



Break a Leg!

Dave Solomon takes us through the lead up to his 2013 London Marathon experience and follows up with the gruesome aftermath.

A phrase touted in the thespian world to defy the potential for things to go wrong just prior to walking out on stage – “Break a Leg”. The offer of “good luck” is strictly forbidden for the superstitious belief that the opposite will surely follow. Many of you will have heard club captain Robin Harper declare as a reply to the offer of good luck, that there is in fact “no luck involved”. We shall see.....

Setting the scene

The year 2012 had been one for me of many satisfying performances and set goals being achieved. We'll discuss 2012 further into the story, but first, a bit of background: I had carried forward the quest for the sub thirty minute five mile and brought to the table the sub three hour marathon challenge too. The Sub thirty minute five had been a goal of mine as long ago as early 2011 and I'd made it known to Tim F when I first met him, as I joined FRR and left my former status as an unattached runner behind. Well Kirton 5 2011 saw me turn in a tidy PB which stood for a further year, at 30:17. Reasonable I guess, but ultimately not what I'd set my sights on. I'd dug very deep in attempting this and even questioned if I was ever going to be capable of getting under the magic line.

What I did identify was that I had a tendency to slacken off my pace in the early middle portion of races. I was running with only a basic stop watch function on my wrist in those days and would be unaware of how wildly I was allowing pace to fluctuate in races until reaching the (sometimes haphazardly placed?) mile posts. I vowed that fateful Friday evening that enough was enough and that a “big watch” (GPS running variety) would be purchased at last – it arrived within the week.

I also ran my second ever marathon in spring 2011. I'd got into pretty tidy form for a succession of half-marathons and on a bit of a whim, and with virtually no specific preparation or training I rocked up to the Bungay Black Dog Marathon and entered on the morning! This race was quite an experience. I ran initially at a pace which I'd backed off a bit from that of my half marathons, but obviously not enough, and with little acclimatisation in the legs, the inevitable horror of running down like a tired old clock kicked in during the latter miles. Nonetheless, a time of 3:11 was pleasing and I'd got a bit of a taste for these events of such a demanding distance. I had run London years ago, as a one off whilst not a focussed runner (rugby and cycle racing being my thing back then) and turned in a 3:46, so 3:11 actually reflected a big PB with a gap of 13 years.

Soon afterwards, this being my first year with FRR remember, I was hearing excited talk surrounding the London Marathon ballot being about to open. Well I thought, perhaps I should take a punt at a place in that and do a proper job of training for it in 2012 (assuming I beat the very unlikely odds of actually getting through the ballot). Upon visiting the website I stumbled into the “Good for Age” section and what a nice surprise it was to find my Bungay time had qualified me (with no prior knowledge on my part of this possibility) for direct entry into London 2012.

At this point in the story I must credit former FRR coach Nigel Dadge. We'd discussed my Bungay performance and he'd made it quite clear that he considered I was capable of running a marathon in under three hours. The seed was sown, by June in 2011 I was determined to knock at least 18 seconds from the five mile and 12 minutes off the marathon times during the following year.

2012 – Sporting Memories for All

Twenty Twelve: A landmark sporting year in many ways, what with The London Olympics, it will take some forgetting for us all, but add to this for me the achievement of smashing my five mile target time in three separate races, with the fastest still standing as PB - 29:16 at Kirton on the start of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee weekend celebrations. Of course, the first of these was some six weeks after my London Marathon involvement. How did that go? Well, target time met, sub three hours achieved - 2:58, but at the risk of sounding very ungrateful, I wasn't moved in quite the way I'd anticipated I should have been with the result. I'll try and explain:

Training had followed a bespoke Dadge programme and I'd reached the day of the race feeling very good but certainly with a realism that running sub seven minute miles for 26 of them was an extreme challenge that no runner can underestimate. Indeed, at the time, I knew many fine athletes whom I'd consider myself inferior to, that had never been able to achieve this. Anyway, off I set intending to stick to my goal pace of 6:50 per mile religiously. I'm sure you can guess what happened. Yes, spurred on by the euphoria of the good for age easy logistics at the start zone and being able to run at a chosen pace from the gun whilst surrounded by fast runners, I was galloping through the early miles with splits mostly averaging sub-6:30. Now we all know in the cool light of day that such behaviour is suicidal and a time bomb is surely ticking away inside and indeed the blow-up duly came. The horror being that my legs started to protest as early as Tower Bridge. By Canary Wharf I was in a very dark place as I vainly attempted to keep the watch anywhere near to respectability.

As the miles clicked over, my all consuming thoughts were focussed on calculating how slow I could let the remaining distance pace drop and still turn in the sub-three hour goal. I believe the places I went to in my mind to find sufficient strength and motivation to keep flogging myself hard enough to make this happen were the darkest I've ever reached, and remember, this wasn't just the last five or six miles, it went on for about ten. My son George had left me a message in the run up to the day: "remember what you've always told me over the years Dad – "back yourself". It crossed my mind on many occasions that letting the pace drop right off and jogging in, as my body was screaming for me to do, wouldn't be letting anybody down. I genuinely believe I was only saved from this fate by recalling George's words of motivation.

