

# BOSTON VS. NEW YORK BATTLE FOR MARATHON SUPREMACY

By DON SIKORSKI  
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The Boston Red Sox have won the World Series. I'm surprised that the Microsoft Word spell check doesn't reject this sentence as a typo. It just can't be right. As a lifelong Red Sox fan, I've been subjected to much verbal abuse when the subject of baseball arises, but no longer will the response "1918" hurt the way it used to. Whether or not a curse ever did exist, the fact is that it is now history, leaving legions of Red Sox fans to ponder how they will ever top this feat in 2005 while Yankee fans quietly write the words "wait 'till next year" on the blackboard over and over until it becomes second nature. I could write about baseball for hours, but this is a running column. So we turn our attention to the cities of Boston and New York and their marathons. Each city boasts a proud tradition of excellence in the marathon, rich in history, attracting the world's best to perform on its respective stage, and certainly the talk of the town in the weeks leading up to the event. Here's a look at how the two marathons compare:

**THE STATISTICS:** Boston is the country's premiere spring marathon and the nation's oldest footrace, dating back to 1897. Tradition is a noontime start each Patriots Day in Massachusetts, historically the third Monday in April. New York attracts over 2 million spectators to watch 25,000+ runners from around the world compete through all five boroughs of New York City. New York was the very first city to stage a marathon in 1896, the year of the first Olympic Marathon. Boston followed a year later, and has been conducted every year since, with the exception of, ironically, 1918, due to the war with Germany. New York, run the first Sunday in November, began in the autumn of 1970, when 126 runners toed the line to run 5 laps within Central Park. Both courses are point to point, and both require long waits at the start and somewhat of a logistic nightmare in terms of shuttling runners place to place. Boston is the only race, besides the Olympic Marathon, that requires qualifying times for entry. That practice has since become more lenient with the inclusion of charity runners. And while Boston and New York don't compete against each other to attract the top international talent to its race, each event has its rival. The London Marathon takes place the day before Boston; while the Chicago Marathon is usually scheduled 3-4 weeks prior to New York each fall. London and Chicago attract large fields and have deep pockets, offering top runners a chance to run on flatter and faster race courses.

**THE STARS:** Boston tradition is anchored by names like Williams, Foxx, Doerr, Speaker, Yastrzemski, and Fisk. In the marathon, runners like Johnny A. Kelly, Clarence Demar, Les Pawson, Gerald Cote, Tarzan Brown, Johnny J. Kelley, Bill Rodgers, Ibrahim Hussein, and Cosmas Ndeti each built the resumes by winning at Boston. New York counters with legendary names like Gerhig, Ruth (can Boston also claim Ruth as their own?), Dimaggio, Mantle, Maris, Berra, Ford, Jackson, etc. The list of greats goes on forever. Alberto Salazar, a Massachusetts high school standout before heading out west to Oregon, joins Rodgers at the head of the field of runners who can claim victories in both marathons. In New York, Rodgers would string together 4 consecutive victories (1976-79) before Salazar posted wins in the next three years (1980-82), including a course and American record of 2:08:13 that was subsequently erased when the course was re-measured and found to be short. Rodgers can also claim 4 Boston wins (1975, 1978-80). Olympic gold medalist Joan Benoit and Germany's Utta Pippig head up the leading lady list at Boston, with Benoit setting a new world record (2:22:43) at Boston in 1983. In New York City, the name Grete Waitz is legendary. Waitz would first win in 1978 and earn a silver medal chasing Benoit in the inaugural Olympic Marathon in 1984. Kenya's Catherine Ndereba, a former marathon world record holder, has won in both Boston and New York. New York has offered a separate, earlier start for its elite female runners in past years; Boston used this practice for the first time in 2004 and found it to be successful.

**LOCAL FLAVOR:** 2 time Olympian Johnny J. "The Younger" Kelley was a New London schoolboy standout that went on to run at Boston University. Kelly would later win the 1957 Boston Marathon in a then course record 2:20:05, and 11 years later, would influence one of his pupils, Groton's Amby Burfoot, to run and win at Boston in 1968. New London's Dan Dillion and Mystic's Wayne Jacob finished 8<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> respectively in the 1985 Boston Marathon. AGAA Coach Norm Higgins was the 1971 New York City Marathon winner in 2:22:54, running on a course that stayed entirely within Central Park, prior to the current 5 borough layout.

**BEST COMPETITION:** The Fisk-Munson scuffle at home plate and Pedro's bullfighter imitation (with Don Zimmer starring as the bull) make for great highlight film footage. And clearly the 1978 single game playoff in Boston, when light hitting shortstop Bucky Dent knocked a three run homer over the green monster, tops the list of all-time great baseball games between the two teams. In the marathon, the 1982 Salazar-Beardsley duel in the heat will forever be remembered as one of Boston's best finishes. In New York City, my vote goes to Rod Dixon running down former Providence College grad Geoff Smith in Central Park in 1983. Dixon ran 2:08:59 to become the first non-American to win in New York, while Smith's 2:09:08 would be the fastest debut marathon ever run.

**THE INTANGIBLES:** I looked to the thoughts from two local runners who were familiar with both events. Uncasville's Kevin Gallerani, 49, a long-time Yankees fan, favors Boston as his marathon of choice. "Boston has a lot of advantage over New York," Gallerani explained. "The Boston course has some challenges with the hills versus the bridges in New York. I also think the scenery is more visually appealing along the Boston course compared to upper Manhattan. Boston also has people lining the course the whole route, where New York's crowd thins out in the Bronx. But coming down 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue is awesome." Logistics wise, Gallerani also gives Boston the edge. "When you finish Boston, you walk to the corresponding bus, get your bag, and move on," Gallerani explains. "New York...you get your bag and pray no one has mugged your family members while waiting for you at their designated alpha sign," he joked. "And trying to get out of the park is a nightmare. Leaving Boston is pretty easy; you get on the Mass Pike and head west. I just remember a long metro train ride home from New York and being asked for money while waiting at Grand Central Station."

Way Hedding has 8 Boston Marathon and 10 New York City Marathons to his credit. The 55 year-old Niantic resident has also attended the Boston Marathon as a spectator each year. "Boston has the tradition; it's the granddaddy of marathons," proclaims Hedding, also a long time Yankees fan. But it's a bad start; the narrow roads make things crowded, and you can't get a running rhythm going at Boston. It's not a course for a PR (personal record). That's one of the reasons I prefer a smaller marathon," says Hedding, the former East Lyme Marathon Race Director. "New York is a great marathon with an unrestricted start," says Hedding. "It has probably the most spectators of any race in the United States. The downside is the baton death march from the finish line to the reunion area after the race," claims Hedding. "You get an apple and a bottle of water and that's it." Hedding also offers this comparison. "Both races are point to point, and both have a long (3+ hour) wait to the start, he states. "But on the positive side, Boston offers free Sam Adams beer at the pre-race pasta party, and New York has a ton of good bar stops along the route." If you're inclined to stop, Hedding recommends the Turkey Bar around halfway or The Friendly Bar in Harlem around the 22 mile mark.

It can be agreed that both cities host terrific marathon events. New York relies on its international appeal; Boston falls back on its long standing tradition. Take your pick, Boston or New York. No matter which baseball team you claim allegiance to, you can't argue with the success of these

two marathons.

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