

The Lake Area Runners Cheering Zone at Bass Pro

The story behind it, and how it turned out



Sometimes, superlatives like “extraordinary”, “awesome” or “incredible” aren’t enough to adequately describe an experience. That certainly applies to my experience at the Lake Area Runners cheering zone at the 2014 Bass Pro Marathon and Half Marathon in Springfield.

Every year, I seem to have one, great experience at an event that stands out above all others. This one certainly topped my list for 2014. While there were a few bumps along the way, setting up the cheering zone turned out to be among my most enjoyable and unforgettable experiences in years.

This is the story of how it all came about, and what it was like to be there.

Bass Pro, November 2013

The idea for a cheering zone came up soon after last year’s Bass Pro race. We had thirty-one runners from the Lake of the Ozarks at that event, making it one of our most popular out-of-town races ever.

Many of us met before the race to take a group photo, and then went our separate ways. In the days following the race, I thought that for 2014 it might be neat to arrange a spot near the finish line where we could all get together after the race for some camaraderie and celebration. That thought morphed into an idea for a cheering zone. The zone would be a place for our runners' families to hang out during the race, and the runners could come over and join us after finishing. I also had the idea that if we put up a "*Lake Area Runners*" banner near us, we could promote awareness of our local running group to thousands of other runners.

I mentioned the idea for a cheering zone to Bass Pro race director Melissa Bondy in January 2014, after trading a few e-mails regarding the race video I had made of the 2013 race. She was quite supportive, and suggested I contact her again in the summer.

Keeping It Secret

I also briefly mentioned the idea on my website, but never said anything to anyone after that for one, simple reason: I wasn't certain it would ever happen. Even when October arrived and it looked like a "go", I still didn't want to say anything. There were a few things beyond my control (weather, for example) that could derail everything, and I didn't want to get anyone excited about a cheering zone that might not happen.

There was at least one benefit in keeping it a secret. If everything went as planned, the cheering zone would be a big surprise to our local runners when they came upon it during the race. After all, everybody likes surprises.

A few days before the race, I was asked if I'd be at Bass Pro. I said "yes", but that, unlike last year, I wouldn't be at the starting line to take a group photo. No one, as far as I know, connected the dots about my absence at the starting line and the cheering zone idea I suggested nine months earlier.

October: Crunch Time

I started finalizing plans for the zone in early October, and ordered some banners and equipment that I needed for it.

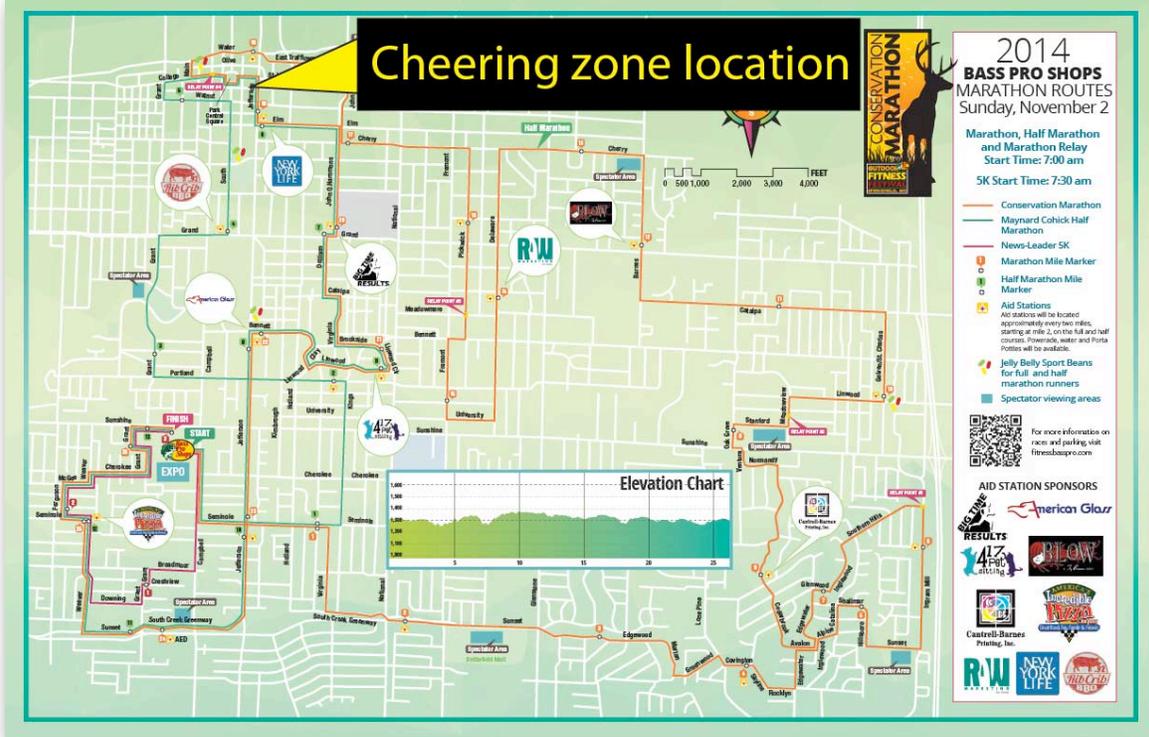
The toughest part was figuring out exactly where on the course I would set up the cheering zone. The location in the residential area near the finish line that I originally thought of back in January had, on second thought, two big problems: (1) the noise from a public address system could lead to neighborhood complaints to the police, forcing us to shut down; and (2) because the streets near the finish line were closed to traffic during the race, I figure I'd have to get there about 5:30 a.m. (before the road barriers started going up), and stay put until the race was basically over (about 1:00 p.m.).