So, goal attained, but I was so horrified by the manner in which I'd ended up performing, that I couldn't but not be strangely disappointed by the race experience. After recovering and reviewing what had gone wrong (and right), it became clear that I'd need to "go again", prepare just as well but run with a sensible approach next time and guard against the suicidal tendencies which I'd let ruin my 2012 marathon.

Well fast forward through the remainder of the year and the scene was set with a 1:25 mixed terrain half marathon at the wet and windy Heritage Coast event only two weeks later. PB's followed in the Friday Five series as I mention, and the first of four PB's for 10K was recorded at Woodbridge. Two sub-18 minute 5K PB's and a couple of PB ten milers later in the year would follow too. Whilst all this racing was going on, my usually ever-present racing buddy – brother in law – Rob H was having a similarly successful year. He'd banged in many PB's too and worryingly for a man who works every second Sunday, by September had edged ahead of me in my attempt to retain the hallowed George Buxton LEJOG trophy for the most competitive road race miles completed by a Road Runner in a calendar year.

Alternative Therapy (for torn muscles)

Disaster for me struck about one mile into the Bungay 20K. A horrible cold and wet November day had seen many of us huddle under cover in the school grounds of the event HQ rather than properly warm up. After starting and descending, the route takes a rather mean turn into a steady climb and as my key rivals in what I like to playfully term a running “peloton” were showing their hands and settling into low six minute pace around and ahead of me as we climbed, I felt a sudden rip in the lower portion of my right calf muscle. My immediate thoughts went to damage limitation. Not to my body you understand, but to the damage that would surely be done to my Suffolk Grand Prix series status by dropping through the field too far if I slowed down. I reckoned that backing the pace off to about 6:30 should be do-able, and for a few miles I was able to tolerate the pain and run just about at this chosen pace. However, by about six miles I couldn't hold it and gradually slowed ever more. This was grim and totally soul destroying as runner after runner quietly strode past. By the final couple of miles I was a properly broken man. Hypothermic by now as I couldn't run fast enough to generate sufficient body heat, which in itself slowed me further! I hung on and finished but every footstep I heard behind me was surely Harper taking me at my lowest ebb. As it turned out he didn't and I managed to stagger in at just under 1:24.

In hindsight, continuing this run was madness, but stopping – quitting is just not part of my make up. I know it was wrong, but at the time the desire to battle on was so strong I couldn't contemplate the option of the quitter, the failure. As soon as I finished, the leg seized up. Walking was difficult, running was impossible. I'd definitely torn some muscle fibre in the right calf. What did I need to do? Yes, rest properly for several weeks. What did I do? Well I hobbled round the following Sunday's Stowmarket Scenic Seven. Why? Well I'd pre-entered and as well as not wanting to waste my money, there was the not so small matter of not letting Harper edge any further ahead in the “you-know-what” battle. I'd worked out that if I backed the pace right back to nine minutes and landed the right foot strike as more of a heel than a mid-foot, I could cope. Poor old Martin F (pictured right) was the “beneficiary” of my pace-making and nagging words of inspiration on that day, as I took the opportunity to run with and help a fellow FRR!



The following week the madness continued. I got carried away at the FRR Tuesday session (I shouldn't have even been running at all) but the leg felt better and although trying to keep the pace down, felt the muscle rip again so was soon back to square one. Obviously this wouldn't prevent me from taking part in the Southwold 10K that Sunday (paid for, LEJOG points etc) and that's exactly what I did – take part. I can't call it racing as it took me some 17 minutes longer than a PB performance to get round without tearing anything again.

I did grab a week off then and by the following Sunday was able to run at three quarter intensity in the hilly Hadleigh Ten. As November became December, I also competed in a sub-90 minute half marathon, ten miles at The Turkey Trot and followed this up with an “under the radar” ten at Buntingford to finish the year and secure the most mileage for LEJOG defence.

I had seemingly run through the calf injury, rather than rest it. Clever hey? We'll find out later.

2013 – The Year the wheels came off

The year 2013 was now upon me. I'd got the London Marathon to start training for. What about having an off season, a couple of weeks resting the body? No time for that, the Suffolk Cross Country Championship was only a week away and following that, I'm already one week into 2013 and in need of getting the marathon programme on the go. I should also add that during the months since September I'd taken on the addiction that is Saturday morning 5K madness in the park – “parkrun”. Initially I didn't see how it would appeal to me on what was traditionally a rest day from running, but after getting the bug I had to make it part of my running life and in 2013 I would often even run the five miles from home before the 5K battle, thereby adding additional speed work to my schedule during eight miles on a Saturday which I swapped with a mid-week rest day.

