felt foolish. Maybe he was having the worst run of his life? Just then the course twice turned 90 degrees to the left to be met by the only wind I remember. The course zigzagged along suburban streets (2003's course was changed to venture down the same never-ending avenue for five miles), and this helped me. Just get to the next corner, then just get to the next one after that, but I was slowing, dropping from 6:10-minute miles to 6:17s. Surreally, with a mile to go one spectator standing on his own held a sign stating "NASCAR fans salute marathoners." The last 400 metres ascended a small incline, and I can perfectly picture the runner ahead of me, or at least the back of him. I saw Cliff Held and his wife Suzanne cheering near the finishing line. There was an official at the finish with a computer, and he told me my finish time was 2:45:00:04. I felt ungrateful at just missing out on a sub-2:45 by five-hundredths of a second, even though it was almost nine minutes faster than I have ever covered the distance. It was a couple of hours later that my official time came through, and I felt on top of the world. There were a number of my teammates there, and with three other runners I had been in a Chicago Marathon team, too,

and we had done well. The next morning we opened three mini-bottles of champagne I had actually won at a faux, virtual horse race at the Melbourne horse-racing track that hosts the celebrated Melbourne Cup where 1,000 or so people were given fake money to make fake bets, and I had emerged with the biggest monetary haul. I had dragged those bottles back to New York City and then to Chicago, only for all of us to swig our plastic cups of champagne down swiftly before the café owner went crazy, presumably due to the fact that she did not have the correct licensing?



London Marathon, April 16, 2000

Double-crossing Grand Canyon, Arizona, USA 2011

When my friend Alex Mittnacht and I finished and sat at the North Rim Lodge's bar, we were treated like rock stars. Unfortunately, my stomach was not accepting much as several pints lined themselves up, bought by people who had heard of our exploit. It's becoming more common—although definitely not officially encouraged—to run a double-crossing, rather than a single, but this was not so much the case in 2011. The two of us, along with Alex's now wife Anoushka and his mother, drove from Las Vegas via an In-N-Out burger restaurant in Hurricane, Utah. After a 2:30 a.m. search for gear we started running at 3:40 a.m. with headlamps and cold-weather clothing through snowy patches. The first five miles downwards was like running through space, to one side a black cliff face, to the other a void. At the Artist's Residence, we changed into normal running attire. The temperature was pleasant. As we stood naked changing, I shouted I saw a male Vermillion flycatcher, scarlet and resplendent. Across the 42 or so miles I saw 14 species of birds new to me. I did trip over my running poles, which I did not use subsequently, but only suffered a graze. At Phantom Ranch (Mile 13) we bumped into Manhattan friend Bob Schulz and his group running from the South Rim, overnighting at the lodge and running back the next morning. Bob had hidden food for us at the top of the South Rim. Crossing the Colorado River, we saw a long mule train ferrying supplies, and we thought it would slow us down. We never could catch up, not until the South Rim's one wide area. As we climbed—very slowly, red zigzags going on and on and on—we started to see descending hikers. When we ran by them again on the way

down, they realised what we were doing, and the noise and cheering was infectious. My one mistake was not dunking my legs in the Bright Angel River the second time we reached Phantom Ranch. I was feeling good at 29 miles, but by Cottonwood Campground (Mile 36) I was suffering. Then I couldn't even reach to take them off. Alex asked a hiker if he could relay a message to Anoushka (Alex gave a description) that we were fine, just slow, only for the hiker to point out legs belonging to his hiking friend sticking out of a rudimentary toilet. So, we did the favour. The last five miles up the North Rim was tough. I was a jumping jelly bean, pulling muscles, and pulling others when I tried to rectify the first, or second, pulls. Wonderful was reaching the Supai Tunnel—cut out by army engineers in the 1920s—2.5 kilometres from the end, but more wonderful was hearing Anoushka. Now I remember all of this, but mostly the joyousness of watching the sun turn 360 degrees around the world's biggest hole, and the idea we had conquered every one of those degrees.



