

Along Marathon route, grief and anger run deep

From Hopkinton to Boston, a sense that connection to race will never be the same

By **Peter Schworm** and **Lisa Kocian** Globe Staff, April 17, 2013, 12:00 a.m.

From his front stoop in Natick, Ron Simmons has watched two dozen Boston Marathons pass by, shoulder to shoulder with his neighbors. The whole town comes out each year, cheering long after the elite runners have finished in Copley Square. It is a magical day, he said, a day when tradition holds and spirits lift.

Now, on a day where the world felt shaky and unfamiliar, Simmons feared that the Marathon he knew was gone. Those responsible for the bombs that exploded near the race's finish line had stolen it, he said.

"It's never going to be the same," Simmons, 67, said Tuesday. "Once something like this happens, nothing goes back. Not like the way it was."

Those who live along the Marathon route spoke Tuesday of a deeply personal grief, a sense of loss forged by years of Patriots Day celebrations and the cherished ritual of cheering the runners on.

From Hopkinton to Boston, residents said they felt an abiding connection with the race and had long been proud that the world's most storied Marathon runs through their town. For them, the bombings hit wrenchingly close to home and left many forlorn and adrift.

"I'm hurt in my heart," said Victor DaVica, 47, of Natick, who watches the race along Route 135 every year. "I can't begin to make sense of this."

From the race's start in Hopkinton, where mourners lay flowers in the town gazebo, life along the Marathon route felt subdued Tuesday. On the town green in Natick, mothers tried to explain to their children what had happened. In the center of Wellesley, a man sat in his truck in silence, lost in his own thoughts. In Boston, where flowers and Boston T-shirts lined a barrier at Copley Square near the finish line where the explosions occurred, marathoners shuffled about town in a haze.

"It was very surreal, the whole thing," said Gary Shupe, 49. Shupe, from Halifax, Nova Scotia, had finished the race just minutes before the blasts, and memories of the ensuing chaos had raced through his mind ever since. Though exhausted from the race, he said he had barely slept.

Along the route, signs of race day lingered, from freshly painted crosswalks to personalized messages to runners posted on trees and lampposts.

Grief was perhaps sharpest in Hopkinton, a small town where affection for the race runs deep.

At his coffee shop a short walk from the starting line, David Phillips had turned the television from the news to music. People needed a break.

In a town known worldwide as a running mecca, residents felt they had lost something dear.

"It will never be the same again," Phillips said.

Kelleigh Kenney and Ashlyn Canonica agreed.

"Growing up here we just always had such wonderful memories of the Marathon," said Kenney, who was at the coffee shop Tuesday morning. "Now it's been tarnished for us."

Canonica, who lives in Framingham, had brought her son Aidden, 2, to the starting line

on Monday because she has always loved the race. But she probably wouldn't bring him next year.

"You just never think something like that would happen because it's such a happy day," she said. "I just think it's really, really sad."

Runners who train for months so they can come to Boston each April felt the loss, too.

From the coffee shop, Greg and Jackie Pavek from Wisconsin recalled the horror of the day before. When the bombs exploded, Greg Pavek, 65, was running the final stretch, and Jackie was cheering from the stands at the finish line. In the ensuing chaos, they couldn't find each other.

Instead of crossing the finish line, Pavek saw devastation.

"We've been married 44 years. I thought, 'This is not going to be it'," said Jackie Pavek, eyes filling with tears.

Greg wasn't sure whether he would be back for the Marathon, but Jackie said she did not think she could return.

But many runners vowed to do so, and spectators said they hoped fears would fade in time.

"We'll just continue to do what we do and celebrate the race," said Judy Murphy, who grew up in Hopkinton. "I think there will probably be tighter security, but I think it will function as it always has. I hope."

In Newton, where residents line the roads to cheer runners up a series of daunting hills, resolve cut through the grief.

"My feeling is this is making everybody feel more bonded together," said Brielle Chabot, general manager at Heartbreak Hill Running Company, a running store in the Newton hills. "I think a lot of the reaction is: 'We're still going to run. This isn't going to stop us from running the Boston Marathon.'"

Growing up in Wellesley, Chabot, 25, watched the race every year with family. They always went to the same spot, she recalled, and "made a big day of it."

The Marathon is such a special tradition, she said, that most people won't give in to the fear.

"I think it has the opposite effect of what was intended," she said. "I feel like Boston's stronger in a way."

In Brookline, Yuliya Scharf, pushing her infant son in a stroller, had watched the race in Wellesley with friends. She expects to watch it again, but said it will never be the same.

"It's been such a happy occasion," she said. "It's sad that this day will have a different connotation going forward. People will be scared."

In Wellesley, where college students have long cheered the runners with spirited screams, many said the fear from the attacks would not soon fade.

"It's always going to be there," said Lindsay Johnson, a junior at Wellesley College.

In Natick, as he looked out at the race course from his front stoop, Simmons said the more he thought about the attack, the angrier he got.

"They took a piece of our freedom away," he said.

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