I remember in the early weeks of January, I would run ten or so miles after work and be aware of an odd discomfort coming from the lower, outer portion of my left leg. It wasn't out and out pain but enough to knock a hole in the latter miles' pace as I became aware of it. Rest for a week or two would surely have helped, but no chance of that, I had a marathon to prepare for!

On I went and after turning in a tidy PB performance at the Gt Bentley half marathon in February – 1:20:54, I was feeling quite good about my form. Towards the end of the month I banged out a nice PB with negative splits at the Tarpley 20. Illness grabbed me between this and the next Sunday's repeat of the distance at Wymondham. The common cold seemingly morphing into the Bubonic Plague during my dismal effort to convince my body to man up and just get on with it. Still, “valuable miles” into the legs even if the watch showed horrible figures! A new mantra was sworn that day though, never run a distance race with illness on the go – it had not been pleasant.

One more race was to follow before London, Stowmarket Half Marathon. Later than usual due to postponement, owing to March snow preventing it taking place on schedule. My strategy was to back the pace down to that which was planned for the marathon and indulge in some negative splitting in the last couple of miles. This plan went well and I felt reasonably well trained generally as April gathered momentum, a couple of parkrun PB's were even delivered. This said, I was still aware

of the odd sensation that was in the left leg. It would not be evident early on, once warm, but could still be felt when up towards the hour mark while running. I began talking of it as a “niggle”.

Suddenly we were into marathon week and all conversation turned to “how’re you feeling ahead of the big day?” My default response had become that I was carrying a niggle and I wasn’t sure how I’d be fairing once into the latter miles of the race. Inwardly I was feeling very negative about the prospect of getting close to, let alone bettering the previous year’s performance. By race day I’d tapered down and found that the niggle was even more evident at the shorter distances than it had been before, all adding to my negativity. Oh well, that’s tapering for you, I said to myself, the body’s not used to doing less!

Race Day



Having well and truly loaded up on the beetroot juice during the final week, I decided race day would be augmented with pain relief so that if the niggle should be happening, I’d be less distracted by it. Well Sunday 21st April 2013 took a very similar form to 2012’s version. I travelled down aboard the club coach, with the early start this entails. I had a different start placement this time, now in the Fast Good For Age grouping and effectively running red route for the first miles rather than the (green which became) blue of

2012. No big deal, but in order to get as close to the start line as I’d planned (which would have been possible), I’d have had to stand in the confines of the tightly packed bodies for longer than I wished. Therefore I hung around away from the cramming until the last feasible moment before joining further back than desired. I started by walking the first few metres and it seemed like ages before I was able to run at target pace, but I kept calm and even once free of restriction, resisted the temptation to try to claw back the early lost time. In actual fact, little time was lost and this strategy was very correct in that I was eking out energy with far better calibration than the previous year.

Back-slapping legends

Given the slower start, I had managed to get running some way behind a few known competitors/friends. Some I was aware were running but had not seen before the gun and some who I'd seen or bumped into at the start zone. These included FRR's very own Francis Fox whose PB was a minute or so faster than mine. He spoke of target pace faster than I was prepared to go at so I wouldn't be seeing him on the course? A couple of Jaffa runners feature in this list (referred to by me as Wazza and Jaffoo) – neither of these had I beaten thus far during the year, but both had featured in very close proximity to me on occasions in the past.

Jaffoo, the better runner, who had never got under three hours but had routinely smashed me in tens, halves and twenties. Wazza (pictured below right) had cruised past me last year in London in the latter miles as I slowed, so beating me and therefore my PB by a small margin. Greg Davies from



Newmarket Joggers (can any competitive runner ever be taken truly seriously when by default referred to as a “jogger”? This title would craze me if I happened to be a member of Felixstowe Joggers) would be there again. I don't really know Greg but he's around my age and distinctive looking as a slim and very tall figure, but he whoops my butt in most stuff although again, had gone over the three hour mark last year. Adam Howlett (pictured left) was another on the list. As of that day I'd probably only met him twice before. He was a spectator travelling down to London on board the FRR battle-bus to support his unattached friend in 2012 when we'd first got chatting and then I'd seen and spoken to him again at the Stow Half after he'd ripped round in the low one-twenties to finish eighth but proclaiming that's as far as he's



good for. This very modest man has however, subsequently and recently run the Loch Ness Marathon in 2:52, so anything he ever tells you should clearly be taken with a pinch of salt. He was with us on the bus again this year and was actually running this time round. The runner I'd have no chance of finding on the road was Jim Bowen (obviously yet another pseudonym that Harper and I use for a local running adversary/friend and not his real name). I'd locked horns with Bowen (pictured right with Poppy Man in his shadow) very many times, with results going both ways, but in recent months this man's form had improved hugely – I'll never beat him again I reckoned.

