

I'll be at next year's Boston Marathon

I ran my last Boston Marathon years before my wife and I met. Since then, she has occasionally asked me if I would ever consider running another one. My response was always no, I could not envision a reason to do so. The stretch of Boylston Street where last week's bombings occurred is special ground. Every time I was on the verge of finishing

the marathon, I took off my sunglasses as I made the left onto Boylston because I wanted the most raw, unfiltered absorption of the experience and atmosphere as I could have. The straightaway is long, much longer than it appears on TV. The finish line, in sight the entire time it takes to cover the distance, cues each runner to remember the reasons why he or she decided to race in the first place. Throughout their unpleasant, cold, and mushy winter training, runners fantasize about running down Boylston with the crowd roaring, the finish line in sight. That stretch of Boylston might be the only spot in the entire city where dreams literally come true for thousands of people every single year.

For many runners, finishing the marathon would be impossible without the support and encouragement of those along the route, including not just the volunteers, but also the spectators. They make the day what it is. Without them, the marathon would not be an event, but rather just a bunch of people going out for a jog. When I had to drop out of the 2004 race due to a medical problem, a complete stranger ran out her front door after seeing me collapse at the end of her driveway and cared for me until I was loaded into an ambulance. More times than I can count, I saw struggling racers break out of their shuffling walks and back into jogs because

somebody on the side of the road told them they could still do it.

A tragedy like last week's bombing would have been wrong no matter where it occurred. If they blew up the local diner or bus stop instead of the Boston Marathon finish line it would have still been wrong, but it would have been a different kind of wrong. In a city where we tend to keep to our own circles, cut each other off and exchange middle fingers in traffic, and walk past each other without even batting an eye, the marathon is the antithesis: strangers act like best friends in order to build something overwhelmingly positive. Somebody attacked that and tainted it. They went after the city at its finest and hit us in the heart. We need to get that back; we need to make that stretch of Boylston special again.

Many ways exist in which we can make that happen, none of which will be more significant than when thousands of spectators line Boylston Street again for next year's race. As for me, I am a runner, I have been my whole life. It's what I do. Given that, I aim to establish a 2014 marathon charity team to fundraise for Monday's victims, to enter the race as a member of that team, and to run down that Boylston straightaway slapping hands with every spectator I can reach.

--Jonah Soolman, Soolman Nutrition and Wellness LLC, Washington Street