Start of the 100-kilometre London to Brighton run, and the total field of runners, Sept. 2017

100-kilometre London to Brighton, England, 2017

My first official ultra-marathon was one organised by Sussex Trails. Around 60 people ran, the start a cadet centre at Blackheath near my home. We were due to start at 6 a.m. but waited a further 15 minutes while someone had bathroom struggles. I carried a roll of 19 Ordnance Survey maps selected, sized and cut up, the route traced in day glo-colour pen. When I reached the bottom of one map, I found a bin to discard it. I have only the final one left. The route, mostly on footpaths, went south to the English Channel at Brighton through South London before heading to the North Downs, across The Weald and up the South Downs before falling to the sea. I got lost once for 300 metres, glad for a previous reconnaissance run in the suburbs. A Dutch woman I often saw was having problems with her stomach after 30 kilometres. At 65 kilometres was the Horsted Keynes checkpoint, one taking on mythical proportions for its promise of hot food, soup and village-hall seating, but reaching it necessitated a roundtrip of a further 800 metres. I asked one runner how he felt, and his reply was a groan emanating from pre-history. As with the woman from The Netherlands, I never saw him again. I started running with two men wearing running flipflops, which they swore by. We met one of their wives with what was the best cup of tea I've ever tasted. I pushed on, as one of the two was tiring. The final checkpoint came before equally mythical Blackcap, a steep rise snaking to the ridge of the South Downs and which can be espied looming from quite a distance. At the top, the weather was changing from being pleasant to being one of drizzle and strong crosswinds. There was little cover as the ridge continued along an

escarpment and dropped to Falmer, before climbing again to a summit overlooking Brighton—or it would have done if not all was mist. Along a horse-racing course, I saw behind me a fast runner. I asked him if he was one of us, and when he seemed confused, I told him what we had almost finished. He was so pleased by this, he said he'd be proud to run with me for five kilometres, even in the deluge. The last drop took us almost to the beach. After running through a short tunnel, I saw Francesca, my wife, at the finish line. I had taken 12 hours, 58 minutes. The finish was nothing and everything—a handshake, a dog-tags medal and a white T-shirt with the L2B London-to-Brighton symbol, but it meant the world. Before the race I wanted to get a black T-shirt for finishing in under 10 hours. Johnny Cash wore black, I thought, but by the time I finished I was proud of my white one earned for running in less than 14. Hank Williams wore white, I concluded, so that will do me very well.

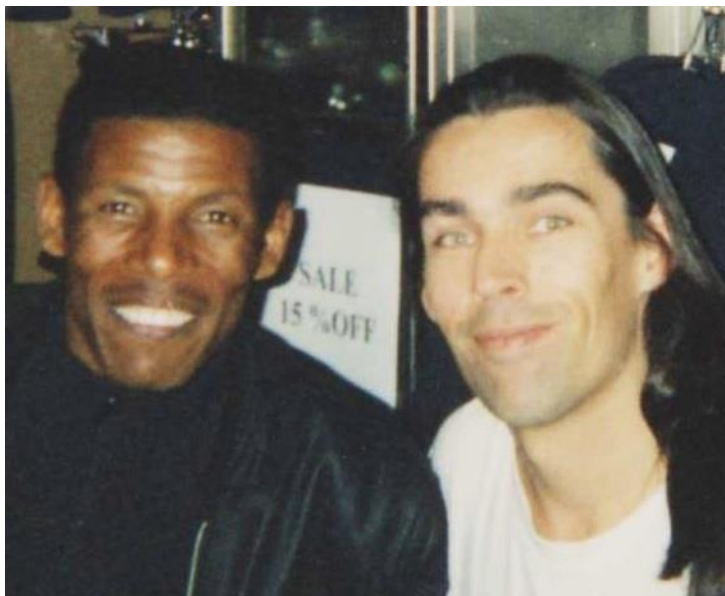
Rockin' the LP, Snellville, Georgia, USA 2019