Of the aforementioned list, all but one would be caught and passed by me. The controlled and more measured pacing was paying off. My big watch faithfully holding firm with the agreed mileage pace - split after split (I have it set to refresh every half mile). It turns out that several friends and club mates were tracking me on the VLM website and were noting the 5K splits being posted as very metronomic in regularity. On I ran with a certain



amount of anxiety though. Despite the performance seemingly going exactly as planned and required, mentally I was far from assured. “I’m in poor form, not as well prepared as last year, I’ll surely blow up – when will this occur, oh and don’t forget the niggle as that will surely slow you as the miles pile on. Furthermore, because I’m running slower than last year, I’m not as far around the course at any given time, therefore when the blow up does occur, I’ll finish with a slower time, surely”. As us runners know, we balance these negative thoughts with good ones too, so I was countering with “don’t forget the PBs chalked up in long stuff already this year, the blow up may not come as I’m not going crazy early on, so although slower now should be able to finish stronger/faster (negative splits), my blood is coursing with nitrates or something due to all that loading with beetroot juice, and the niggle isn’t even featuring this morning – perhaps it was all in the mind after all”.

First up in the people I recognise list, as I ran along, was yet another Jaffa – Scott. Many of you will know Scott from regular appearances at parkrun. His USP is the most impressive feat of strength in that he runs whilst pushing a large off-road buggy with his son as the pilot. I should beat this man I was thinking. He’s only ahead at the moment due to my hampered start. We had a quick chat and off past him I went. Next would be Greg D around six miles in. I had a chat with him and reported that I’d recently overtaken a three hour pacemaker. He was pleased to hear this fact as his intention – as I’d suspected – was to get in just under that magic barrier.

This was nice, identifying people and actually exchanging words as I ran. None of this had happened last year. Next up it was the start of the personal calls from spectators, and faces in the crowd being picked out. Also a feature last year’s pain fest had not included much of – indeed Christina H maintains her and the vociferous Tower Bridge FRR posse were impossible to miss as I trudged past, oblivious to their supporting efforts in 2012! This time round Martin F got himself noticed by me, not by my eyes but ears. After I’d run past him somewhere after Cutty Sark and heard my famous call of “there’s one on your shoulder” Dave, it could only be Martin, and turning back to check I caught a fleeting glimpse of my friend – nice. Dave “Foxy” Fox was spotted, Dave Gardner, Martin again, Marcia from parkrun, and the truly loud Christina posse who I actually spotted before they saw me and kicked into life, Pete Golding (or Poppy Man as he’s also known) – the inspirational St Edmunds Pacer, and Rory Marriott. Oh yes, Rory (pictured below right). Many of you will know the loveable, larger than life Event Director of Ipswich parkrun that is Rory M. He had mentioned he would be on a drinks station around the fourteen mile mark and I had been keen to keep an eye out for him.

Having been roared on by the FRR massif at Tower Bridge and feeling rather buoyant with everything, I had a bit of mischief in me as the water station approached. I grabbed a bottle early on from the table and took a swig. Initially no sign of Rory but suddenly he appeared, high up at the back of the helpers. A totally spontaneous act then followed as I raised my three-quarter full bottle in his direction and squeezed hard. The jet I had propelled hit him squarely in the kisser (as they say in London) just after I’d managed to attract his attention in the nick of time so he was fully aware who was dowsing him – priceless.



On I go, out round Isle of Dogs and feeling much better than here last year. In truth, I could feel my legs becoming heavier as the last ten miles commenced but this just meant what had been easy running was now moving into tougher demands on the body but no crisis and pace remained on target. It was a hot and sunny day by now. As is my preference I was running without a hat or sunglasses but was also ruing forgetting to apply sun cream to my follicly-challenged head. I had first realised this omission on the start line, by which point my belongings were well beyond reach on the trucks transporting thirty odd thousand bags to The Mall.

Suddenly, ahead of me I could see the familiar image of an FRR vest. Who's this? Oh no, it's Foxy Jnr. He'd properly blown up by the look of things. A consoling word or two was uttered as I passed. Of course I felt for Francis and his obvious misery but this strengthened me. He's a better runner than me and I'm out performing him, was my take on the situation. My memory does actually muddle the order and location of the encounters I was having now, but Adam H was another recipient of my encouraging words as I glided past him. He reckons our chat was around the twenty mile mark. I never did find Jaffoo on my travels, with him ultimately destroying his goal by posting low in the two-fifties, very impressive, but the imperious Wazza certainly crashed onto my radar. I can't say with any certainty at what point this was but how shocked was I to see him walking. It felt good to slap him on the back and call out words of encouragement as I strode past, still going well. Wazza's blown up, bloody hell! If that was a shock to me, imagine my mixture of horror and guilty elation which accompanied the sight of the slight figure of a slow moving Framlingham Flyer (as opposed to a Jogger, I wouldn't mind being a Felixstowe Flyer) up ahead. Surely not, but oh yes, Jim Bowen in pieces! Again the well meaning back slap and heart felt words of encouragement from me. What was happening to the legends? Was it the heat? Would I be the next victim to crumble, what with no sun cream on the go, after all?

To quote Danny Baker – “Nothing can go wrong now!”

