

Keys 100 Miles UltraMarathon 2013 - "Sex with the pavement" **Race Report/Unfiltered Open Letter re: the state of 100mile races**

DISCLAIMER/WARNING

If you are easily offended, this RR will offend you. In such a case please stop reading and move on to better things such as taking a yoga class to channel your inner beauty, join a "save the whales" organization or become a hippie.

If you are not sure if you are easily offended, the following test is meant to determine your ability to benefit from reading this RR or not. Proceed by taking a pen and a piece of paper and respond truthfully the following questions:

1. *Does the phrase: "toughen up buttercup" offend you?*
2. *Does the phrase: "get off your high horse" offend you?*
3. *Does the phrase: "suck it up, Princess" offend you?*

If you answered YES to any of the above questions (check your answer sheet again to be sure), put down the pen, close my RR and proceed to better your life by doing something else.

If you have answered NO to the above questions (check your answer sheet again to be sure) then I recommend seeking professional help for listening to me, however you are fit to continue reading this RR ☺

This year's Keys 100 UltraMarathon 2013, marked 2 years of official racing in my ultrarunning path. Two years prior, the Keys 100 of 2011 was my first official ultramarathon. It was an utter and complete failure, I committed the capital sin of ultrarunning and DNFed after running 64 miles. The memory of that race still haunts me today as a dark light from the past meant to keep me focused and humble [yea sure, it works with the humility ;-)]

Since then I have successfully completed 19 other ultramarathons of 100 miles or more or 24 hours. Saying they have changed my life is a huge understatement. The reality is they've become part of my life, they've become ME. Over this 2 years period, my life has improved beyond my wildest dreams and I have achieved more than my imagination was able to envision possible. At the same time, I have grown attached to this amazing sport and realized I owe my life to it. Because of that, I have to move on from racing 100s. The Keys 100mi 2013 was my last 100 mile race, concluding 2 years of racing with a score of 1-19 (1 DNF – 19 Finishes). Next, I will only race distances of 150 miles or more. Coincidentally or not, my next race is the Spartathlon (153 miles) with BIB number 119. If I would be to believe in numerology this could be very good or very bad :-)

During the last two years I have witnessed the amazing growth of our sport but also the weakening of what ultrarunning means, the weakening of the runners and what I consider being a growth in quantity with a diminishing quality. Have tried to oppose such a path for the sport I love so much, however fighting with the masses seems a losing battle and a waste of time. The only way to maintain my focus and continue the evolution process I have started is to distance myself from these events and focus on events where the spirit of ultrarunning is still present on a higher percentage, the 150 miles or more races.

Nevertheless during the last two years I have learned from my own experience and witnessing others so much about what it takes to be an ultrarunner and succeed in our ultra quest. This RR is a recap of the Keys 100 mile race and a way to share my own view about how to succeed, the common mistakes and solutions for evolution.

The Keys 100, 2013

In my opinion this is the most beautiful race in the US, probably a very bias opinion as South Florida is my home and what I consider PARADISE. The race starts in Key Largo, Florida and goes South for 100 miles to Key West, which is the home of the Southern most point monument of the US. There is a shorter distance from Key West to Cuba than from Key West to the continental US. Because of that and the sub tropical climate, Key West is a super laid back place, ideal to visit for a vacation or ultrarunning training. For the most part people are happy and open minded, very little politics or negative news affects the life of this place.

Having been the 8th 100mile or more race for 2013 I have not really trained specifically for this race. I knew I would be able to finish it, I knew I will even do OK, had some goals in mind, but no stress or specific goals.

The week of the race I ran Monday through Thursday a total of almost 70miles. Friday I decided to take a break from running and "taper." I did wake up early and did about 1 hour or so push-ups, sit-ups and some lower back exercises.

Nothing fancy, just to keep focused and mess a bit with my super competitive girlfriend, Claire who was still in bed trying to sleep late :-)

We got on the road early as we had to meet our dear friend, Ann Miller for lunch at Biltmore Hotel in Miami and wanted to reach Key Largo in time to check into the hotel, decompress and get used with the idea of the race, a contrast from the super busy/stressful everyday life.

