

Matt & Alex head to Melbourne for the Marathon

After completing the Gold Coast marathon on the 1st of July myself, Alex Gilks & Matt Backwell (who is Alex's friend from Melbourne) hatched a plan to compete in the Melbourne marathon. Seeing Matt stayed with Alex for his visit to the Gold Coast he kindly offered us a place to stay if we visited for the Melbourne marathon. So we thought why not! A couple of plane tickets & race entry fees, a bit of spending money & we had it all worked out.

Of course we would have to continue our training & long runs for another couple of months but that was OK because the thought of running on a different track & finishing inside the MCG was enough motivation.

It was my first trip to Melbourne and everybody I talked to who had been there said how nice it was but expect the unexpected when it comes to the weather.

We arrived on Saturday morning to a cool & overcast day with a bit of a breeze. We walked around Melbourne a bit & went & picked up our race kits.

The weather slowly deteriorated during the day & eventually it was raining & windy on Saturday night.

Alex was at a 30 year school reunion that night, so Matt & I stayed at his apartment and watched the Australia-New Zealand rugby league test match & listened to the rain outside & carbed up on pizza. I wasn't looking forward to running a marathon in the rain.



Sunday morning, race day came along & it was perfect running conditions. Sunny, no wind & about 12 degrees. After a bit of breakfast we headed off to the start line(which was near the Rod Laver tennis centre). There was a record number of entrants in this years marathon, close to 7000. We were tempted to go up the front & rub shoulders with the Kenyans but we thought they might get intimidated so we decided to start mid pack. We found Alex's brother in law Pete(who was running his first marathon) amongst the crowd & started the run together.

After we got going we settled into a comfortable rhythm & just enjoyed the scenery & atmosphere. The plan was to run together for as long as possible but at about the 6km mark we got separated at a drink station. Not being sure whether they were in front or behind me I just kept on running amongst the crowd & kept an eye out to see if I could spot them.

The first sighting I had was Alex at about the 25km mark. He was only about 500m in front of me, so I picked up the pace slightly to see if I could catch up to him. I had to be careful not to pick the pace up too much because there was still a long way to go & I had to leave some 'petrol in the tank'.

I was still feeling good at the 30km mark, which in previous marathons is where I hit the wall & start to deteriorate. I still couldn't see Alex up ahead but thought that if I kept going at a steady pace I might catch up. My confidence was boosted because I was starting to pass a lot more people than were passing me.

At the 39km mark after running through the beautiful botanic gardens I spotted Alex up ahead.

I caught up to him & we decided to ramp it up another notch for a strong finish into the MCG at about 3 hrs 43 mins. What an amazing experience that was!

They had mats down on the grass to run on but we made sure we missed the mats a little bit so we could say we'd been actually on the MCG ground.

That afternoon we went down to Port Philip Bay to give the legs some cold water therapy. When I say cold I mean really cold, which was good because when we got out we couldn't feel our legs so there was no soreness.

That night we celebrated with some dinner out & a few beers.

Monday morning we bid Matty Backwell farewell as he went off to work and pointed us in the direction of the train station so we could head to Geelong. Alex's parents & sister live down that way so we visited them and had a surf & a game of golf before heading home on Tuesday afternoon.

We didn't get any worthwhile photos but there are some at marathonphotos.com.au if anyone is interested.

Matt Stanley