With perhaps three miles to go I had started to allow myself the odd thought about how this was all going to finish. Things felt good still, you know, mental checklist: energy levels, mental fortitude, muscle groups in the legs, no grumblings from tendons, ligaments, no rubbing/chafing anywhere ranging between nipples to toes, everything felt really good. I even wondered what would be a good point to actually increase pace with a view to burning off all retained energy. How cool would

it be to throw in a quick final mile?



And then it happened – BANG. I can't be sure exactly where but estimate around 24.5 miles, as if to slap me in the face for daring to have such outrageous thoughts, as my left foot landed, a sudden and sharp pain was felt in my lower left leg. This was exactly where the niggle had been making itself known up until today. Oh yes the niggle, I'd completely forgotten about the likelihood of that making an appearance, but now it had morphed into something far more sinister. What the hell had happened? I obviously didn't stop and there'd be no slowing down. Wrong on the second count, despite my determination to carry on at previous pace, that just wasn't possible, there was too much pain for this. Surely though I could get round in a time which would be under three hours even if I'd need to

slow considerably. Yes probably but given how well things had gone until now surely I can't let a decent PB slip through my fingers?

What had happened in the leg? Was this a muscle tearing like Bungay last year? I suspected not as the pain was different, the like of which I'd not tasted before. I reckoned some sort of tendon had

let go. Each step on the left leg continued to hurt. Try as I might, not limping wasn't possible. The watch said I was now in the sevens. Albeit for a different reason, I was now re-enacting last year's final miles as runners of all shapes and ages began to nonchalantly run past me – or so it seemed. This was frustrating, I'd been the net passer this year. The only runners ahead of me up until this point were those that had started ahead in the lines and/or gone faster from the gun. Nobody had overtaken me but now my competitive pride was being assaulted from all angles.

Dig deep I told myself, this thing's nearly over, it's a marathon – it's going to hurt – shut up and get it finished. I suppose the finish line did soon come. For the second year on the trot though I wasn't in good shape and rather than the elation which joins most runners on The Mall I was again running with mental and physical trauma. I could see the line, the clock, the PB was happening even if I needed to walk now, not that I would. The watch stopped in accordance with the gun time of 2:57. Chip time would later reveal 2:56:08.

Post - Race

I began to trudge with a very pronounced limp, off down along The Mall in the never-ending section which is the sterile area beyond the line where medals and goody bags are forthcoming and then



eventually I was at the right lorry to reclaim my own bag. I found a quiet area to sit down and relax. I freshened up with wipes and changed clothes. I drank a bit but fancied little in the food department. Every time I tried to move, the leg protested, oh well I'd time to kill before my arranged meet with Martin. A familiar figure dropped himself down next to me – Jim Bowen. It was good to chat but we were both broken men in one way or another. Unfortunately he'd missed three hours by a couple of minutes and was at a loss to explain why cramping in the legs had been the reason for his collapse.

Cooling down as I was now, on went track suit trousers and FRR fleece and I embarked on my walk to find The Red Lion pub in Parliament Street where Martin would meet me. Why there? Well the organisers had been kind enough to pop a voucher for a free pint of London Pride, valid at specified pubs, into the registration goody bag and I was determined to exchange it for the grog. The closest pub which would be eligible would be this

Red Lion. I don't suppose the walk was that far, less than a mile I guess, but let me tell you, my body

was properly starting to let it be known that things were not as per normal. My walking speed with this leg injury was slow at best. I carried a vast quantity of stuff (typically travelling far from light) in the draw-string VLM bag and now I needed the toilet. As I tried to increase my glacial pace, although not really happening, the effort was causing me to heat up. Now I felt nauseous. "If I keep this up I'll be sick. If I stop I'll wet myself or far worse" was my thinking in a catch 22 situation like no other. Thankfully I kept control of the urgent toilet requirement as I took the sensible option to stop. I think I was on the verge of collapse anyway, judging by the concerned looks and offers of assistance I was now getting. Some minutes later I finished dragging myself to the pub and the welcome sight of the waiting Martin.

The toilet visit within, was yet another drama to unfold. I'll spare you some of the sordid details reader, but can't keep from you some references to the ongoing nightmare this day was seemingly unravelling into! The pub was heaving as I entered. It had two levels with the toilet being on a below-ground floor. Worse was the fact that the steps down went round and round in a tight spiral of seemingly endless quantity. A huge queue extended all the way up these back from the bar. I'd long since lost all desire to consume ale but was intending to grab my pint still for carer Martin but this was never going to happen now. I eventually made the toilet, only to discover that I'd now got acute kidney failure! Thankfully my pessimistic and hypochondriacally fuelled diagnosis was overlooking the fact that despite consuming vast quantities of beetroot juice in the days leading up to race day, without the merest hint of dark colouring in my urine, it seems that the act of running a hard marathon kicks in the colouring effect, but I was properly horrified at the time by the colour – it was like neat blood, and no exaggeration. Thankfully this did clear by later in the evening. After trudging back up the congested stairway, I eventually started to feel a bit more normal. Martin kindly carried my bag and we slowly made our way to the coach pick up point close to Trafalgar Square.