Instead, I decided to look for a different spot that was on both the marathon and half marathon courses, and was away from any homes and churches that might object to the noise. Since the two courses were contiguous for only about nine miles, and since most of those miles were in residential areas, that didn't leave many options. What made looking for a spot especially tough is that I'm not that familiar with Springfield's streets outside of a few main thoroughfares.

Google Maps, and its satellite images and Street View feature, helped enormously. I was able to use them to quickly eliminate locations that had potential problems. For example, I first thought that a location on Elm Street would be a good spot. However, Street View showed that there was student housing right next to it. I knew that playing loud music early on a Sunday morning wouldn't go over well with a bunch of hungover college kids.

I found a spot downtown, on South Jefferson Ave., that looked promising. I sent an e-mail to Melissa Bondy asking about the location, and whether I'd be permitted to set up there. She thought it would be OK, but said that she was going to be meeting with the police department in a few days (i.e. the Wednesday before Sunday's race) to talk about traffic control and road closures. She said that, unless I heard otherwise from her, I should plan on that location. (Melissa, by the way, was great to work with.)

I didn't hear back from Melissa, so the spot I suggested was going to be the cheering zone location. Since I hadn't seen it in person, I wouldn't know for certain until race morning whether it was as good as I had thought or hoped. That was a little worrisome, especially after all the time, effort and expense that went into preparing for this. If, on race morning, a police officer or race official told me I couldn't set up where I wanted, or if there were complaints from a nearby church or residence that I missed on the maps, all of it would have been wasted.



The cheering zone was located in Springfield's downtown area, away from any residences or churches. It would be at the 5.8-mile mark of the half marathon, and mile 18.9 of the marathon.



A Google satellite image of the cheering zone location.

Sunday: Race Day

I woke up at 3:30 a.m. and left for Springfield at 4:15. It was an uneventful drive until about ten miles from Springfield when I noticed some drops of water hitting my windshield. The weather forecast never said anything about rain on race day, so I initially thought the water drops must be condensation flying off the roof of the tractor-trailer in front of me. No dice. It was raining. If it continued like that, it would basically put the cheering zone out of business before it started, since the PA system couldn't be used in wet conditions and the signs I had spent hours making would be quickly ruined. I had an umbrella in the truck, so I could at least stand there without getting wet, but it wouldn't be much fun doing so in 40-degree weather. Fortunately, the rain stopped soon after arriving at the cheering zone location.

Now that I finally had a chance to see the location in person, it looked pretty good. There was a no-parking zone on one side of the street that I could use for the cheering zone, and a spot on the other side of the street to park my truck and easily load and unload all of my stuff. All in all, I think this was as good a spot as I'd find anywhere on the course. I have to give credit to Google for their helpful online tools. I don't know what I would have done without them.

A police officer showed up at 6:30 a.m. to control traffic at the nearby intersection, so I thought it would be wise just to go up and tell him what I was up to. He was very nice, and I felt comfortable knowing he was always close by in case there were any problems.

Always Expect the Unexpected

I learned long ago that things rarely go exactly as planned. Unexpected things will happen, so you need to be ready to make quick decisions or changes. Today would be no exception to that.