Made it to Key Largo, checked into the hotel and unpack our equipment as we had a few minutes before the package pick up. As we were lining up our gear on the bed and preparing our drop bags (we were both running the race un-crewed) I discovered I left my running shoes at home. Luckily enough I decided to drive with a pair of shoes I purchased very cheap for walking because they have 1 color (grey) and match better with jeans or shorts without looking like someone going to a race. Unfortunately because they were “walking shoes” their size was too small for running (in ultrarunning we generally wear shoes ½ size or a full size bigger as the feet swell after many miles). For a second I panicked, but then I realized the race it is only 100miles so it should not be that bad to run in shoes with no support and smaller than I should have.

When one encounters problems the best and most efficient way to get over them is to stay positive and look for a solution. People who allow themselves to keep thinking about the problem, become negative and likely will be consumed by the problem, never capable to overcome it. Off course I blamed my “lack of shoes” on Claire. When you have a gorgeous woman walking around and messing with you while packing, it is only normal to forget packing even what would be considered the most important part of the gear... :-). She gracefully tried to convince me to look for a running store and buy a pair of shoes, but again in my mind I was thinking something to the extent: I already have several great pairs of shoes at home, this is only a 100miles race, so why spend money on another pair of shoes. Made the decision to stick with my “walking shoes” and race in them, after all how bad could it be?

Went to the packet pick up and talked to a multitude of friends. Keys 100 is one of those races where almost all the ultrarunners from Florida want to run it, or at least be present as volunteers or crew members, with the exception the very stubborn “trail runners” who would not want to even hear of the race. After exchanging greetings, stories, pleasantries and picking up our packets, we went to the pre race meeting and then to have dinner with our friends Alex, Zoey, Dave, and Kenny there to crew for Dave.

Making it early to bed turned out to be a bit of a challenge, but we still made it before midnight which gave us about 4 hours of sleep before the start of the race. It is kind of difficult to go to the bed early when you are in such a beautiful place and can hang out by the pool drinking beers for a while.

After a few hours of sleep we walked to the starting line, a large parking lot able to host well over 1000 people, the athletes and their crews. The National Anthem was sung, and then the start for the relay teams took place exactly at 0600. The start for solo runners took place 10 minutes later. I had two beers very fast and then I was on my way running fast with the lead group. At that point, I was looking for the following times/racing plan: in the worst case scenario (when everything goes wrong) run a sub 24hours. Go for a 21hours pace, but adapt during the race to attempt to reach sub 20hours. To be confident about Spartathlon I really wanted my finishing time to be sub 20hours, as close as possible to 18hours. Having ran a 18:14 this year at Iron Horse, I knew I was capable to do it, however the weather in the Keys plays a major factor. At Iron Horse, the weather was perfect, in the Keys, we were expecting high temperatures and high humidity, creating one of the most difficult environments to run, and even worse for high performance (going for PR – personal record).

During the race I felt perfect, everything I trained for and applied in other races just came in together and realized very soon that I was making times better than predicted possible. I kept the nutrition/hydration to a basic: every 20 miles – a high protein bar and a beer, in between the 20 miles increments have some minimal food every 5 miles (a ½ sandwich or a cookie), refill the water bottles every 5 miles, drink one and use the other one to pour it on my head to cool off. Also at every 5 miles station (fully manned aid station, or drop off cooler) take a scoop of ice and place it in front of my shirt and one scoop of ice for the back. The shirt was tied with my running belt so the ice bounced and slowly melted cooling down my core. When you have a crew, they can spray you down with cold water, wrap you into frozen towels, etc but when you run un-crewed you have to improvise. It is not ideal to run with “bouncing ice” in your shirt, but it does the job.

