

BY BRIAN BASSETT • Times Bulletin Sports Editor

BOSTON - Before tragedy struck at the Boston Marathon on Monday, it was a day of celebration for many, including Van Wert native Craig Leon.

Leon finished in 10th place in the marathon, and third among Americans, with a personal-best time of 2:14.38.

"I'm obviously excited about the race itself. In terms of that aspect of the day, it probably couldn't have gone any better than what it did. We were really fortunate to have good weather yesterday, I know that's been an issue in the past," explained Leon.

The Van Wert High School and Ohio University graduate credited the group he ran with for part of the race with his success.

"I had a good group of guys to run with... We had a group of about seven or eight guys together for about 16 miles or so. Once we hit the hill things kind of broke up a little bit. That's when the race really started to develop."

Leon continued to say that he could tell over the final stretch of the race that he would finish well.

"Over the last couple of miles, I knew I was running well. I knew I felt good. I certainly felt a lot better in the later part of this race than I had in any of my other previous marathons."

Even after finishing the race, it took some time for Leon to realize just how well he had done.

"I really didn't know what place I was in until a couple of minutes after I crossed the finish line. I had no idea that I finished 10th."

Part of that was due to the large crowds that edge the 26.2-mile race path.

"You just couldn't hear," Leon said. "Some races you can hear people yelling out places or times. You couldn't hear anything, there were so many people on the course. It was kind of a roar the whole way."

Leon's time of 2:14.38 was exactly a minute faster than his previous personal best. His 10th-place finish is more impressive when taking into account the fact that around 23,000 runners attempted the race.

"I knew it was something where I had a chance to run well. It's a tough course. It's probably the toughest course I've run. So I knew it was going to take a pretty special performance to try to PR. I was pretty confident that my training had gone well over the past two or three months.

"I knew (getting a PR) was a possibility, especially with the weather being as nice as it was. I knew it was a day I could run fast if I had the right group. I'm certainly happy that I could knock a minute off (my best time)," Leon explained.

Monday was the first Boston Marathon Leon had competed in, and though it would later become memorable for a great tragedy, the buildup to the race lived up to its billing.

"The Boston Marathon, to all runners, it's the goal of running here in the United States. Everybody wants to run in the Boston Marathon, and you want to have your best day at the Boston Marathon. Everything about (the buildup) was awesome, the crowd support was unbelievable. It's amazing how many volunteers they had helping out with the race," Leon continued.

The race is a huge day in Boston, a part of the Patriot's Day celebration.

"The crowd support from town to town, as you make your way into Boston, it just gets bigger and bigger," Leon said. "The last 10 miles, there's not one part of the course where there's not people cheering you on. It's a big deal out there. It's a holiday for them, it's Patriot's Day."

Unfortunately, hours after Leon finished at least two bombs exploded that left some dead and many injured. Fortunately, Leon made it out alright, but it put a damper on the celebration for all involved.

"Through 1 p.m. it was all I thought it would be... It was certainly bittersweet last night. What should be a fun night was anything but for everyone involved in the race and everybody in Boston," he said.

After returning to his home in Eugene, Oregon, Leon explained that he will take some down time before picking a fall marathon to compete in.

"I should have some options to consider here in the next couple of weeks. The Olympic qualifying trials will open up in October so I would like to go ahead and run well and knock that goal off the list. Make sure I have my ticket punched for the trials in 2016," he concluded.