With this run, I can state I have broken a finish tape, cannily defeated the wily, ultra-fit opposition and won a race. It's my first and only victory in some 45 years of running, save for a mixed-gender, two-person relay team I was in that was the best on two consecutive annual occasions because of the woman—Ellen Fitzgerald—on the team, not the man. To win an individual race if you have my general ability, what's needed is a certain level of fitness and for someone—Deborah Montgomery Racing—to organise a half-marathon in August in the southern states of the USA. The day before I had decided to take a coffee in Athens, Ga.—home of rock band REM—just to get out of the heat, and 8 a.m. in the Snellville suburb of Atlanta was not that much cooler, but I have always looked for races to do when I am visiting Nashville for my company's annual conference, and this was the only one for seemingly thousands of miles. It was a nice, small, friendly affair, with some 21 participants of whom ran the 13.1-miler. The start was at a gazebo, and each of the five loops around Lenora Park returned to the gazebo before the course double-backed on itself for a short while before starting the next loop. Then after the fifth loop, there was required a three-quarter-mile stretch on the usual loop to a marked turnaround. We were given instructions on this, but by the time I got to that point the sun had clearly addled my mind. When we started, I started running at what I considered my usual pace, and after 300 metres, I was 50 metres ahead of the next person behind me. I just carried on, and the distance between me and second place never narrowed more than two minutes. I just decided I would maintain a pace. There was one hill that I even walked up on two occasions. The backward straight went through wooded shade, downhill, too, and that was nice. It was very warm, I have to say, and at the end I had a photo taken with me (1:38:48), second-place Elan Miller (1:40:46), who was from California and visiting his cousin in Georgia, and third-place Katie Fox (1:41:48), from South Carolina and who had the goal of running a half marathon every month in the US, with this particular event the only one she could find, too. I was thrilled I was not the only mad one who had put in a particular distance in travel, although I had made the race an international meet. Two days before at Nashville International Airport, when I picked up my rental car, there was a shortage of vehicles, so I had been given a 7-series BMW for the cost of an economy-size car, so there I was, an international athlete newly victorious in a distance run driving off in his luxury German automobile out into the Georgian and Tennessean countryside.

Santarelli Memorial Cross-country 5K, Elyria, Ohio

As I travel to my company's headquarters in Cleveland, Ohio, once or twice a year, I am always on the lookout for races to run, completely new experiences (also see the Still Hollow race in Chattanooga). I joyously discovered this 5K race, and my calendar has coincided with it twice, and twice I have won my age group. It remains the only cross-country race—indeed any race—I know that takes part on a Sunday evening, and that is enough to have it have a

special place in my heart. This is another race I am sure I make an international meet, and it all stays within the campus of the Lorain County Community College in Elyria. It seems to be a training run for three or four high-school track and short-distance teams, more of them it seems in 2017 than in 2014, judging by the ages of the runners immediately in front and behind me. At the end of the second run the two people ahead of me were both 13, while the two behind were 17 and 12, respectively, with a lumbering 51-year-old coming in between. The race starts along an imaginary line, and when the command sounds to run, 30 or so children rush out as though there is one ice-cream and only one on offer across the way. After 300 metres of roughish grass, the course turns left twice and heads back to the school and a thin path that meanders through a wood. It then crosses a campus road and heads up a short, sharp, artificial hill that knocks the wind out of runners. The course drops down a similar decline to the ascent and then all is grass and dirt as runners start the second, and last, loop, which again includes that nasty hill. The open space, which is half of the course, can be tough. The last 200 metres breaks off the route and heads to the finish tape. I like the fact that the winner of the 2017 race is named Demetrius Snellenberger, who ran a speedy 17:53. I ran both races in a time within one second of each other, 21:31 in 2014, 21:32 in 2017, a mile-split time for both of 6:55, good for ninth and 22nd, respectively, out of about 100. The prize-giving is held in the college's sports hall, and this is how I know all its teams are named the Commodores. At the 2017 race I collected my first-place trophy (all my US-gained trophies I have won since I moved back to the U.K. I have left on my trophy cabinet in the Cleveland office) just before another person—Will Ross—accepted his for winning the age group above mine. We started chatting and met later for dinner. He remains a good friend, and we have run and watched races since, and in 2019 we went to see The Zombies play at the Rock n' Roll Museum and Hall of Fame in Cleveland when it was inaugurated.