The one problem you encounter is that the ice melts and the water runs down your legs into the shoes. You are sweating quite a bit as well and the truth is that I have not been dry even a second during the race. However all that water and sweat

running down into my shoes created this squishy sound with every step. The previous year I had finished the race in 22 hours and experienced the worst chafing ever. I mean it was so bad, I had blood running down my legs, and the material from my shorts cut so deep into the skin it almost looked like it grew there. Of course we use different lotions to prevent chafing, and for the most races they work well, but the Keys is a race where you sweat non-stop so everything you apply is being washed off. My friend Eric has tried in the past running with a condom on and soon I followed his advice. It worked well in the several races I have done before the Keys. Well, put together the condom statement, the excess perspiration, the heat your body feels, the increased heart rate and the squishy sound from my shoes and what you have? Yes, it is right, you have “Sex with the Pavement” :-)

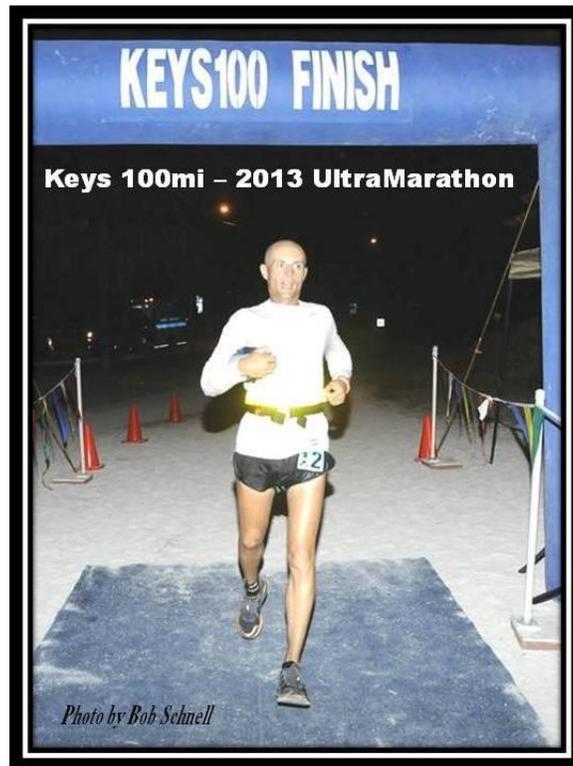


Running over bridges is just a breath taking experience. When at some point you are running with Brenda Carawan, the only female part of the US “Spartathlon” Team is even better. We started chatting about the race, our training plans for the following 4 months, and the time passed very fast as well as the miles. Brenda is a super focused athlete who always puts 100% in what she does. I knew she was a bit faster than I so I let her go after a few miles. She ended up winning the race.

For short periods of time I would run with other runners, but decided to keep the pace I was most comfortable with and not to run with someone else because I did not want to get sucked into their pace. I wanted total “communication” with my body and mind. The strategy worked well and soon I started to pass quite a few of the “faster ultrarunners” who were displaying signs of exhaustion. Shortly I started to pass some of the relay teams. That always gives you a boost of energy when you realize at mile 60 you are passing runners who are generally training for shorter distances to run faster and are doing the race as a team...

Around mile 84 I finally caught up with my good friend Dave. He was a bit surprised to see me, especially since he is a faster runner and had a crew. Dave was at that time going through a low, but he has an amazing recovery capacity. He can stay in a low for a few miles barely walking, then all of a sudden at mile 90 he is running sub 8minute miles looking as fresh as when he started the race. This time it was no different, he was able to catch up with me a few miles down the road and pass me to take 2nd place and 1st male.

I ended up finishing in 17:54:55 which is a new PR. The race went better than expected, however I have to repeat this over and over, I train very hard. Without hard work, it is highly unlikely to do well or finish. Here and there a few ultrarunners can pull off a 100 miles without too much training, based solely on talent or grit but is very rare (will discuss in more details this below in the open letter section).



Even if my race had nothing memorable to talk about, or major obstacles to overcome, or drama, several other ultrarunners had truly amazing races. Beside Brenda who was training for Spartathlon and Dave who was training for Badwater and whom had great races, it is worth discussing/acknowledging some friends who did more than great.