After a less comfortable coach journey home than the morning version, walking was still not done for the day though. Upon arrival back to Copdock Mill Tesco I walked with Martin (even though he wanted to get the car himself and pick me up) back to the car some half mile or so away. Once home, a restful evening with Sally preceded a good night's sleep.

Getting back to "Normal"

And so to life after Marathon 2013. I'd worked the Monday last year but was good for nothing so a day off it would be this time round. We pottered about, Sally and I, firstly at Campsea Ashe market, then to a pub lunch before returning home. The grass needed cutting so obviously I got stuck into this task with the mower. How the leg hurt every time I needed to change direction (often, of course). It had been agony all day although no real issue when sitting still or even standing up, but movement of any kind was not clever.

I was back cycling (I commute 4 miles each way to work, all year round by bike) on Tuesday, and although this was possible, it was awkward, with shock-wave type pain being felt in the leg whenever even the slightest bump in the road was encountered. In 2012 I'd actually managed some very gentle trotting with FRR on the first Tuesday group session immediately following race day. There was absolutely no way this was happening this time though. I did make the start gathering, resplendent in my finisher's tee-shirt, but took myself off to the Felixstowe hospital in the vein hope someone there could help diagnose what was going on with my debilitating leg issue. Given the out of hours timing of my visit, there was no doctor or X-Ray facility available. A well meaning nurse carried out an examination though and did enough to reassure me that it looked very unlikely I had broken a bone in some fashion or other. There was a caveat mind, a second opinion would be worthwhile, she said, and advised me to "pop into" Ipswich A&E as well. I chose not.

So, I'd run hard, recorded a respectable finish time in my fourth ever marathon and was now suffering painful soft tissue damage, but this would ease, as it always had done in the past. One week on now and a planned rest weekend under the belt meant that the next race focus would start looking at Heritage Coast. I usually do the half marathon option here but always have the alternative of the 6 miler if necessary. As the week unwound it became clear there was no chance of participation. Walking was still not possible without limping and running at any pace seemed like a distant possibility. Never mind, I could at least cycle, and I was already upping my usual mileage to compensate for not running and helping therefore to keep the base fitness up. To this end I opted to cycle there (Thorpeness) in the company of Adrian H (that very cultured multi-disciplined athlete of FRR) who would be running the six miler once there! My duty would be cheering on Rob H in the half, Jon W, the aforementioned Adrian, and my Sally in the six, along with two or three other FRR members and other running friends likely to be there. This was a table-turner, me cheering on Sally from the sidelines in her athletic endeavours and although unknown at the time, would soon become something of a new theme for my year.

Happy Birthday Dear

Wednesday 1st May, another stand out date for more reasons than usual. It's Sally's birthday. This year she would be spending it visiting daughter Genni in Norwich. This meant that following work I'd have at least an hour to spend on the bike before she'd be home – great. We'd get to go out for dinner later on and my extra time on the bike wouldn't require any sort of "pass". Well, for the first time since hurting the leg I'd ridden one of my bikes (I have several to choose from) with clip-in type pedals. No great issue here I thought, but had nonetheless felt pain when unclipping my left foot upon that morning's arrival at work. This in turn had led to a slight delay in getting the foot off and down, and although it didn't, could have led to the awful moment when, as many of us have memorably done, collapsing sideways with trapped feet unable to stop the ignominious collapse to the ground. My extended ride home was a twenty miler. It had gone well, with my restricted athletic status seemingly less hampering on the bike than I had feared.

The ride was nearing its end as I swung into my close. Our drive is an upward slope with a turn. As I started to enter it my thoughts went to the impending issue of getting my feet, specifically the tender left legged version off the pedals and down. Recalling that morning's near miss I decided it would be sensible to disengage the left foot gingerly and in good time, whilst still moving. The ensuing chain reaction went something like this: 1, clumsy tender left leg comes out of pedal clip. 2, clumsy tender left leg fails to prevent foot striking the trailing edge of the long front mudguard this bike is fitted with. 3, trailing edge of mudguard snags into the still revolving tyre. 4, still revolving tyre acts like a captor and begins drawing the mudguard upwards, folding it into ever harder contact in doing so. 5, the now mangled and folded mudguard reaches the crown of the forks and can't travel any further. 6, the wheel instantly stops revolving. 7, my remaining momentum has to go somewhere so I find my body moving over the front and left side of the inexplicably (my brain hadn't kept pace with this unravelling disaster which had of course happened far faster than I'm dragging it out here) now stationary handlebars. 8, I'm falling from a moving (or not in this instance) bike (brain catching up now) which as some of you may know, I have done many dozens of times in my former sporting life as a cycle speedway racer (the below picture demonstrates this point from the sport's 2002 British Final), which I'm mentioning as coming down in this fashion really shouldn't have been a big deal at all – I'm very good at crashing, or specifically landing, a crashing cycle. 9, the first point of contact with my drive surface is the left foot, which despite my best efforts all along to protect is now getting stamped down with rapid and heavy force – ouch. 10, still dealing with forward and downward momentum, my upper body now needs to land and my fingerless cycling gloved hands get thrust out to take the final impact of this much undignified dismount as both palms and outstretched fingers see to finally stopping any movement of me.