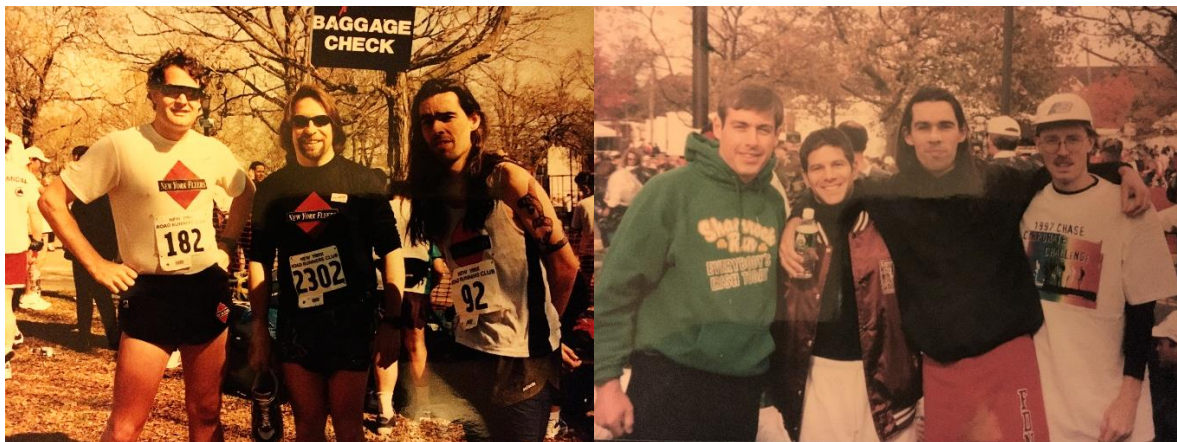


Haile Gebrselassie and me, New York City, 2003

Brooklyn Half-marathon, Brooklyn, New York, USA 2000

I loved this March race, often cold and sometimes icy. My streak of runs in this 13.1-miler started in 1998 and ended in 2008, 11 occasions, and I ran it again in 2010. Perhaps I was travelling somewhere in 2009? My best time in the event came in 2000 when I placed 71st place of 2,468 runners, gaining a 73.7-percentile performance (this becomes more important the older you get, although in 2000 I was in the open division where your age-graded time never becomes “better” than your real time) and finished in 1:20:50, 56 seconds faster than

my time the year before and in an average mile split of 6:10, including the hills of Prospect Park near to the race's end. I was becoming a faster runner in 2000, but it would take me another 18 to 30 months before my 26.2-mile times started to fall. The Brooklyn half-marathon was a very early start in those days, starting in Coney Island after a long subway journey and finishing in Prospect Park. The last couple of times I ran, the route went in the opposite direction, and I did not like it so much. Perhaps my times had started to lengthen? Certainly, the event had become more popular, and today I believe entry is largely by lottery, as is the New York City Marathon itself. "Back in the day," the first three miles went along the boardwalk parallel to the Atlantic Ocean and the Coney Island Freakshow stands. The race started at 8:00 a.m. I would try and run close to the front at the beginning to make sure I had an unimpeded run along the wooden beams laid out lengthwise and not on those placed crosswise that I would often see people trip over. After the boardwalk section ended, the run went up Ocean Parkway for seven miles. The trick here was not to fixate on the street names, which went from Avenue Z to Avenue H before becoming more "normal" in name. Concentrate on the pace, I would tell myself, and the lettered streets would take care of themselves. Ocean Parkway travelled through a conservative Jewish neighbourhood, and often you would hear the angry cries of motorists who discovered they could not cross or enter the thoroughfare and, later on in the press, those who considered the Shabbat somehow violated. A flick to the right took runners off this main road and into the park. That was when the hills started, and everyone knew how hard was the huge hill close to the Brooklyn Library. A series of rolling hills took you back down to where was the loop close to the first entrance, and it was always fun to run alongside runners who had just entered. It was possible here to really kick in some leg speed, as the presence of these other runners would spur you along and up the last half a mile. The race was not the same when it all turned the other way.