Jodi Weiss is one of the most positive athletes I know, she simply does not DNF and always reaches her goal. She is a yoga fan/teacher and she walks the walk (remember this statement as I will take on yoga “practice” later). A few days before the race she pulled her calf muscle. It could also have been a tear as her calf was bruised inside pretty bad. She was not able to walk almost at all just days before the race and “advanced to walking” the day before the race. After having talked to her several times that week and learning she made the decision to run, I knew she will find a way to finish. Jodi is just amazingly strong. She had a hard race but she finished!!! I could not be more impressed with her accomplishment.

Another injured athlete was Sergio Radovic who the morning before the race could barely stand. He had severe shin splints and possible stress fractures. He was running the races as a training race for Badwater. When I started ultras, Sergio was the person who inspired me with his grit and ability to push through everything in order to complete a race. He finished as expected, showing once again, like Jodi that one can run a 100 mile race injured and finish with enough mental power.

Elaine Stypula is a friend from Michigan. She is a beautiful woman, a super athlete and a fellow attorney. Her resume is impressive with finishes at some of the hardest races on the planet. Is it surprising that she finished the Keys 100? Well, based on her experience, no. One can expect from Elaine to always finish her races. She is a very dependable athlete from that perspective. What is worth discussing here is that she flew in from Michigan where temperatures were in the upper 20s/lower 30s to race in the Keys in temps in the 90s. Why is amazing? Well because she is not acclimated to hot weather, she did not have a crew and she did fantastic.

My gorgeous girlfriend Claire, moved to South Florida just days before the race from Colorado where the temperatures were at times in the lower 30s as well. Claire ran the race without a crew as well and she had a goal of finishing sub 24 hours. She achieved that goal. So the question which begs to be asked is how so many other ultrarunners who live in South Florida dare to complain about the heat and use it as an excuse to DNF? The answer is simple, if Elaine and Claire traveling from very cold climates were able not only to finish, but to achieve their goals, then no other wannabe ultrarunner can use the heat as an excuse.

Jon Cooper was new to ultrarunning. He decided to make the Keys 100 his first 100mile race. Even if quite a few people take that route, I believe it is extremely gutsy as the Keys 100 is one of the toughest races out there due to heat, humidity

and lack of shade. I knew Jon will finish as he has a great quality for an ultrarunner, he is very stubborn. He does not quit. That's what he did and could not be any more proud of him.

Krystle Matinez is relatively new to the 100 miles distance and she is young. Not the greatest combination to perform well even if she is a very fast shorter distance runner. Krystle had some problems at some point which required the intervention of the paramedics and the use of IVs. Yes, Krystle received IVs during the race. Did that stop her? No, she quietly waited to feel better and continued the race to reach the finish line. Now, stop for a second to think about this. There are many runners who stop and bitch about their foot hurting, or being too hot, or having stomach problems. They DNF. Krystle here, is forced to be put on IVs and she finishes her race. Hard to have compassion for someone who DNFs when you take this into account. Again, only respect for Krystle.

Traci Phillips, like Krystle, had a really bad day. Things did not go well and she had a multitude of problems to overcome. She did and finished proudly. Both her and Krystle will be fierce 100 miles ultrarunners in a very short period of time as soon as they can gain some more experience.

Sung Ho Choi returned to the Keys to run the race in preparation for his two major races scheduled for this year, the Western States 100 and Vol State. He did not have a particularly great race, however he stuck it up and finished. Below in the open letter I will expand on why is so important to finish. Great job Sung for pushing through a hard race.

Grant Maughan is a very tough Australian dude which I met the previous year in the Keys. Since then he completed race after race, he improved and always got the job done. Like Sergio and Dave, he was there to use the race as a training run for his upcoming Badwater. Grant, as always, ran very strong and finished without problems.

