



The Hurt Locker

All Paul Lynch wanted to do was beat his best marathon time. But for this reader it wasn't just about breaking personal records

X-ray image: iStockphoto



Pin-up boy: Our luckless groom was left with a leg full of steel after nearly being sent home with nought but a pair of crutches

My name is Paul Lynch and...

I RAN 22 MILES OF THE LONDON MARATHON ON A BROKEN HIP



Our hero crosses Tower Bridge. Searing pain, collapsing in the street and medical misdiagnosis to follow

Engaged men everywhere take note: running a marathon the week before your wedding can be bad for your health. Not to mention your honeymoon.

The 2010 Virgin London Marathon was my second go at the distance and I was determined to get under the magic four-hour barrier. I ran the 2007 Flora London Marathon in 4:10, so with the right amount of training I was sure I could knock those ten minutes off. I was due to get married a week later and had visions of the wedding party rising as one with a round of ear-shattering applause at my having smashed my personal best.

I started training after the New Year, a bit heavier than when I ran the 2007 race, but training went well and by February I was fit enough to run a half-marathon. I did that in about 1:42 and then ran a 20-mile race in March in Hillingdon, which I did in about 2:51. I suffered a bloodied nipple in that race, which looked like it was hanging off and took a few days to heal. I look back on that mangled teat with something akin to affection, given what was to follow.

I only live walking distance from the start of the marathon, so on the day I had a relaxed stroll to Greenwich Park. I chilled out, did my

stretching and started the race. I was going quite nicely, feeling good and on target to beat four hours.

But as I was going under the bridge where the route takes you out of Docklands and back towards the City, my back started to ache and then my hip felt sore – it was as if I'd been clipped by a speeding car.

I coped with it for a short while, but between 20 and 21 miles I had to walk and the pain transferred to the front of my leg. It felt like I had pulled my thigh and there was a strange, burning feeling in the top of my right leg. I started struggling to put any weight on it, eventually trying to hop along on my left leg.

There was a point where I actually thought that I could manage the last few miles like that, heroically hopping across the finishing line; I'd likely make the evening news.

One runner who was also injured offered to help carry me, but as the searing pain tore through my hip I declined. He was quickly followed by another competitor who was less generous in his assessment of my cowed frame. "What are you doing?" he asked. "You can't even walk."

And I couldn't; at that point I was slumped over the barriers in middle of the road. A race marshal came to get me and the general



Top: 'Ironsides' on his wedding day. Right: broken, busted and (wearing) blue. Far right: the blushing bride grins and bears it as she discovers the honeymoon's over before it's begun



THE EXPERT VIEW

GO SLOWLY GET FIT AGAIN



Coming back to exercise after a serious injury should always be overseen by a professional, such as an

osteopath, as if you push yourself too far before your tissues are ready then you may be prone to more serious injuries. It is important before you start that you have good stability and mobility of the hip joint to allow for a full range of movement for propulsion while running.

Make sure that you have the correct footwear, as this can cause poor running mechanics and lead to problems even before you start. Then start slowly to build up the muscles using light concentric exercises throughout the whole body and dynamic exercises, such as cycling and swimming. A concentric contraction is a type of muscle contraction in which the muscles shorten while generating force. Gradually increase the weights and time cycling, followed by walking and then finally running.

Do be aware that if you start to feel any soreness or pain, or you haven't seen your professional for some time, make an appointment immediately, as this needs assessment before you continue.

Stress fractures account for about ten per cent of overuse injuries in runners and no activity should be undertaken if there is pain in a weight-bearing joint. Many athletes have a high tolerance for pain and may not seek medical care as quickly as they should do.

Getting fit again after serious injury is a slow process, but if you stick with it and be patient, then eventually you'll be fighting fit again.

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consensus was that after a massage and ten minutes' rest I'd be okay to carry on. But then I tried to stand up and couldn't use my right leg at all. I sat heavily knowing that the only place I was headed was to casualty.

The A&E triage nurse decided that seeing as I hadn't fallen over then it was highly unlikely I could have broken anything. I was then seen by a doctor who explained that I was probably suffering from a build up of fluid in the leg, which, apparently, is what happens to a cheetah; their legs bulk up with fluid as they run.

After a chat with the anaesthetist, I opted for an epidural rather than a general anaesthetic to make the post-op pain more manageable, which meant that throughout the operation I could hear them drilling and bashing away at my broken hip. It sounded like they were working on an extension at the end of the operating table.

I was able to get up and tackle a flight of stairs on the Wednesday and on Thursday they let me go home. I got through the wedding ceremony on my crutches and made my wedding speech sitting down, with the added ignominy of my

I KNEW I WAS IN TROUBLE WHEN I WAS IN THE X-RAY ROOM AND THE RADIOGRAPHER STARTED SCREAMING: "I THINK YOU'VE FRACTURED YOUR HIP!"

That was the good news. Then he ordered me a pair of crutches and, after seeing me try to stand up, wobble and almost go over, he ordered an x-ray to be on the safe side, which was either good or bad news depending on your outlook.

I knew I was in trouble when I was still sitting on the table in the x-ray room and the radiographer screamed: "Don't move! I think you've fractured your hip!"

Aside from explaining to my fiancée that our wedding might have to take place on a hospital ward, I was more alarmed at the brief mention of my having to undergo a hip replacement. Luckily, because of the fracture's location at the top of the femur, I got away with having a dynamic hip screw inserted.

The surgeon was confident I would make it to the church in six days' time, albeit on crutches. The honeymoon was another matter entirely.

new wife standing up to raise a glass to Ironside.

No one has really been able to pin down when the fracture first appeared. I've had bone density scans and all sorts of tests and there is no underlying problem that could have caused it. Next year I'll probably have all the metal work taken out, clang less and not have to carry copies of my x-rays whenever I go through airports.

As for running another marathon, I know I should make a full recovery, but the injury will always be there at the back of my mind. I'm not sure it's worth the risk, or the mental stress of waiting for something to go crack on a long-distance run.

I'll still train, but my long-distance days are over. On the bright side, a medical expert compared me to a cheetah; the fastest of all land animals – faster than supercars over short distances. Surely that's some kind of sign?

Share your pain

Ever found yourself in the hurt locker? Contact us at editorial@mensrunninguk.co.uk with your story or log on to www.mensrunninguk.co.uk and post it on our website. The best one each month wins a subscription to Men's Running, will see their story in print and gets ultimate bragging rights down the pub.