

Fort Collins Boston Marathon finisher: 'You just knew something wasn't right'

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Dan Berlin finished the marathon 25 minutes before Monday's deadly blasts rocked Boston.



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Talia Berlin, 11, at left, guides a blindfolded Connie DeMercurio and her blind father, Dan, follows behind them on Sunday, April 1, 2012, as they train for the Boston Marathon. The Berlins were present during the Boston Marathon bomb explosions. / Coloradoan library

Fort Collins runner Dan Berlin crossed the Boston Marathon finish line with his running aide at his side and found his daughter waiting for him with a rose and her congratulations. About 20 minutes later, they heard a large boom.

“It was like a cannon going off. You know the cannons at a CSU football game? It was like that, but amplified 20 times,” said Berlin, who is blind. “Then there was another one. You just knew something wasn’t right. The whole atmosphere, it’s already kind of chaos. People were falling and leaving and everyone just stopped and it was quiet after the explosions.”

Berlin was running with his aide, Pete Kardasis, as part of Team With A Vision, an organization that raises money and awareness for the Massachusetts Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired. He crossed the finish line about 25 minutes before the first of two explosions rocked the race.

Berlin said after crossing the finish line, he moved to the baggage claim area about 200 yards away where his daughter, Talia, 12, was waiting for him. Thousands of runners were in the finish line corral, Berlin said, and they heard the explosions as they were making their way toward the exit gate.

“It probably took about five minutes and then there were sirens everywhere. At the finish, you’re barricaded in and you can’t really get in or get out. It was just scary,” Berlin said. “A lot of people were looking for their families. We’re very lucky.”

According to the Boston Marathon database, Berlin was one of 35 runners from Fort Collins registered for the Boston Marathon. An additional four runners were registered from Loveland and three from Windsor. Colorado has 523 runners registered. Results show that 28 runners from Fort Collins, Loveland and Windsor finished the 26.2-mile race.

The Fort Collins Running Club had three members who ran the race: Berlin, Mike Higgins and Celeste O’Connor. Higgins and O’Connor both finished the race and are OK, according to club president Connie DeMercurio.

Steve Cathcart, owner of Runners Roost in Fort Collins, was in Boston supporting his girlfriend, Betsy Fisher, who was running the race.

Cathcart said he and Fisher safely left the race. They went to nearby Copley Plaza to eat and grab a drink at Legal Sea Foods. Cathcart and Fisher were evacuated from the restaurant after the explosions, “before we could even finish a drink,” he said.

Cathcart is the race director for the Horsetooth Half Marathon, set to run this Sunday. He said there were no plans for extra security measures scheduled for the race, which he expects to host 2,000 runners in the half marathon and new

“We’re not Boston. We’re irrelevant on the grand scale of things. We’ll have 2,000 runners. Boston has 27,000,” Cathcart said. “I would say to runners not to panic. ... Right now, I’m more worried about the weather.”

Berlin also ran Boston last year. He said he never imagined an event like this happening.

“You’re thinking of pacing, you’re thinking of hydration, you don’t really think of what happens at the finish line,” Berlin said. “It puts a different perspective on these very large spectator races.”

Xplore reporter Stephen Meyers covers the outdoors and recreation for the Coloradoan. Follow on Twitter @stemeyer or Facebook.com/meyersreports.