Thomas Grinovich is a friend I met more than a year ago at Long Haul 100. We always talk on line and since then we saw each other at other races, his family is always positive and great to be around. He doubted his performance at the Keys because this year he has not trained properly. Sometimes life makes you skip training, thinking you will catch up at some point, but then suddenly the race is there and you just realize you are not ready. Thomas did not allow that factor to be a part of his decision to run. He showed up, put up with the pain and the heat and finished! Great Job, Thomas!

Menyhert Lesi is another friend from Florida with who I have ran several races. He did not feel especially prepared for this year's race, but he did a great job and finished strong! Craig Lozowick struggled for many months with injuries. He has seen some great races in the beginning of his ultrarunning career and then he experienced a steep decline in performance. Well, after some "thinking" Craig realized he had the option to quit or stop failing. He took the second, much harder option and returned to the Keys with a vengeance. Needles to say, he finished strong. In a similar situation, not physical injuries, but a lack of focus was my friend Hernan Garcia. For a while he even mentioned not being sure if he wants to run 100s anymore. Nevertheless, he returned to the Keys, had a great race and finished strong! Both, Craig and Hernan show that when you want something, you can make it happen with a bit of determination.

Charlotte Armstrong is relatively new to ultrarunning as well. Not particularly a fast runner, but a very strong and consistent one. She came to the Keys to get another 100mile belt buckle and she did. Very proud of her accomplishment and her continuous improvement.

Bill McCarty is from California and he is in his 60s. Bill runs 100s almost as much as I do. He also finishes his races. He came to the Keys to run and that's what he did. He finished strong. Like Bill, Jim Schroeder is also in his 60s. He too finished the Keys even if the last few miles he was walking sideways and bent from the waist, a clear sign of how much pain he had to endure. They are both examples of tenacity and a clear showing that age is NOT a factor in ultrarunning.

Two other friends I will discuss are the Florida Ultra Runners (FUR) founders, great friends and occasional training partners, Eric Friedman and Smith Jean-Baptiste. Both of them have gone through some "roller coaster" periods with regard to training. Both are into the "Buddha/Zen" philosophies for which they get much grief from me. Nevertheless, I always listen to their point of view and always respect them. Smith is a vegetarian ultrarunner, while Eric is a Jewish bacon aficionado... They both had goals of finishing sub 24hours, a first for both to break that mental barrier. They both did! Smith broke his goal time by more than an hour, and Eric finished strong and happy. Respect for both of them.

Cannot finish this part about the race without mentioning three great performances in the 50miles race. Alyson Venti who won the 1 female last year in the 100miles race did not train sufficiently to feel good about running the 100 again and she

made the decision to drop to the 50miles race. While I am not a supporter of that decision because I see Aly as one of the most talented ultrarunners in the world who's place is in the US National Ultrarunning Team, that decision worked well for her. She crushed the previous course record at 50miles and of course won the race. Aly is a phenomenal ultrarunner and have learned quite a bit from her the few times we ran together.

Katalin Nagy is another fast runner who decided to run the 50mile race due to her debut in the UltraBalaton (132miles) a short time after the Keys race. It was a good decision. She took second place after Aly, also breaking the previous course record and crushed the UltraBalaton race winning 1st female.

Mike Holt is a fellow attorney who works in the same office with Dave (yes, I know a lot of lawyers running ultras). Mike is new to ultras and the Keys 50 was his 1st 50mile race. He is a strong runner and he finished in a respectable total time, however what is memorable about Mike is that after the start for the 50miles was given, he crossed the starting line and then sat down for 4hours waiting for Dave to make the 50mile mark in order to run with him. Not many people would have done that. Nice work and super show of friendship, Mike!

As mentioned before, my race went well, in a way too well. It was also the first race I ran totally relaxed and happy. Happy is a state of well being difficult to express in words. One recognizes 'happy' when experiencing that feeling. All my previous races have been ran on pain, but this one was different due to Claire. She changed the way I look at life, she changed the way I feel. I have to admit, I was worried that without my pain would not perform as well. As it turns out, my worries were pointless. Thank you, Claire for helping me race at a different level, with a different perspective.

