

BMW 44th BERLIN MARATHON



More than any other event I've done in recent years; my trip to Germany had me giddy with excitement from the moment I secured a ticket. This quite simply was a real bucket list item for me. To finally get a chance to participate (and represent ATC) in one of "The Majors" in such a historically rich & beautiful city really is a dream come true. I feel like I've been training for this my whole adult life and finally it's here..... **The Berlin Oktoberfest!** Just a small matter of another pesky marathon to do before the main event (& real endurance challenge) begins!!!

Pre-race preparations:

As soon as the 2017 Berlin marathon lottery results were announced (back in November 2016) strategic planning for "**MISSION BEAT BERLIN**" commenced. I immediately booked annual leave from work, budget accommodation (EasyHotel) and flights (Ryanair Dub – Schonefeld Berlin) and mapped out an itinerary for a 5 day endurance adventure. With my BFF & marathon inspiration **Kieran O' Connor** travelling from Sydney (with his Kiwi running pal "Lightening Mike Lichtwerk"), and ATC running pal **Mick O'Connor** (no relation!) also acquiring race tickets, this had the makings of a trip to remember.

Friday travel & check-ins went without incident (despite Michael O'Leary's best efforts!). Saturday race registration at the EXPO was so perfectly German – No faffing around, organised and uber efficient - **Vorsprung durch technik** - I love it. Myself and Mick managing to change our starting pens, allowing us run together was a bonus. A sensible early night, then pre-race light breakie & tactics talk on race morning had me relaxed and enjoying the atmosphere.



The Berlin marathon course is famously flat and fast. The scene for many a world record setting with Gebrselassie, Kipsang & Kimetto all doing so in recent years. This year saw 3 marathon legends attempt to set a new WR & reach the holy grail of marathon running, a sub 2hr finish. I couldn't see it happening, especially when race morning brought with it wet and

extremely humid conditions. Officially 98% humidity as the gun went off making for tough running conditions.

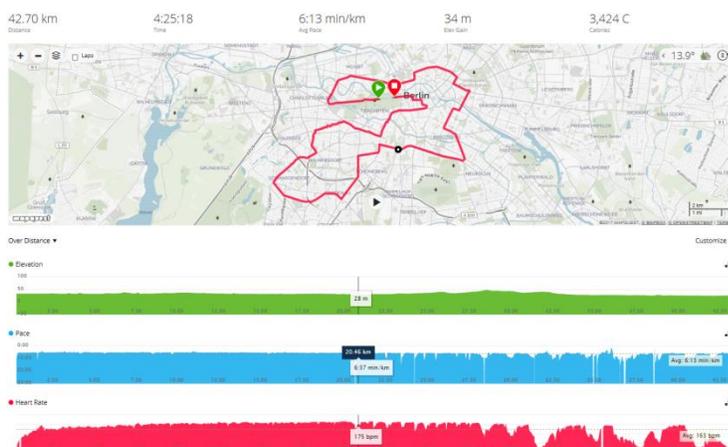
The Course:

Normally my order of preference for long run locations would be 1) Seaside, 2) Countryside, 3) City centre, but the Berlin City marathon route might challenge that listing order. It's like a journey through historic and cultural change. Marching through Berlin, viewing so many notable landmarks and changing architecture is intriguing. Passing by beautifully constructed bridges and varying building styles has the eyes moving as much as the legs. There is a large mix of short sharp turns and long stretches along the way but all in all it is a route that keeps the body & mind busy. Wet road surfaces also meant extra care was required, especially taking corners.



The marathon start on Strasse des 17 Juli in Tiergarten Park is some sight. You immediately get a feel for the enormity of this event. Approx. 40,000 people on a quest for personal glory. The course passes the Siegessaule monument, exits the park & loops around heading east. Crossing over the River Spree 4 times in the 1st 15k as it passes through Hansaviertel & Moabit and Mitte. With sneaky peaks at landmarks such as the Bundeskanzlaramt (Mrs. Merkel's place of business!), The Reichstag (German Parliament building) and Platz der Vereinten Nationen (United Nations' square) along the way.

Continuing on through Moritzplatz, and a long stretch to Kreuzberg, running south on Martin-Luter-Strasse passing The Rathaus Schoneberg (the location for JFK's famous 'Ich bin ein Berliner' speech) on your way to the 25k Marker. I remembered the JFK line (from the history channel) but I defo didn't feel like one myself to be honest. Berlin was kicking my butt. Even from the 20k mark, I was feeling the effects of going out too quickly (*AGAIN!!*) and a busy run season had finally caught up with me, resulting in me having to take walk breaks every km or so in the 2nd half. That said, the support from The Berliners was loud & enthusiastic, (over a million spectators by conservative estimates) and their support and cheers do drive you on.



After passing through Foreign Embassy territory at Schmargendorf & Wilmersdorf and reaching the 32k mark, the route heads back in towards Tiergarten. Passing more famous buildings such as The Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church and Potsdamer Platz (the home of the Berlin Symphony Orchestra's Philharmonie building) & Konzerthaus Berlin. I was mostly walking/hobbling at this point so got to see/admire way more of the sights than I expected!!!

But all this quaint TripAdvisor-esque sightseeing is about to be blown away by **THE MOST** spectacular marathon finish I've experienced to date. After you navigate a few final twists & turns the route takes you onto **Unter den Linden**, home of the Staatsoper (Opera House) before reaching the tummy tumbling scene of **The Brandenburg Gate** and the finish line.

OMG, what a sight! Arm, leg & neck hairs standing on end, so so happy to be done with this race but loving every moment of the final stretch. The finish line is actually about 400m past **The Gate** so that ending does drag a bit (especially when gritting teeth in pain) but it's a finish I'll not forget in a hurry. My finishing time of **4:25:13** was my slowest standalone marathon to date but about what I deserved after arrogantly assuming past performances could be replicated on demand. This is what happens when you don't give training & preparation its due respect. A mistake I will try not repeat in the future.

Happy to say my Berlin buddies fared much better: Mick O'Connor (**4:17:18**), Kieran O'Connor (**3:02:34**) Mike Lichtwark (**2:33:39**) – just 30mins behind the winner Kipchoge (**2:03:31**).



Post Marathon:

After collecting a nice (very German) medal and hobbling back to our respective digs for a rest and freshen up, we met up and moved on to the main event: 3 days of Berlin's beers, bands & boys banter. The set up for Oktoberfest (even in the city centre bars) is amazing. Lots of friendly Berliners, plenty of folk music and locals dancing in authentic German dress. The atmosphere is electric, very tourist friendly and safe.

As with any endurance event, pacing is key – late night bar service, litre size glasses of beer as standard and very efficient floor staff do not aid that pacing effort but we battled through it, did ATC and Ireland proud, I think. All members of the mission making it home safely.

While I went with a mission in mind, I can't really say I **"Beat Berlin"** on this occasion. A more appropriate phrase might be **"Aus Schaden wird man klug"** (failure makes smart) and I will take nothing but positives from my **Berlin Marathon** experience.



Up next, another visit to Santry Sports Clinic for some TLC and an improved focus on shifting some timber in advance of the next challenge – which I'm still hopeful, will be the big ATC away day in Dublin for DCM in a few weeks.

On the immediate horizon, boxset rentals this weekend of Baywatch & Knight Rider, as a cheeky visit to a Berlin museum in his honour has reignited my love & admiration for.....

The Hoff