

THE MORNING CALL

MASTERS
RUNNER-UP

Proud grandfather says
Jordan Spieth achieved his goal

SPORTS I



1.50

APRIL 15, 2014

TUESDAY

THUNDERSTORMS 63° | 27° FORECAST

Boston Marathon memory will never go away

BY CHARLES BUTLER

Back in early January someone said to me, seemingly off the cuff, "You must be glad it's the new year."

I wasn't sure what she meant, so I shot back, "What do you mean?"

"You know, last year must have been difficult with what you went through in Boston?"

Oh, yeah. Boston. I may need to be reminded, but I'll always remember Boston.

Last April 15, I was standing atop the photo bridge just beyond the finish line of the Boston Marathon. I was maybe 40 feet up watching as runner after tired/delirious/thrilled runner completed the final steps of the most famous 26.2-mile race in the world.

It was midafternoon, with a warm, early spring sun hovering in the sky. I was waiting for two runners — Juli Windsor and John Young — to arrive. I had been tracking their progress since early in the morning as I was reporting on their races for *Runner's World* magazine. Were they to complete the marathon — and at that point it seemed likely both would since they were just a couple of miles from the finish — Juli and John would become the first two Little People to run the Boston Marathon in its 117-year history. Juli stands 3 feet, 9 inches; John stands 4 feet, 4 inches. Two miles stood in their way.

They were due in shortly after 3 p.m.

They never made it.

At 2:49 p.m., while I stared out toward the finish line, and at the runners coming in, and the people cheering those runners on, I heard a boom ... then saw a flash.

I can't remember what I did. I think I just kept staring, and thinking: Why fireworks? Why now? Suddenly ... another boom ... another flash. And now screams as well. And someone yelling at us to get off the bridge. To get out of here. With the photographer I was with, we raced down the 20 or so thin, metal steps, wondering if we would trip, wondering if another boom was coming. We hit the ground, and ran.

For the next moment I wasn't sure what to do. I texted my wife. I knew she would be



DAN LAMPARIELLO/REUTERS FILE PHOTO

One of two bombs explodes as runners approach the finish line of the Boston Marathon one year ago, when three people died and more than 260 were wounded.

picking up the kids at school. "I'm ok," I typed, "but something terrible has happened here."

I stayed in Boston for the next 24 hours, talking to runners, getting their stories, writing their accounts. I watched as Juli and John received their finisher's medals, even though they weren't finishers. John told me he wasn't sure what he would do with his.

Then I headed home to the Lehigh Valley, and mid-April turned into May, and summer came, and so did fall and winter. And the images of Boston and the bombs and the Tsarnaev brothers began to get obscured by the kids' softball and T-ball games, and the car that needed replacing, and the holiday presents that had to be purchased, and the snow — oh, that snow — that wouldn't stop falling. And suddenly Boston disappeared.

Until someone reminded me. "You must be glad it's the new year."

Recently, I have been talking to a number of runners who will be returning to Boston to race on Monday.

One was Meb Keflezighi, the American Olympian. He was injured last year, so instead of running he waited at the finish

line and cheered on the average Janes and Joes who were. He left the area minutes before the bombs went off. When he heard the news, he cried, he told me. He also said that every time he sees a Boston Red Sox cap he's reminded of the tragedy. "I want to do something special" at this year's race, he said.

Another runner was from San Francisco. Amy Heredia had finished her race and was waiting to get her bag of clothes when the bombs went off. Ever since, she said, the mere sound of her coffee grinder reminds her of what happened. Heredia's coming back to race, she told me, "because it makes a statement."

I won't be in Boston this year. Life is getting in the way. But I also know Boston will be back; it will never go away. I'll always remember what was lost there. Still, if I can't be in Boston, I'll wait to hear from people who were there, and hear what they found.

Then I'll have something new to remember, and to remind me.

Charles Butler, who lives in Upper Milford Township, is a writer-at-large for Runner's World.