

The Boston Globe

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To the judges of the Pulitzer Prizes:

At 2:49 p.m. on Monday, April 15, life in Boston was about as good as it gets. It was Patriots Day, and the Red Coats took the loss again in the reenactments at Lexington and Concord. The Red Sox' traditional holiday morning game ended as it should, with a wall-ball double securing the win. And of course it was Marathon day, and the 117th running was unfolding without a hitch. Of the more than 23,000 who had set off in waves from Hopkinton that morning, only a few thousand remained to cross the Boylston Street finish, where the throng remained thick.

Then, two young men, filtering through the crowd, set down their backpacks and walked away. History shifted. In the Globe newsroom, an editor with his ear to the police scanner heard, just before 2:50 p.m., the first confused reports of smoke, maybe fireworks. And then the words that immediately and fully mobilized the Globe's staff: Blood, severed limbs, mass casualties.

The response by the newspaper and its websites, BostonGlobe.com and Boston.com, was as swift as it was comprehensive, utilizing every tool at our disposal to document, interpret, and investigate the Marathon bombings, which killed three and wounded 260, and the dizzying days that followed. From the first blast to the arrest of the second suspect in Watertown, it was one vast story that unfolded without cease over five days. The gravest act of domestic terrorism since 9/11, the biggest manhunt in Boston history, the assassination of a police officer, the early-morning shootout on a quiet suburban street, and the unprecedented lockdown of an entire metropolis, all in 102 electric hours that put the city, and the Globe, to the test.

From the first seconds, the world was captive to the story and leaning hard on us. Over the course of the first five days, the Globe's websites registered 86.8 million page views. We dropped the paywall immediately on our subscription site because we knew the public would uniquely depend on us at such a time — and traffic soared six-fold. Our Twitter followers increased by nearly 250,000.

We had, at the outset, the advantage of proximity, an advantage born of commitment. Most other media had left in the hours after the winners were crowned. The Globe's first tweet, from a videographer with the sports department, went out at 2:53 p.m., just four minutes after the explosions. "God help us," wrote Steve Silva. The first post on our website followed seven minutes later, based on details provided by a dazed reporter who had been stationed at the finish line. "Blood is staining the sidewalks of Boylston Street," David Abel wrote. Two Globe photographers were posted just yards away when the first bomb went off. The Globe's images would define for every news outlet, website, and broadcast in the world the horror, blood, and spontaneous heroism that followed the blasts. Silva, stationed at the finish to tell the stories of the Marathon stragglers, wound up providing the first footage — raw and powerful — of the blasts and the immediate aftermath. "We've been attacked," he says on the video. And then: "Oh my God. Oh my God."

Over the course of the next nine hours of that first day, the Globe reported relentlessly, posting dozens of updates, relying on an army of reporters to convey an accurate account of the crime, its many victims, and the nascent investigation. At least three reporters who ran the race that day reported for duty, gathering details in their gym shoes. Our social media team immediately launched a live blog that drew in Globe tweets, as well as telling images, videos, and observations from other outlets and individuals. As information became available, graphic artists augmented our online coverage with maps plotting the detonations and street closures.

We sought to stay with, and think ahead of, a story moving at warp speed, while always making accuracy and fairness our first priorities. We weren't perfect — we put out and swiftly corrected one errant posting that relied on a to-that-moment impeccable law enforcement source. But especially during the most confusing and chaotic stages — the first minutes, the after-midnight chase, the deadly crossfire, the house-by-house hunt — readers noticed the effort to hew to the facts, to be solicitous of the grieving, to avoid premature speculation over who the mystery assailants might be.

Along the way, we broke just about every story that mattered. To mention just one epic stretch: At just after 2:15 a.m. on the morning of April 19, the Globe was the first to report that the murder of an MIT police officer that evening and the subsequent gunfight in Watertown was the work of the suspected bombers. The presses were held for third edition as reporters and editors — many of whom had been working since dawn, others who rushed back in after the gunfight — worked to revise the main story by a 2:50 a.m. deadline. As at least 14 reporters worked through the night in Watertown, posting updates for an avid online audience that swelled to some 415,000 unique visitors in the predawn hours, the Globe was able to deliver the most up-to-date print edition to more than 160,000 people on their doorsteps at dawn. Even amid the swirling events, we set out to assemble a stronger sense of what had happened and why. We devoted ourselves to the victims' stories, the dead and the grievously wounded, in the initial hours, across the first week, and ever since. As soon as the names of the alleged terrorists emerged early Friday, we launched a swift, searching examination of the brothers, an extraordinary team effort, produced on a crushing deadline, that set the factual framework and tone for all future efforts to understand the Tsarnaev family. We published the first take of that effort online Friday, followed by a comprehensive 3,000-word report in Saturday's paper. It was the highlight of a 30-story Globe report that day that anatomized the last gripping moments of the manhunt and the final dramatic arrest.

It was a harrowing week. We did our very best to serve our community and our readers. And our work was widely recognized, by our readers, by our peers, and even by the president, as an indispensable source of information at a time of trauma. "If anyone wonders," Obama said, "whether newspapers are a thing of the past, all you needed to do was pick up or log on to papers like The Boston Globe."

I proudly nominate the staff of the Boston Globe for consideration for the Pulitzer Prize for Local Reporting of Breaking News.

Sincerely,



Brian McGrory
Editor