Early days of running in New York City with the New York Flyers—from left to right, Richard Brounstein; Tom Dessereau; myself; Ken Marks; Kenny Linsky; myself again, and Tim Decker

The Palisades, New Jersey, USA, 20-mile training run 2007

I would always look forward to this annual training run, and just because this list of 10 runs is about 10 individual runs, I will choose 2007 as the year I enjoyed it most. I am not sure if that is exactly true, but it was always fun to run, and we would always end the Sunday morning with brunch at the home of Jerry Flower—who founded our running club, The New York Flyers, in around 1990—and his wife Susanne. Forty or so runners would gather at the Port Authority bus terminal at 175th Street (now, I have heard, a lot more runners show up, so the meeting point is somewhere on a nearby street) and take off across the George Washington Bridge spanning the Hudson River. On the Manhattan side was the minute Little Red

Lighthouse, while across were the cliff faces of the Palisades Ridge, after which New York City would end and the United States of America would begin, or so I like to think. The route would turn left and head down Hudson Terrace to pass Fort Lee Historic Park and enter the rolling hills of the Palisades Interstate Park. So close to the Big Apple, yet after rain there would be waterfalls that you could hear splashing off rock flats, and there would be deer scampering away from the sound of heavy feet. The 20-miler involves 350 metres of ascent, with the highest climb coming right at the halfway point with the calf-crunching ascent and quad-smashing descent to and from the park headquarters at Alpine, somewhat suitably named. Flyer volunteers would manage drinks stations, but often their good intentions were not as swiftly enacted as our running, and we would have to wait to mile 9, just before that Alpine climb, to get refreshment. The route also was an out-and-back one, and on the way back you could on occasion glimpse the skyscrapers of Manhattan and the shoreline flats of North Bergen, but mostly it felt as though you were running along a sylvan corridor betwixt river and cliff, with the trees just starting to turn into their autumn colours. The run was intended to come about six weeks before the New York City Marathon and two weeks or so before the New York Road Running Club's Central Park 18-miler, which technically was as much a race as it was a training run. The Palisades was definitely a training run, but it came at a time when we would be pushing ourselves to get to marathon fitness. On the way back we would pass many of our club teammates still on their way to the halfway point, and that would always spur us on. The last two miles were the most difficult, and not just because they came at the end but because they would take you up a curving hill for half a mile to the base of the bridge and because the bridge never looked like ending. Always a memorable day.

Richmond Running Festival, Kew, London, England, half-marathon 2015

Held in September, this half-marathon is the only time runners can race inside of the famous botanical gardens of Kew Gardens, where the Victorian world collected, analysed, catalogued, learnt about and grew plants, although after about one-third of a mile the route exits its walls. The course then goes along the idyllic, leafy south bank of the River Thames, at about the point when the river starts to narrow a little and takes on the guise of a country stream, not an industrial estuary. Several thousand people run this race, and its weekend of events include 10-kilometre and 5-kilometre runs and, since 2016, a full marathon. I had not run a half-marathon in less time than 90 minutes for maybe three years, and I targeted this event to break that barrier again. So many of us running along the river path must have scattered or deterred the cyclists, dog-walkers and walkers, but when one is consciously needing to clip the 6:45-per-mile pace, or something close, that does not come to mind. When I run little does—the scenery, where my feet are landing, pains and aches and wondering if I have reached the next mile still at my intended pace. A large meander of the river took me to mile 6 at Richmond Bridge, and there is the notion that there are probably another three miles of fast riverside running besides a little detour at 6.5 miles. At just beyond mile 9, the course takes a left and heads inland a little to the eventual end in Deer Park, which might be where the idea for the race's awful slogan originates? “All the gear, no eye deer,” which has never made sense to me. On the T-shirt there is a drawing of a deer wearing sunglasses, for another reason I do not understand other than that explaining “eye deer.” There is every opportunity to learn more about running, but I do have some idea, although whether it is sufficient, I do not know. The weariness that might come in a half-marathon just as one reaches double figures in mind but still have five kilometres to run, I will blame for my annoyance of T-shirt slogans. In Ham, the 13-1-miler runs along a track through a park, along a road and then around stately Ham House, before returning back along the river. The last mile travels back inland and, after a switchback, into the finish area. Actually, runners run right to the finish line before needing to do a large circle back to the actual finish line. This was soul

destroying, and I indeed slowed down, believing I would not make 1:30, but I picked back up, and once again amazed myself how far and quickly we all can run in the last handful of seconds. I came through the end in 1:29:08, good enough for 109th place out of 2,801. Some friends had run the event, too, so we all ended up in Richmond Park with a beer and sandwiches.