Thank you to all the volunteers who did a phenomenal job. As always the FUR volunteer captain, Susan Anger was there to coordinate and participate in a very difficult task with David Murdock. Thank you to Issie Sosa who made me eat when I passed through his aid station even if I was not really in a mood for anything. Kathleen Wheeler provided "magic bracelets" before the race and they boosted my confidence or at least made me look prettier. Either way, she was great at the aid station. Tom Asiala decided to go volunteer this year instead of running, thank you Tom. So goes for Lauren Hadley. Cindy and Bob Schnell, thank you for the photos. As always, Mike Melton did an impeccable job with timing and keeping everyone accounted for and Bob Becker put a great race. Let me rephrase that, not a great race, but the Greatest US Race.

Lastly, thank you to all the crew members who while supporting their athletes always offered and asked me if I needed anything. Just because I never took any help, it does not mean your offering was not appreciated. I do have this "thing" about not accepting help from others and using only the aid stations when running a race un-crewed. However seeing everyone there, always positive, always cheering makes a huge difference.

Now, it is time to focus solely on Spartathlon, generally considered the most elite ultramarathon in the world. It will not be easy, but it will not be impossible. If 4 years ago I was a broken guy who had a hard time waking up in the morning and had no reason to live, if I was not capable to run more than a couple of miles, now, the Spartathlon will be the completion of a dream beyond what was once considered humanly possible. Looking forward to the end of September when together with 6 other American athletes will travel to Greece to show what the US Spartathlon Team can do.

Unfiltered Open Letter re: the state of 100mile races

Some of my friends know I am not a fan of DNFs, in fact I take an extremely hard stand against DNFs. I have been asked repeatedly why I decided to stop running races under 150miles. The following part is an attempt to explain my reason, my vision and offer my suggestions/opinion.

As mentioned in the beginning of this RR, this will be a very hard to read part, coming directly from the heart, unfiltered, in raw form. I am going to use extensively the "F" word and likely hurt almost everyone persons' feelings. The reason this RR comes 5 weeks after the race is due in part to the internal struggle regarding the harsh words I decided to use. I believe in tough love, in pure truth (vs. sugar coated) and in staying away from BS. I made the decision that this should be said in the hope it will somehow resonate with some and save the ultrarunning from the direction has taken recently.

This Open Letter is addressed ENTIRELY to athletes wanting/running 100mile races. It is NOT addressed to anyone running shorter distances or to otherwise general population. If anyone feels offended at the end it is for two reasons alone: 1. they are a weak person who did not want to listen and decided to read the RR ignoring the warning and 2. they feel it applies to them directly. In either case, they should take their concerns somewhere else if they are looking for a

response. I am not using names for examples, and I am creating “syndromes” to group together people in order to analyze mistakes and offer suggestions.

Ultrarunning has saved my life. This statement is not a figure of speech and not an exaggeration. Because of that ultrarunning is extremely close to my heart. I am a very nice person with the people I love and a merciless person to the ones I consider enemies. I have no problems in feeling angry, frustrated and generally I believe violence has its place in society (as a last resort, a universal language). The reason I am explaining this is to convey the fact that I am not a saint, I have NOT achieved a state of “nirvana” nor do I think I am better than most people. I am just an average guy who had the chance to understand life at the time when I was dead inside, to use stubbornness and pain in my favor and to go from not being able to run more than a couple miles (4 years ago) to start running 100 mile races having no talent (2 years ago) and in September to race in what is generally considered the most elite race in the world.

During my journey, I discovered that ultrarunning is the most pure form of therapy, the most efficient path to better ourselves in everyday life, to get stronger, to get more balanced and to achieve our dreams (not only with regard to running, but all dreams). In a word ultrarunning is a path to happiness. I tasted it and took advantage of it. I am at the point where it is part of my life and nobody can take it away. Many others can and should benefit from this path, especially people who have suffered severe physical or emotional traumas, people with addictions, weak people, etc. Unfortunately, lately this path is being trashed by an increasingly large group of ignorant people. That’s where it has to stop!