As I rise, my thoughts are shared between annoyance at being caught out in this fashion, dull pain from the tender leg with the irony not lost on me as to how attempting to favour the leg had been the catalyst to this carnage, and further annoyance that I've managed to mangle components on one of my most valuable machines. Only then did I actually catch sight of the real trauma this unravelling

sequence of events had actually created. The middle finger of my right hand had now got a very unusual look to it. The joint nearest the nail was clearly dislocated and the top portion of the finger was pointing right at a considerable angle. For a moment I consider attempting to put it back in myself. I've seen this done on the rugby pitch over the years. I bottled this option though as although the top of the finger was now drained of all usual colour, I was perversely feeling absolutely no pain from it. I'd managed to draw some blood too on the palm side of it. I reasoned that no pain could rapidly become lots of pain if the process went wrong in any way, and I was alone don't forget. So what to do? Well, unlock the door, pour a drink of water, take a photograph (below) of the hand, before discarding broken bike in the garage and selecting an alternative for my solo trip to A&E at Ipswich Hospital.



I'm sure you can imagine Sally's feelings when she hears from me on the mobile from Heath Road explaining that I'm likely to be some time before getting home for the second time on her birthday evening. In fairness she calmed down enough to cycle up herself and join me in a very busy waiting area. X-Rays, nitrous oxide, pulling back into place by the skilled nurse sorted it, but the moment was gone. Sally's birthday had not gone to plan and dinner consisted of a 9.30 Chinese takeaway.

Anyway, moving onto the weekend and the Heritage Coast event. My cycling was hampered, but not spoiled, by the now splinted finger, so the transport plan was able to be kept. Whilst waiting for the runners to return at the Thorpeness field, I took up the opportunity for a sports massage from the ladies present who were offering such a service. Talk was obviously about my leg injury, but a certain amount of rubbing and poking went on with seemingly no harmful effects felt. Several theories came out, all concerning various soft tissue problems I might be carrying, but the one piece of advice which ultimately counted was the instruction to seek out my GP with a view to getting professional help under way on what was starting to appear a slightly longer term injury than I was expecting. I had actually got an appointment already made in this regard, but was having to wait an eight day period for the consultation. This occurred on the following Wednesday, 8th May.

To her credit, the doctor suggested a good starting point would be for an X-Ray and we'd discuss further options dependent on the outcome. I duly turned up at Ipswich Hospital the next day, cycling there straight from work (can you see the pattern developing here?). Not really able to predict what sort of response I was likely to get from the radiographer as she viewed my images, the first real news came with her commenting with a trace of surprise in her voice, "you've got a fracture showing in your fibula". I was despatched directly from X-Ray to A&E. I'm not sure if in my slightly shocked state I was in any way pleased to hear this diagnosis or not. At least now I was getting information on the missing piece of the jigsaw, and as I've been told on countless occasions before,

you're better off breaking a bone than certain soft tissue injuries (that I've endured – ruptured cruciate knee ligament on the same leg in 2008 for instance).

There was shock though, as I mention, I've been a very active cycle speedway rider for a large portion of my life, I've played adult rugby for many years and am a professional motorcyclist. Prior to April this year, as a forty five year old, I'd never broken a single bone. Now seemingly the gentlemanly, non-contact sport which is competitive running had managed what a few extreme, contact alternatives had always failed to do. What's more, by a slightly detached path, running was also responsible for my inaugural joint dislocation! The second phone call from A&E to my long-suffering better half in only a matter of days was met with substantially greater sympathy now. I had to smile when being asked to take a waiting seat in A&E. The concerned staff keen that I should have access to a foot stall so as to keep my broken leg raised whilst I awaited the attention of a nurse. I didn't have the heart to explain it wouldn't be required given I'd cycled to the venue and virtually carried on normal activities without any meaningful resting since actually injuring the leg some eleven days ago.

The consultation with the nurse was somewhat surreal. He advised that very little was able to be done for me there and then, but that an appointment with an orthopaedic specialist the following day would bring all the advice and help I'd be needing. In the mean time I was to rest, starting with cycling home! My X-Ray was being displayed in all its gory glory on the PC monitor as we spoke. A very truncated version of this whole London Marathon story was trotted out by me (the first of many, many more that I would be called upon to relate as the year went on) to the stunned medic who was struggling to understand how anyone could continue to run on a leg which resembled the shape of mine. "Didn't it hurt?" he asked!