Still Hollow Trail Race 13.1-miler, Enterprise State Park, Chattanooga, Tennessee, USA, 2017

This is another race deriving from my travelling to the US. Getting to it involves a race, too. The race date has to coincide with the dates of the Nashville conference I attend, and getting to the registration requires my London-Chicago-Nashville flight to be on time, the car-rental office not having a queue and Interstate-24 being uncongested. Race-number collection is at the wonderful Chattanooga Brewery craft-beer pub and restaurant, but my first time I did not realize a mile west of Chattanooga is where Central time zone changes to Eastern, and the organising Wild Trails running group had shut up shop for the evening. I saw them packing, and when they realised I was the British runner who had corresponded, they searched out my number. I stay in a small hotel at the Hamilton Place motorway interchange, where there is nothing other than bad restaurants. The brewery bar-restaurant is, though, a very pleasant to spend an hour, full of runners. If I had not been made aware of the loss of an hour I would have missed the start the next morning in Enterprise State Park, officially still within Chattanooga. Cars park along a dirt track when still dark. Runners get ready and wander down to a small, grassy opening that is the start and finish. The second time I ran I saw a Carolina chickadee, a bird, as I was preparing. The race is two loops, and it is hilly, meandering and full of rocks, roots and other woody obstacles. Often if someone wants to overtake, runners just step to the side for a second. Voices of spectators, officials and maybe other runners often are heard, but one is never aware the finish is ever close to where you happen to be running. The first loop is a little more than halfway, and it is a thrill to come hurtling down a narrow track, enter the grassy area for a brief moment and head back uphill amid cheers. The trees keep the sun off the brow. The last two miles seem steeper than anything negotiated on the first loop. Of course, it might be a different section of the park. When the trail starts to drop, I know now there is not much longer to go, but the finish is seen literally only when you come out onto it. That has felt thrilling on both occasions, the first time in 2014 when I came 28th out of 219 in a time of 1:46:47, the second time in 2017 when I came 15th out of 348 in a time of 1:52:44. It is hilly, but on both occasions my age-adjusted percentile score was exactly 74.39%. Afterwards, I've been invited to share a beer—even though it's still 9:30 a.m.—with someone or some group I have met, and that first year I won my age group and some running compression socks. Not bad for an almost 24-hour journey to reach check-in. Then driving East, I catch back up 60 minutes.

Boston Marathon, Boston, Massachusetts, USA 1998

Run marathons and Boston is always on your mind. The next step up from Boston is the Olympic Games' trials for your particular nation, and that's a level simply beyond any stage of my running life. When US marathoners—me for 20 years—say New York or Boston, they refer to their marathons, not the cities, and qualifying is an arrival mark. It took me several attempts, and I thought I'd missed the chance again as I rounded Columbus Circle at mile 26 of the New York City Marathon only to be screamed at by a spectator that I had another minute to get over the line. I needed to run 3:10, and Boston doesn't care if one runs 3:10:00 or 3:10:59, but they would have cared in 1997 if I'd run 3:11:00 for the men's open-category qualifying time. I ducked under the finish with 16 seconds remaining, and I believe I entered Boston the very next day. Then, if you qualified, you ran; today, even qualifying is no

