

Boston Marathon with the Red Sox

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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Last Monday was Patriot's Day in Boston, the day of the Boston Marathon. For who knows how long now, the Red Sox have played an early afternoon game in the shadow of the Marathon. It seemed almost unnatural to watch those marathon highlights and not see them followed by scenes from Fenway Park.

But on Monday the Red Sox were playing in Fort Myers in a belated spring training game, and so Patriot's Day in Boston was missing a piece. I asked an old Boston hand the other day how long that combination had existed, and he said he didn't know when it started, but his memories of it went back fifty years.

So chalk up another piece of wreckage for the baseball geniuses who wiped out the playoffs, a World Series, spring training, and now a Boston tradition. Fear and Loathing, Don and Bud, can put another notch in their belts.

As for the Marathon itself thousands of runners made the 26.2 mile trek, and in the end the winner on the men's side and the women's side were repeaters, a first for the event. Uta Pippig of Germany was the women's winner for the second consecutive year, and on the men's side Cosmas Ndeti of Kenya won his third straight Boston long run.

On the men's side it was a Kenyan event at the top. Luis Dos Santos of Brazil finished third, which produced a busted flush of Kenyans in the top five. Ndeti's third straight win put him in the select company of the legendary Bill Rodgers, a winner in '78, '79, and '80, and Clarence DeMar, who accomplished his hat trick in 1922, '23, and '24. For his efforts Ndeti will take \$75,000 in prize money back to his African home, along with a potential \$150,000 in bonuses.

What is it about Kenya and its neighbor to the north, Ethiopia, that has produced so many world class distance runners over the past three decades since Abebe Bekela of Ethiopia first won the Olympic Marathon running barefoot in Rome in 1960? It was after all conventional racist wisdom in American society that blacks, a people of African origin, were only talented in the sprints, and whites had an affinity for middle distance and long distance running. That racial myth is long since down the drain in the face of the East African onslaught.

Certainly the success of these East African runners is explained in part by the fact that they train at high altitude. Both the

Kenyan and Ethiopian runners prepare themselves in the 7,000 to 10,000 foot highlands which flank the Great Rift Valley, spanning the length of East Africa from the Red Sea to Capetown. It is a place of breathtaking natural beauty and an ideal location for distance training, combining as it does, high altitude and moderate temperatures.

But the peculiarities of Cosmas Ndeti's story suggest much more than that is at work. Ndeti's first victory in the Boston came two years ago just two days before the birth of his son who has acquired the name Gideon Boston Ndeti. Last year Ndeti's victory was achieved in the course record time of 2:07:15. But since then Ndeti has done nothing to suggest that he would be able to successfully defend his marathon title. Last October he did not complete the Chicago Marathon and last month he struggled in a half-marathon in Lisbon with stomach and wind problems.

His training methods are not conventional nor consistent, and many feel that they may be erratic or non-existent. He runs few marathons during the year and seldom trains at distance. And yet he keeps on winning the Boston, and in a most peculiar fashion, as Cosmas Ndeti is the only winner in Boston marathon history who runs the second half of the race faster than the first half.

But there is more. Ndeti is a born again Christian who before this year's race said, "A lot of people say I have no chance to win. But the Jesus who made me win in '93 was the same Jesus in '94 and is the same Jesus in '95. If I ask for victory, why shouldn't I have victory?" And when the race was over he added, "I trusted myself and I know my God is able and I was going to win."

And so this twenty-five year old Kenyan, one of 37 children, his father has three wives, won for the third consecutive time. His only regret was that Gideon Boston was unable to make the trip with him due to visa problems. Next year Cosmas says it will be different. Gideon Boston will be on hand to celebrate his third birthday in the city for which he is named, and it will be a fitting conclusion to the 100th Boston Marathon as well as Cosmas Ndeti's record breaking fourth straight Boston Marathon win.

No doubt the Jesus of '93, '94, and '95 will still be with him in '96. The only thing that seems in doubt is whether the Red Sox will have a home game at Fenway that afternoon.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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