So, the next day, what would Mr Bowditch, revered consultant orthopaedic surgeon, have to say on the subject? My broken leg was termed as a stress fracture of the non-weight bearing fibula bone. Apparently, proper rest and inactivity would have very much been the order of the day from the word go, no plastering of this bone is usually carried out or surgical intervention if it's still in one approximate piece. An immobilising boot contraption could be used

and would have been if I'd been seen appropriately earlier, but this would now be of little use for me. Mr B explained there'd be no running for twelve weeks and of greater immediate worry, no cycling for six either. Surely cycling would be OK, but apparently the flapping action of the foot (the same goes for swimming too) causes issues with the healing site of the bone. I explained how I'd

been actually upping my cycling since breaking the bone, and managed to negotiate minimal distance, gentle paced commuting only, by my default travel option. Tongue in cheek I asked Mr B to confirm that the following day's triathlon at Wattisham and Sunday's Suffolk Sunrise 100 mile cycle ride sportive that I was pre-entered into, would be off limits for me now. He duly obliged.

I began my re-hab that day. I had painfully been hobbling around on this broken bone unaware of what I'd done up until now. I'd missed no work but was fortunate enough to have been able to restrict certain activities. I'd tentatively carried out a test of my ability to ride a work motorcycle on the day of the finger dislocation and had found even that possible although the act of getting on and off when pivoting on the left leg with all body weight going through it whilst supporting the balance of a 300+KG motorcycle had nearly brought a tear to the eye. No further motorcycling would occur for a couple more weeks as the finger had seen to that. A special splint now made it impossible.

I took on a forced non-competitor status for Alton Water and Woodbridge 10K races in the coming weeks where I was once again happily able to watch and urge Sally on in both events as she proudly completed back to back PB performances. I had also been the wrong side of the telephoto lens for the Ipswich Friday Five race, but with the passing of Woodbridge all pre-entered races of mine were now behind me. How my plans for the year were now changed. As previously, I'd hoped to be competitive in my age group (this year now moving up to Vet 45) for the series of Friday Fives and Suffolk Grand Prix events, but had to re-focus (pardon the pun) on photographer duties for many of these instead.

I've had a difficult summer, keeping in touch with my running buddies by non-running appearances at training nights and competitive events. I made a few cameo appearances by returning to gentle running slightly ahead of original schedule and due to the power of parkrun and the inability of me to do anything gently for long I was soon back to reasonable pace over short distances – typically 5K or so. This return has not been plain sailing. There's been pain in the leg whilst running and depending on how hard I dared to push on some occasions, varying degrees of pain afterwards, but in recent weeks (I type this in October) I feel I'm turning a corner. There's actually no pain now from the break site. There's been some grumbling from tendons which are protesting at harder "paper rounds" than they've experienced throughout the preceding weeks and I'm gradually adding extra distance and sessions of running now. I've been able to take part in the very sociable Saxmundham Five, ahead of the Framlingham Cross Country in October, in addition to the Saturday parkruns which have returned to weekly essentials in my life and are now just about back to former, pre-injury levels of finish times.

Lessons Learned?

So what actually happened to me on that day in London? Well my belief is this: Following a latter portion of 2012 containing more racing than was healthy for my protesting body and the ludicrous refusal to acknowledge the necessary rest the torn calf actually deserved, I went straight into a heavy (but if all things were equal, achievable) marathon training programme with a developing stress fracture of the fibula. I suspect that a tiny crack was developing in the bone following on from the weeks of work that leg was asked to over-deliver when the other calf (of the usually stronger side) was torn. The discomfort I was feeling in ten mile runs back in January was the first I was getting told about the issue, but I didn't properly listen. In my defence, if us runners listened to every "niggle" we'd never leave the close, but clearly there's a balance to be struck and in hindsight mine was way out.

I believe rather than allowing the crack to heal up, which would have meant many weeks of non running and ultimately probably not starting in London, led to it becoming ever worse as the marathon approached. Why it let go in rather spectacular fashion as the photo shows, when it did, I suspect was due to fatiguing muscles surrounding the bone, failing to continue with the levels of support they'd been providing it hitherto.

Have I learned from the overall experience? Yes. Will I do things differently in the future? Yes. I'll race less and try to listen to the body better. Well that's the plan anyway! Do I regret running on in London when the leg broke, rather than pulling up and seeking proper and immediate medical assistance? No way. I was able to turn in a 2:56, broken leg included. In the overall scheme of things not many people can do this and I may never be in a position to do so again. I may one day repeat this story to my grand children (I don't yet have any, calm down), or in fact read this version to them in instalments as bed time listening. Some how, if it had petered out with "at 24 miles I felt a sharp pain and stopped" it just wouldn't carry the same blockbuster script.

I'm getting back on the horse in 2014 and have recently received my confirmation of Good for Age entry. Currently the thought of pounding 26.2 miles of tarmac at 6:40 pace fills me with horror, but I'm closing this saga with a reminder of the mantra I mentioned earlier in the text:

"BACK YOURSELF"!