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Runners, Red Sox bring crowds to finish line

by Kate McManus
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Just as she has for the past 68 years, Mary Gritti staked out her spot in front of the Lenox Hotel long before most runners had even arrived in Hopkinton.

A Marathon finish line veteran, Gritti knew where she wanted to be. So by 7:30 a.m., the Gritti contingent had set up shop.

"You make a lot of nice friends here," Gritti said as she settled in for the long wait in the cool spring air. "But this is a good spot because when people come by they're exhausted. So we yell to cheer them on."

Equal parts athletic event and frat-party, the Boston Marathon finish line was jammed by mid-morning – hours before the first runners even began their 26-mile trek to Boston.

While many people in the crowd were there because they wanted to support someone running the race, many admitted they were also there for the free stuff.

From cough drops and yogurt to Frisbees and juice, marketers took full advantage of the event to pitch their wares.

"We didn't realize there would be such a festival atmosphere," said Steve Bliss, of Ohio.

Bliss, in town to watch his son, Ali, run the Marathon, found the Boylston Street bazaar to his liking. After getting an eyeful of the crowds, the elder Bliss said he was excited about all the free merchandise and the meatless hamburgers.

John Packard, of Boston, said he was there to support a friend in a different manner. Packard said he planned to drink one beer for every mile his friend, Lance Baier, runs. Packard said he expected Baier to finish the race in less than three hours.

Just after noon police blocked off many side streets and the crowds began to swell. The band 'Beatle Juice' – featuring former Boston lead singer Brad Delp – entertained the crowds.

That's where Ed Brooks, of Maryland, took in the view. Brooks, who was recently laid off by a dot-com, decided to make the trip on a whim. He arrived at 9:30 a.m. this morning.

"I try to run, but I'm mostly here to watch everything," Brooks said.

Nearby lounges were charging upwards of a \$25 cover charge for entry. Matt Taraborelli, of Milford, forked over a bit less to secure a spot in front of the Red Sox game at the Pour House on Boylston Street. Taraborelli arrived at 9 a.m. to catch the early baseball game and a little of the Marathon.