“For God’s Sake, stop failing and start succeeding!” it is a phrase I want to scream at many ultras. People DNF for a very simple reason, they LIE to themselves and to others. DNF is a choice; it is a personal-premeditated choice to fail. It has to stop!

During the past two years of racing I witnessed some truly great performances and a huge number of failures. Because I was fascinated by the increasing desire to fail, I tried to understand the mistakes and offer my advice. Here are some of the most common mistakes:

The number ONE mistake is lack of preparation. To succeed in an ultra one has to prepare tri fold: physical, mental and build character/habit. The vast majority of people have none or one of these parts working for them when they enter a race. There are some talented runners (former track stars in high school, college, people who done well in some marathons) but for the most part, due to their talent they do not have mental strength. Then there are the ones with mental strength who acquired that through a very hard life, people who struggled a lot and learned to successfully overcome any and all obstacles. For the most part they lack talent, otherwise they would be in the first category. Then there are some who just do not ever quit, it is not a matter of strength, it is not a matter of talent, for them it is a matter of duty to finish what they started. They share some characteristics with the mental strength group and in some cases they have minimal talent as well. However, to be successful one needs to train and prepare all the three parts.

The physical part is simple, you just have to run MORE. There is no f***ing magic pill, equipment, training strategy, magic food, drink or anything else that is generally sold to the lazy ignorant masses who are too lazy to train hard and too delusional to admit it. To succeed in a 100 mile run, one has to train constantly, to log some miles and live more or less an ultrarunning lifestyle. Most successful 100 miler veterans agree that running in average between 80 and 100 miles a week will get you in shape to complete most 100 miles races. The quality of running is important as well, the training runs will have to be light enough not to burn you, injure you and at the same time depending on the experience level long runs are required. For most beginner 100 mile competitors, the long runs are the most important ones as it forces the mind and body to get used with the physical pain of sustaining the runner’s body weight vertical for extended periods of time as well as keeping the body awake.

The mental part is more complex than the physical one. It involves letting go of negativity, surrounding ourselves with successful people, picking the right “idols” to follow, learn to always be positive and eliminate the possibility of DNF as an option in races. It is very important to visualize a race repeatedly in our minds, to see ourselves running that course whenever training (of course if possible to go train on the course itself). Very few do it. Many others are picking and following advice from self proclaimed “elites.” Someone who wins some races and DNFs a lot of races is not an elite ultrarunner. Such a person is a clown, a joker, a fake. Generally speaking, these are the very talented people who run only when they have a good day and quit the rest of the time. The ONLY thing one will learn from such a self proclaimed elite is how to find excuses, and how to DNF.

The character/habit part is more difficult to achieve as it implies finishing race after race, to the point where finishing races becomes a habit and a part of character. To help building this part one has to build character outside the running world and implies finishing our daily tasks, being truthful with ourselves and others, keeping our promises, etc.

So what are the main syndromes affecting the ultrarunning races today?

The “Pretty B***h/VIP Syndrome” – these are people who generally have been blessed with pleasant physiques, have charisma, have talent but they never worked hard for anything in life because it was provided to them by others. Generally speaking here you have former star athletes, “beautiful people,” runners capable to run around 3 hour marathons. They are easy to recognize on the course because they are arrogant, they have a sense of entitlement, they demand respect, they are rude to others, they always start fast and talk big and they almost always DNF. Let’s analyze now: in ultra races it makes no difference what race one is, what education level has achieved, what cultural background grew up in, sexual orientation, financial situation, etc. That is why ultras are so beautiful, they are an equalizer. The only thing that matters is how hard you trained, how well you prepared and how much pain you are willing to take.