I arrived at the cheering zone location around 6:15 a.m. The first half marathoners wouldn't pass by until 7:30, so I had some time to spare before having to start setting up. As I sat in the truck, I could see the wind was going to be a problem. A potentially big problem. Trees nearby were swaying from some pretty stiff winds, no doubt made worse by the wind tunnel effect created by nearby office buildings. The NOAA weather forecast called for winds between 8 and 15 mph, with gusts to 22 mph. (I think we had gusts stronger than that.) I had prepared for the wind by bringing along some free weights and other heavy stuff that I could use to keep my signs and banners from blowing away.

I started setting up at 6:45. The first step was to assemble the frames for the two big banners. I had spent the better part of two afternoons making these frames using PVC pipe. My great room and dining room became my workshop, as I laid the banners on the floor and measured the pipes and fittings to fit around them. (My kitchen table was

being used to make signs. You can get away with stuff like this when you're a bachelor. :))

I pieced together the PVC frames pretty quickly, and attached the banners to them using Velcro strips. I then placed my free weights on the frames' legs to keep them in position.

Suddenly . . . Whoosh!

While I was across the street getting more stuff out of the truck, a big gust of wind blew away both banners. The 90 lbs. of free weights holding them in position obviously weren't enough. Houston, we have a problem. A big one. And not much time to fix it.

With time ticking away, I decided I'd better take down the "Lake Area Runners" banner and use those free weights to hold down the "Lake Area Runners Cheering Zone" banner. So, for the next five minutes, I hurried to get that done. When finished, I realized the wind was blowing hard enough that even more weight would be required. (I had nightmarish visions of the banner being blown onto the course while runners were passing by, or hitting a car parked not too far away.) A 40-lb. bag of water softener salt that I had brought along to hold down the stand for the first-timers' bell had to be used to hold down the cheering zone banner instead. The total of 130 pounds of weights did the trick. It goes to show the force of the wind on a four foot by six foot banner.



This is the banner that had to be taken down. It's big: 3 feet tall and 10 feet wide.

Next, it was time to set up the PA system. I brought along stands for the speakers, but didn't use them since I was afraid the wind might blow the speakers to the ground. I just put the speakers on the sidewalk, and that worked fine.

The music was all played from my iPod, which I plugged into the PA system. For power, I brought along a small Honda generator. Thankfully, they all worked flawlessly all morning.

Due to the wind, I was unable to put out a few signs that I had made days earlier. It was disappointing, but I had no choice.

There were three things left to do: set out next to the cheering zone banner the Lake Area Runners pumpkin I had carved on Halloween night; grab my camera to take some photos during the race; and write the names of our local runners in chalk on the pavement. (The first runner came by before I could finish even one name, so I gave up on that.)



*A close-up of the pumpkin placed next to the cheering zone banner.
At least I didn't have to worry about this blowing away.*



Signs that couldn't be put up due to the wind.



More signs that never made it out of the truck.



Yet another victim of the wind. I borrowed a spare bell from our boat and hung it from a photo light stand. There are always lots of first-timers at marathons and half marathons, so I was expecting the bell to be rung many, many times. Originally, it was going to be a "P.R. bell" (as in "personal record"), but I wanted to give the first-timers some well-deserved recognition. It was disappointing not to be able to use it.

Here Come The Runners

As expected, the leader of the half marathon came through around 7:30 a.m. I had the music playing and started cheering, but neither really mattered. The early leaders were so focused on their race that they didn't even look over at me. That started to change a bit after a dozen or so runners. By the time a few dozen (of the total of 1,700 half marathoners) passed by, I started getting some acknowledgements--a thumbs-up, a smile, a "thank-you", etc.



Kimi Reed was the overall women's winner of the half marathon, in 1:18:35. Last year, she won the 5K, in 17:34. She's one of the fastest women in the state. (Regrettably, I missed getting a photo of the men's winner. He came by seconds before I had my camera ready to go.)



Nigher Alfaro was the first Lake-area runner I spotted, and I stopped cheering for a moment to take a photo of him. Pardon the quality of the photo. I was fumbling around alot early in the race, and failed to set the camera to use a faster shutter speed. Hence, some blurriness. (I couldn't help noticing Nigher's foot-strike. The angle of it looks a bit worrisome. Compare it to that of the runner behind him.)