determinant of getting a race number. My fellow New York Flyer Kenny Linsky and I trained through a bitterly cold 1997/1998 New York City winter, with one day the two of us sliding along the East side of Central Park and forming icicles on our eyelashes on the West. On Boston race day we swore a hundred times we'd run together until one faded. I had cramps at mile nine, pinching my stomach tight until the pain faded. I have only run this race the once, but I'd say key is pacing yourself at the pace you trained for. This is common sense in every race, but when you have essentially 17 miles of rolling hills mostly dropping in altitude and a class field all of whom qualified, it's very easy to go out too fast. Heartbreak Hill at miles 18 to 20 I did not find difficult, and I could have done with another incline, but if runners start out too fast it's the last six downhill miles that churn them up and spit them out. The quads cannot take a second wave of stress if the pace was too quick early on. I passed 10 or so runners I knew from New York City and who I knew usually finished ahead of me. They were walking. Kenny had fallen behind by a couple of minutes by this stage, so I pushed on (he finished in 3:02, but dropped below 3 hours at that year's New York). The final two bends onto Boylston Street and the long straight to the finish line are magical, especially if the finish clock says 2:58:53, a 6:49-per-mile pace, a personal record and the very first time under the magical 3-hour mark. Again, I was surprised by how much tarmac it was possible to cover in 60 seconds. Nothing can take anything away from qualifying for Boston and then running almost 12 minutes quicker than ever before to get under 180 minutes. Boston is running.



Myself and Gower Tan in March 2020 training for the South Downs Way 100-miler

South Downs Way 100-miler, Winchester, Hampshire, to Eastbourne, Sussex, England, June 12, 2021

This was the first of my two 100-mile runs, and it was delayed by a year due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. I originally signed up with my friend and Dulwich AC club-member friend Gower Tan for a start in June 2020, which was postponed initially to November of that year, when it was cancelled due to U.K. prime minister Boris Johnson yet again imposing a lockdown. Throughout the pandemic, we had been allowed to go out once a day for exercise. I remember one minister saying, yes, five kilometres would be sufficient,

but out we went for 20 miles at a time. We must have put in 18 months of training for this event, pulling back a little after each lockdown was announced so that we would not overrun and injure ourselves. On the day before the run happened, there was a signal failure at Surbiton, which delayed my arrival to Winchester and the inability for Gower and I to travel down together. I was fortunate. Maybe I was delayed by an hour, but some runners—and one could easily pick them out on the train—had been sitting at Clapham Junction for four or five hours. At the hotel, the server did not bring me what I thought I had ordered, did not bring me anything, even though I was seated with Gower and another runner. I told myself everything that could go wrong would go wrong on the day before the run, not on the day of it, and this is how things turned out. The race start was staggered due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions between 4:30 a.m. and 6 a.m. Gower and I in our training—and we did not know what really what race day would throw at us—walked the hills, and we did in the race, too, the first one coming after about 200 metres. The race comprised five river valleys. We had reced most of it. At mile 46, after a narrow, downhill section of flinty chalk bed, I thought I would be not able to continue. I sat on the back of a flatbed truck with shin splints, the first and only time I have had them—or what I thought was them. A stranger, another runner, told me to start walking, then to shuffle, then to jog and then to run. I did so, and I reached the first main drop-bag stop, at Washington after 54 miles, with renewed vigour. Gower had gone on at my insistence, but we left that stop together, and it was then Gower who would need my support and camaraderie, as he had given me for the first 46 miles, and then, likewise, in the last 46. At Devil's Dyke, mile 63 or so, we were joined by a friend of Gower's. Dave Rogers (pacers are permitted after that point) who provided exactly the right level of coaxing and repartee, as well as the critical help of running ahead of us to open gates. We said goodbye to him at Housedean Farm, the second and last drop-bag spot. That was mile 74, with just a marathon to go. It was bedlam inside the farm's main barn, with numerous runners crushed by the extreme effort, and one runner even hallucinating. Gower and I felt very strong, though, more so when we reached Firle Beacon and another friend of Gower's, Martin Craddock, who put our seats and soup for us. We arrived in Eastbourne in the very early hours, running the last 300 metres around a track and just missing out on a time of sub-24 hours by 40 minutes. Gower knows a lot of very kind runners. Another one, Sarah Evans, came out to provide food early on the first morning, and she also looked after me on my second 100-miler when she waited for me until midnight on the side of the River Thames in Reading. That was the 100-miler in which Gower and I corrected those 40 minutes and both ran the Thames Path 100-miler from London to Oxford in under a day to earn a silver belt buckle inscribed with the words "100 miles, 1 day". Gower finished in a time of 22 hours 40 minutes, myself in a time of 23 hours 10 minutes.