

## Feature

## Cramahe's marathon man shares experience of Ottawa run

*Born in Cobourg, Robin Mounstevan grew up in Cramahe Township where he attended South Cramahe Public School before moving on to ENSS. The 24-year-old runner graduated this June from the University of Ottawa with a Bachelor of Arts with a geography major.*

*The younger son of Al and Jean Mounstevan has been running the roads of Cramahe for many years. He began running to get into shape for hockey and ball. It's gone on from there. In the past year he has begun to take his running more seriously. Last month he finished in the top per cent of runners in his first-ever marathon.*

*If all goes according to plan, he will be wearing the Chronicle colours in the Boston Marathon next spring.*

**By Robin Mounstevan**

Special to the Colborne Chronicle

It's 6:45 a.m. and race officials are calling ING marathon participants to the start line. As I join 4,000 runners making their way to the line, my mom quickly hugs me. I wait for one of my parents to yell "Be careful!", something that was always said as I left the house to run up and down the back roads of Cramahe Township.

I guess they were not worried about cars speeding past me on the race course. The reminder never came. I made my way to a cramped corral of finely tuned athletes where doubt began to enter my head.

Waiting there, shoulder-to-shoulder, with so many unfamiliar faces, I found myself looking around the huddle to see what other athletes were doing to help focus themselves. As a first-time marathoner, I had to calm myself down. Too many emotions were going through my head as I waited.

All those other runners at the starting line whom I couldn't stop looking at were doing the same thing I was doing: standing, waiting, looking around. I wasn't going to find the inspiration I was looking for here.

The race organizer welcomed the elite athletes to the front of the line, some of whom were using the times they ran that day to qualify for the Olympics later this summer. I knew we were only minutes away from the start of the race.

Former Olympic marathon champion Frank Schroeder stepped up to the podium as guest starter, advising to the eager crowd of runners, "Remember not to go out too fast. As every runner knows, the first half of the run is 20 miles and the second half is six miles." Needless to say, Mr.

Schroeder's words of advice didn't calm me down. Being a first-time runner, I didn't know what to expect from my body after the 30-kilometre mark. I would find out it was painful.

When I began running down Telephone Road in Grade 9, I was doing it to keep in shape and to stay healthy, never giving much thought to running competitively or at a marathon level. I simply tossed my shoes on and ran, sometimes long distances, sometimes short, and sometimes with good friend Scott Chapman riding alongside me on his ATV. Running was always a way for me to relax, a chance to think, to leave behind whatever stresses I had at the time.

When I moved to Ottawa to pursue academics, I found myself comparing my running regimen to those of others, wondering if I had the ability to complete a marathon.

For the past year, I have kept myself to a strict running schedule that had me running up to 115 kilometres weekly as the race neared.

No amount of training could put my mind at ease in the days prior to the race. I was extremely nervous because of the unknown factor: what would happen to my body after 30 kilometres?

With all the anticipation leading up to race day, the start was relatively uneventful. In the commotion, I missed the gunshot to signal the beginning of the race. As I began to see heads thinning out in front of me, it was my turn to start.

Suddenly, I was comfortable, as if I had forgotten it was just running. The race begins by running past Parliament Hill, a scene I was comfortable with because it was on my training route; it helped to keep me in check mentally.

Through the first half of the marathon, my body felt great: no injuries, no pains. I was happy to see my time at the 21 kilometre split to be 1:32:15, not a great deal different than times I had recorded in my last weeks of training. But, not too much farther and I would enter that unknown distance. For the first time in the race I was worried.

There is a great deal of significance in the distances between 30 and 42 kilometres for all marathoners. The term "bonking" or "hitting the wall" is a condition when endurance athletes lose glycogen stores in the muscles, essentially losing all energy. A Gatorade commercial shows the impact, depicting a marathoner who wobbles to the finish line. Finally collapsing, he hits the wall.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Plugged in to his i-Pod, Robin Mounstevan is on a pace to qualify for the Boston Marathon.

An Olympic coach I had the opportunity to meet told me, as a first-time marathon runner, at some point in the race, I was going to have to be Superman, something that didn't escape my mind for the last 15 kilometres.

As I approached the 30-kilometre split, soreness in my legs set in and I knew it was about time for a superhero's appearance. But, it wasn't until around the 37-kilometre mark, with both hamstrings as tight as knots, that I realized I could be in serious trouble.

Coincidentally, it was about the same point I heard a terrible scream, only to run on about 20 metres to see a man in his 40s clutching the back of his right leg. It was

the last thing I needed to see, as my own hamstrings felt like they were about to cramp.

With four kilometres left, my trusty i-Pod died due to the amount of water and sweat I can imagine it took in. It was my only means of knowing my time.

I was running the ING marathon for more than just the experience. It held the key to a dream I had been harbouring — to run the Boston Marathon. I needed to know my times.

The Boston Marathon has a storied world history as the pinnacle of marathon running. It is the only race in North America, with the exception of the Olympic qualifying races, where a runner must qualify to run. The cut-off mark for my category is 3:10:59. This was my goal and my motivation on every cold winter morning and rainy fall night of training when it would have been much easier to sit at home.

As I approached the final kilometres, I was doing so with no knowledge of my running time and with two dangerously tight hamstrings. I knew I would be close to my goal, and I hadn't yet had to be Superman.

It was soon to come.

As I passed the 41-kilometre marker, I felt I tightness in my left leg that forced me to stop — a rookie move, because it tightened completely.

A member of the medical team came to my aid and offered his advice: "If you want to finish, you need to walk it off, or it will get worse." I began to limp and eventually jog again.

I always wondered what emotions and thoughts would be going through my head as I travelled down the final few hundred meters to the finish line. I laugh with friends now as I explain to them that I feel robbed of the answer because the only thoughts and feelings going through my head were: "Please make it to that finish line without my leg ceasing completely."

In the final 100 metres, I looked up to see I was within reach of the running time for my Boston Marathon goal. I crossed the line in 3:10:23, qualifying by 36 seconds. I might have been the happiest exhausted person in Ottawa.

I placed 228th overall, and 11th in my category of males between the ages of 20 to 24, a category which held four of the top 10 overall finishers.

A handshake from dad and a hug from mom are the only fitting celebration, a reminder of training routines on back roads, both quiet and unassuming.