Pete Leyva came by soon after Nigher. (See the “DEN” written in chalk on the asphalt in the lower left corner of the photo? I was going to write the names of each of our thirty-four local runners on the pavement. I got as far as “DEN” when writing Denise Baker’s name when the first runner came by, so I had to stop and get out of everyone’s way. Sorry about that.)



*I saw **Eric Newman** at the **Give ‘Em The Bird 5K** in Versailles the day before Bass Pro. While there, he asked me if I was going to Bass Pro, and I said “yes”. I was hoping he’d leave it at that since I didn’t want to say anything more about my plans. He then asked if I was running. I said “no”. Still curious, he asked what I was going to be doing, and I had to tell him it was a secret. He would find out soon enough. (Sorry once again for a fuzzy image.)*

The Party Atmosphere Begins

The fun really started when those half marathoners who would finish in about 1:45:00 started arriving. There were lots of smiles, high-fives, and “thank-you’s” from these folks, and many responded positively to the music--a mix of rock ‘n’ roll, disco, Motown, and popular tunes.

Bass Pro ▶ 🔊

50 songs, 3 hours 22 minutes

▲	✓	Artist	Name
1	✓	Pretenders	Middle of the Road
2	✓	The Black Eyed Peas	Let's Get It Started (Spike Mix) [Bonus Track]
3	✓	will.i.am	#thatPOWER (feat. Justin Bieber)
4	✓	The Commitments	I Thank You
5	✓	REO Speedwagon	Keep Pushin'
6	✓	Flo Rida	Good Feeling
7	✓	C+C Music Factory	Gonna Make You Sweat (Everybody Dance Now)
8	✓	Survivor	Eye of the Tiger
9	✓	The Bee Gees	Stayin' Alive
10	✓	The Contours	Do You Love Me
11	✓	Elvis Presley	Promised Land
12	✓	The Foundations	Build Me Up Buttercup
13	✓	Music Choice 3	Signed Sealed Delivered by Stevie Wonder
14	✓	Music Choice 3	YMCA by the Village People
15	✓	Bon Jovi	Livin on a Prayer
16	✓	Daio Cruz	Dynamite
17	✓	David Bowie	Modern Love
18	✓	Def Leppard	Photograph
19	✓	Des'ree	You Gotta Be
20	✓	Genesis	Turn It On Again (Live)
21	✓	Gloria Estefan	You'll Be Mine (Party Time)
22	✓	Howard Jones	Things Can Only Get Better
23	✓	Jackson Browne	Running on Empty
24	✓	John Mellencamp	Authority Song
25	✓	Journey	Don't Stop Believin'
26	✓	Journey	Stone in Love
27	✓	Journey	Escape
28	✓	Journey	Any Way You Want It
29	✓	Maroon 5	Moves Like Jagger
30	✓	Music Choice	Living in America by James Brown
31	✓	Music Choice	8675309 Jenny by Tommy Tutone
32	✓	Music Choice 3	Panama by Van Halen
33	✓	Music Choice 3	Right Now by Van Halen
34	✓	Music Choice 5	Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go by Wham
35	✓	Pat Benatar	Hit Me With Your Best Shot
36	✓	Peter Frampton	Show Me The Way
37	✓	Peter Gabriel	Solsbury Hill
38	✓	Pink	Get The Party Started
39	✓	Prince	Raspberry Beret (LP Version)
40	✓	The Tubes	She's A Beauty
41	✓	U2	Beautiful Day
42	✓	The Isley Brothers	Twist and Shout
43	✓	Stevie Wonder	For Once In My Life
44	✓	Chubby Checker	The Twist
45	✓	Music Choice 2	Disco Inferno by The Trammps
46	✓	Billy Idol	Rebel Yell
47	✓	Lou Bega	Mambo No. 5 (A Little Bit Of...)
48	✓	Rod Stewart	Every Picture Tells a Story
49	✓	Pitbull	Don't Stop the Party (feat. TJR)
50	✓	Music Choice 3	YMCA by the Village People

My iTunes playlist created specifically for Bass Pro.

Never, ever underestimate the power of the ultimate party song, The Village People's "Y.M.C.A." Out of sheer luck, it came up on the playlist when the number of half marathoners passing by reached a peak, and the runners responded like true party animals. You can't believe how many runners joined me in spelling out "YMCA" as the song played on. It was by far the single most memorable--and funniest--moment of the morning. They also became pretty animated when disco tunes like The Bee Gee's "Stayin' Alive", rock favorites like Survivor's "Eye of the Tiger", and Motown classics like The Contours' "Do You Love Me?" came on.



