

THE



FUNRUNNER

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Purity Moosic City Dairy Dash 10K



Kelly Stum

(Photo by Kelly Stum)

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“why on earth would YOU run Boston?”

By Phil Kirkpatrick

In September 2010, an orthopedic surgeon handed me a metal cane adjusted for my height and told me my running days were over. On April 21, 2014, I ran the 118th Boston Marathon. A lot happened between those dates, including two hip surgeries, and two bombs.

I had run 7 half marathons, and was running 20 miles a week before the hip pain got intense. I carried, but didn't use that cane all the way to my car, then tossed it into the trunk, sat down and couldn't believe what had just happened. I had been told that the arthritis in my right hip had gone in 6 weeks from being a 4, to a 9 (out of 10) in cartilage damage. I was having bone-on-bone catching to the point that my children watched me try to maneuver my leg and hip into a position to get into the car without the catch pinging, which would result in me literally yelling out in pain. I was told that when the pain became too much to bear, I would know it was time for surgery. My physical therapist made valiant efforts to help me avoid it, but was a very responsible guy, and soon told me that my hip was beginning to cause other physical problems for me that would only get worse, and I needed to choose a procedure. I chose hip resurfacing over hip replacement. They don't cut the femoral head off in a resurfacing, so you don't lose that bone mass in the hip joint. It is said to be a procedure for active people who want to get back to being active. But, they do part of what would be done in a hip replacement, in that they go into the acetabulum, ream it, and insert a metal cup, then smooth the top of the femoral head, put a metal cap on it, and put you back together. It happened on March 21, 2011. Then I went home to use a walker for a few days, then back to work with the cane---for a while.

I didn't wait so long with the

deterioration of the left hip. That procedure was performed on January 22, 2013.

My girlfriend Vicki qualified for Boston in Chicago in October '12, and promptly sent in her registration application. She got in, and was ecstatic. We left for Boston on April 13th, and I was set to take her picture at the finish line with her only 400 meters away when the first bomb exploded with a white fireball flashing practically right at my feet. Ten feet away five people were down, lost foot, lost leg, blood everywhere, including on my shirt, shoes and jeans. The blast was so loud that my hearing immediately shut down in both ears, I landed on the sidewalk, and I was wheeled down the street across the finish line into the medic tent. My ER physician Dr. Matthew Mostofi at Tufts University Medical Center asked me if I would do an interview the next day with him and Katie Couric, which I did. It was a tough interview to do.

Back home I was told at the Vanderbilt University Medical Center's Wilkerson hearing center that I had sustained not only a ruptured right eardrum, but also middle ear nerve damage to both ears. While the hole in my eardrum eventually closed, the nerve damage resulted in hearing loss and constant tinnitus in both ears—considerably worse on the right, and it's permanent. A hearing aid couldn't reduce the tinnitus. So, I hear Boston every waking minute of every single day.

Fast forward—in the fall of 2013, the Boston Athletic Association did an amazing thing. To all 260 or so of us who were injured at the finish line last year, they offered two entries into the 2014 Boston Marathon, waiving qualification. I was the only injured person from Tennessee. A friend named Marc Dedman came up to me at a holiday party in December and said,

“Phil, you ought to do Boston. I’m going to do it again, and it will mean a lot to me and my family, but if you do it, it could mean something to others.” I had started doing a little running on the Harding Academy track back in June, but only a little. Marc offered to connect me with John Thorpe, who conducts speed sessions for runners on Thursday nights at Vanderbilt. John and I met at the Frothy Monkey Coffeehouse in mid-February, and discussed me doing the Jeff Galloway run/walk method with an eye toward training me up to the point that I had a realistic shot at finishing the race, but not causing me to be injured so as to get knocked out of the opportunity. Dr. William (Bill) Shell, my rock star orthopedic surgeon who did the two resurfacing procedures on me, cleared me to do it.

John was great with setting my training schedule every week, and even got after me a little for overdoing. But, he was pretty happy when 3 weeks before the race, I did my 20-miler at Centennial Park. Then we tapered, and it was time to go back to Boston. This time it was going to be different, really different.

The entire weekend was a healing process, including meeting and hugging Adrienne Haslet-Davis, the dancer who lost her foot. And Dan Ashmead’s Nashville running group there to do the race took me in to encourage me. The race was an over-the-top amazing experience. There were throngs upon throngs of people all along that historic route all the way into Boston. They weren’t just spectators, they were vigorous participants of the event in their own right, shouting seemingly endless loud support for the runners. Some of the Boston police were even high-fiving runners. I had hoped to come in by 6 hours, and crossed the finish line holding up the U.S. flag in one hand and the Tennessee flag in the other at 5:29:09. John Thorpe looked like an angel when he yelled my name and came running saying “You did it, you did it,” and gave me a big coach’s hug.

According to the BAA, 80 countries and all 50 states plus six U.S. territories were represented: 32,456 runners started the race, and 31,931 (more than 98%) finished; as did 53 push-rim wheelchair athletes; 44 mobility impaired athletes and 48 visually impaired athletes. Any other year I would have no business being on the course of the Boston Marathon, but this year, being so fortunate to still have my legs and feet, and being the only Tennessean injured by the bombing, I had to be there for my first full marathon to do my small part of something very big—taking Boston back.

Boston Strong---we will never forget 4/15/13.

