

RUNNER'S WORLD

Who Was the Dad Leading the Boston Marathon at Mile One?

The father of two wanted his kids to see him on TV.

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Derek Yorek, bib 162, leads the Boston Marathon early in the race. Photo courtesy of Universal Sports Network.

Meb Keflezighi calls the Boston Marathon the “People’s Olympics.”

That’s because it’s a place where athletic specimens with the highest aerobic capacities in the world do the same exact thing as an 82-year-old grandmother wearing trash bags. It’s also a place where a 31-year-old father of two can lead the first mile and a half of the world’s most famous footrace, simply because his kids want to see him on TV.

Meet the man with enough guts to stride past Keflezighi’s left shoulder, enough moxie to pull ahead of eventual winner Lelisa Desisa, and enough stupidity to shun every single marathon pacing strategy you’ve ever heard.

For a glorious five minutes and 30 seconds, a dad from Fort Worth, Texas, led the Boston Marathon. For a miserable two hours and 59 minutes, Derek Yorek suffered to finish it.

“That was horrible,” Yorek cried after crossing the finish line in 3:04:57. He let out a few audible groans before getting a water bottle. It’s the reaction of a guy who ran one mile in 4:38—close to the limit of his aerobic capacity—then had to trudge through another 25.2 in the rain.

But give him a Mylar blanket, some water, and a couple granola bars, and Yorek becomes giddy with what he accomplished. “It was the hardest race of my life but I did it to myself,” he says. “I wouldn’t change anything about it. It was an amazing experience.”

Yorek isn’t an elite, but he’s no pedestrian either. The former professional triathlete qualified for Boston at the 2014 Cowtown Marathon in an impressive 2:30:59 and he didn’t want to interfere with the lead pack’s race strategy.

“I wanted to respect the race,” he says. “I knew I was fast enough that I wouldn’t blow up.”

Yorek planned on leading the Boston Marathon as soon as he registered. He wanted to give his five-year-old and two-year-old daughters an unforgettable memory. He also wanted to say thanks to his friends, family, and coaches back

in Texas.

“It was something very special that I will be able to hold onto forever,” he says.

Not everyone can be in Yorek's position. He had to qualify to start in the first wave, and have enough fitness to stay with the elites before stepping aside—a fact he was well aware of before executing his plan.

So what's it like to run with the fastest marathoners in the world? “Their rhythm is amazing,” Yorek says. “They weren't hurting at all. They are doing an amazing thing.”

Yorek says he learned firsthand the incredible capacities of elite marathoners. As the lead pack glided to sub 2:15 finishes, Yorek struggled to reach mile 14. There, he saw his mom and sister with tears in their eyes—ecstatic they got to see him lead the race on the live stream on their phones.

“I knew I had to finish it when I saw them,” he says.

On paper, Yorek's race was a tactical disaster: 3,571 people passed him, he ran his last 5K nine minutes slower than his first, and he finished more than 30 minutes slower than his personal best.

But he doesn't care. That's because even though the announcers didn't know the name of the guy leading the race after the first mile, two little girls back home in Texas did.