



Whoever plotted and carried out Monday's bomb attack near the finish line of the Boston Marathon did their homework. If you're going to attack a large sporting event, it's hard to find an event more vulnerable than a marathon.

The vast majority of sporting events take place within the confines of a venue. Stadiums, arenas, even golf courses, have gates and gatekeepers. Security officials can keep a reasonably close eye on who comes in and who goes out. Bags can be checked, metal detectors can be installed, suspicious items can be confiscated.

Marathons take place in the streets. In the case of very large marathons, like Boston's, hundreds of thousands of spectators line the streets to watch tens of thousands of runners. The crowd condenses near the finish line, as spectators pack into any available space to watch the winners break the tape, and watch friends and family members cover the final few hundred yards to the finish.

They stand five and 10 deep or more. They climb onto benches and light pole bases to get a better view. Children sit on the shoulders of their parents. It's a celebration. It's also a nightmare for anyone in charge of ensuring public safety.

With countless people packed into a small space, the opportunity is readily available for a person with nefarious intentions to hide in plain sight, plant a device, and slip away down an

alley or through a building. That is reportedly what happened Monday, as the perpetrator (or perpetrators) allegedly dropped shrapnel bombs in garbage cans lining the race's home stretch on Boylston Street, near Boston's Copley Square. Two bombs detonated in rapid succession around 2:45 p.m., about an hour after the winner had crossed the finish line. Two more explosive devices were reportedly found nearby, undetonated.

The explosions injured hundreds of spectators, many critically or seriously. As of Tuesday morning, three people had died.

The attack was a manifestation of physical violence, but we know that terrorism is, at its bare essence, psychological warfare. It doesn't matter if the perpetrator is of foreign or domestic origin, the intent is clearly stated in the root word: terror. And when we're jolted out of our relatively peaceful American existence by an attack like this, the terrorists accomplish their mission. We may go on with our daily lives as usual, but our hearts beat a little faster, we tread into unsure situations with more caution, we worry more about the safety of ourselves and our loved ones.

You can't fly on a plane anymore without the suggestion of 9/11 slithering around somewhere in your gray matter. It's because you now know there are organizations out there capable of hijacking planes and flying them into buildings. Though you also know our national airline security procedures are much more sophisticated than they were prior to Sept. 11, 2001, the "what if" still lingers.

You can't see your kids off to school without thinking, at least now and again, about Columbine or Sandy Hook. You can't watch your college student depart for the new semester without remembering Virginia Tech, even if it's only for a few minutes before you chase the thoughts away and get on with your day.

Now the same thing has happened in the sporting sphere, and to the running community in particular.

I am a runner. I've been running in organized races since 2009, and have six half-marathons to my credit since 2011. I've never run a full marathon and have no plans to, and even if I did, I wouldn't come close to qualifying for Boston – a race prestigious enough that you can't merely

sign up for it. You need to post a “Boston qualifier” time at another sanctioned race in order to even toss your hat in the ring for the Boston Marathon.

But the shockwaves from Monday will almost certainly reverberate at races throughout the country from here forward. Next month, I’m registered to run the Flying Pig half marathon in Cincinnati, and two weeks later, the Rite Aid Cleveland half.

No other race has publicly responded to the events in Boston as of yet, but I’m anticipating much tighter security at next month’s races. I’m anticipating a much more prominent police presence, complete with bomb-sniffing dogs. I’m anticipating mailboxes, trash cans and other sidewalk collection devices to be locked down, removed or otherwise guarded.

I’m anticipating a zero-tolerance policy regarding unattended bags and coolers. If you want to see a pack of runners approaching from up the street, you had better take your belongings with you, even if you’re only moving 100 feet.

At the finish line, I’m anticipating far more stringent crowd control – security shooing people away before large crowds can develop and a drastic increase in the amount of restricted area. Metal detectors? Not out of the question.

Runners, usually herded through the finish-line corral quickly in order to prevent bottlenecks, might be sped along even faster, receiving a terse warning from race security if they linger for more than a few seconds.

All in all, I anticipate the runner’s high of the finish line to be replaced by something more white-knuckled, much like what has happened to the experience of flying. It used to be a luxury. It used to be a fun way to travel. Now, you proceed through the TSA checkpoint, proceed to your gate, get on the plane, fly, get off the plane, collect your bags and get out of the airport as quickly as possible. Most people do not count flying as an enjoyable experience anymore.

Monday’s bombing was designed to shed blood and kill, and it did. But more than that, it was designed to plant the seeds of fear and doubt in our heads. And it did that, too. For runners and

spectators alike, races will be more controlled, more policed, burdened with more procedures and more rules, more inconveniences, more things you're not allowed to do, bring or say, and overall, deliver an experience that is all the less enjoyable.

That's what the perpetrators of Monday's attack have taken away from us. Terror attacks won't make us hide under our beds, but they fill our lives with more fear and more rules. That contributes to the degradation of our society as much as anything. And that's exactly what terrorists want.