Runners spelling out "YMCA".

The cheering zone was all about trying to add a little fun to the race for the runners, and to encourage them along the way. I thought that if I could just take their minds off of their suffering for just a moment and get them to smile, reach out for a high-five, or do something silly like spell out "YMCA", I did my job. And judging by the many, many thank-you's I received, I think they sincerely appreciated it.



The back-of-the-pack runners in the half marathon were the easiest to draw smiles from.

A Crowd of One

I thought that a few spectators might decide to come over and join me, but it didn't happen. The very few spectators in the area were waiting for a runner they knew, and once that runner passed by, they were gone. I was having so much fun, though, I didn't care if anyone joined in or not. I just hoped that what this cheering zone lacked in numbers would be more than made up by its fun and enthusiastic support for the runners.

Actually, not having any other spectators around, and locating the zone far away from other distractions, were probably good in that the runners couldn't miss seeing that it was set up by the Lake Area Runners. (I was wearing my Lake Area Runners t-shirt, as well.) Certainly some of those who had never heard of our group before are aware of us now.

Here Come the Marathoners

The number of half marathoners trailed off considerably by 8:30 a.m.. I was expecting the lead marathoner to arrive around 9:00, and sure enough he did. Both the male and female leaders had substantial leads over their nearest competitors.



The first male and female marathoners to pass by the cheering zone. They would both end up winning. **Richard Kessio**, from Toledo, Ohio, finished in 2:40:51. **Jenna Mutz**, from Joplin, won in 3:13:49. Unlike the leaders in the half marathon, the marathon leaders acknowledged me.



Anita Leyva was on one of our two marathon relay teams.



Jim McDermott was the fastest marathon finisher among our Lake-area runners, in 4:09:59.



Amy Harrell was our second-fastest marathon finisher, in 4:59:58. If Amy's goal was to finish in under five hours, she cut it awfully close.



I wonder if any aid stations received requests for peanut butter and 'nana sandwiches.

By 11:00 a.m., which was four hours into the marathon, the number of marathoners passing the zone started to dwindle rapidly. Folks arriving at that time would likely be finishing in 5 hours or so.

While I was bent over at the PA system cueing up the iPod to again play “Y.M.C.A.”, I heard my name called and looked up to see three, smiling Lake of the Ozarks runners who were all doing their very first marathon--**Denise Baker, Tania Maschhoff** and **Erin Oswald**. They ran and finished together (in 5:12:20), and at the cheering zone they looked as fresh as can be. They were making a marathon look easy, and Lord knows it isn't. I put down the iPod and scrambled to get photos of them. They don't even look like they're sweating!



Denise Baker



Tania Maschhoff



Erin Oswalt

At 11:30 a.m., there were very few marathoners passing by. A course monitor on a bicycle came by and said that there were only fifteen people left on the course. I was hoping to stay out there for every last marathoner, but the monitor said that some were still pretty far back. Reluctantly, I decided to start packing up, but stopped to cheer whenever someone came along.

With runners (actually, most of them were walking at this point of the race) coming by sporadically, I took the opportunity to walk a short distance with some of them to talk and offer words of encouragement. I would first ask how they were feeling. Some were suffering from stomach issues, others were cramping, and still others were just worn out. You could tell who was hurting just by the look on their face.

Out of curiosity, I also asked each runner if this was his or her first marathon. Surprisingly, almost everyone said "yes". I asked an older gentleman that question, even though I expected him to say "no". It turns out it was indeed his first, and he was 68 years old. How inspirational is that?

Despite their suffering, all of them were in very good spirits, and adamant about finishing the race. As I've said many, many times, if you want to see great athletes, be at the finish line in time to see the winners. But if you want to see real guts and determination, wait around for the final finishers. They have plenty of reasons to call it quits, but they've come too far to do so.

At noon, the police officers on either end of the block opened the street to traffic, and drove off. I left a few minutes later. Runners still on the course at that time had been instructed to move to the sidewalk.

When I left, my hands were sore from clapping for the last 4-1/2 hours, and my voice was hoarse from cheering--small prices to pay for an experience that can never be adequately described in words, and will never be forgotten.

Thanks for reading!

Jim Glickert