What is the solution? Well if running a sub 3 hours marathon does not mean s**t in a 100 miles race, if being famous or good looking does not make a difference, if having the best equipment does not really help, then such a person has to get down from their high horse and learn to listen, be humble while training hard. It is not worth really discussing why such individuals are complete losers. I believe it is obvious that life handed them a good hand of cards and they are wasting a huge opportunity. The worse mini group are the ones who would want you to believe they are saving themselves for the “big races” and use that as an excuse to DNF. Will give a simple example of their results. A certain American Olympian athlete recently DNFed at the Olympics in London. “He was hurt” many say, and that was his excuse. Let’s analyze: he was a “professional elite” who failed in what is generally considered the most important day in an athlete’s career, competing in the Olympic Games. Generally I would say, f**k him because it is his problem. But is not only that. The moment when he accepted a spot in the US National Team he took on the promise to represent me and millions of other Americans (if he knew he sucks, he should have declined and let someone else to take that slot). He went there and embarrassed the US as desecrated the US Flag. Let’s remember that many brave young Americans are carrying/suffering/dying for that flag in combat all over the world. “Our elite” did not even have the decency to limp to the finish line keeping his head high at a cost of taking some pain in for 7-8 hours the most. I do have a f***ing problem with that. He represented me and many others who are nothing like that. We do not accept to be losers, we do not accept defeat, we do not surrender. He and others like him are a disgrace and a cheap excuse for human life.

The “Martyr Syndrome” – these are people who all of a sudden in a middle of a race decide to quit and go home to “have dinner” with their families or are the ones who do not train enough blaming it on their responsibility to take care of some ill relative. In either case they fail.

Let’s analyze now: if someone takes time away every day to train, spends substantial amounts of money to travel to races/pay registration fees/buy equipment, then that person is taking all that money away from their families. Not to mention the time spent training and being away from them. News flash for such a person: YOUR family wants you to succeed, that is why they put up with your training, that is why they make sacrifices for you to go to races. When YOU fail, you send them the message that all that it was for nothing and in fact you are blaming them indirectly for your failure (“because my family wanted to have dinner with me I quit”). Children always look up to their parents and want them to be heroes. What child does not want to go to school and brag to their friends “my dad/mom ran 100 miles this weekend,” instead they will have to say “it was a great race, many people finished, but my dad/mom decided to quit in the middle of it” ... Think for one second what message you are sending to your children. You are telling them it is OK to fail, it is OK to quit. That is f***ing wrong as you set up your children for failure. We live in a world that is failing, people always give up, never keep promises, never speak the truth, cheat as much as possible. We can only fix it by changing ourselves and our children by being winners/finishers.

If YOU are using the excuse of having to sacrifice training to take care of an ill relative, that is BS as well. But why? It is so noble to take care of someone! Bull. YOU can take care of someone only when strong, a blind cannot lead a blind, a coward cannot teach courage, a weak cannot be strong. When the world collapses, everyone in every family is looking up to the strong person. YOU can be that person and they need you, they need someone who is rational, someone who just doesn’t throw their hands in the air and scream helpless. You can help by being strong, and you stay strong through training. I speak here from experience as my dear mother died of cancer not long ago. I know how it feels to go out for a run and just want to scream or cry because you know there is nothing you can do to take their pain away. But what you can do is to always stay positive, to always encourage them, to always support them, even if at times you seem cold or an ass...

The “Pathological Liar Syndrome” – these individuals are easy to recognize as well. They always post stuff on line about how much they train, how fast they run, how many races they completed but they always fail. It is pointless to discuss them, best is to just ignore them as they are the worst of all. They have a narcissistic personality, always looking for attention, they are needy and they always have excuses available for every possible situation. They are human garbage. What is even more ironic, is that these fakes are the ones always arguing and questioning the training philosophies of the athletes who succeed while being the first ones to offer “advice on how to be great.” Be very, very careful about who’s advice you follow. Losers like this can only teach you to be a loser.

The “Predator Syndrome” – these guys are pretty easy to recognize as well. They share some of the narcissistic traits, they are extremely insecure about themselves, they are great manipulators and they come to these events to pray on the weak and to make themselves feel better. They always brag, always take a multitude of photos with sexually attractive people, they always flirt and generally are there to have sex with whomever will agree to. They have some talent, some are good runners, but they will never achieve greatness because they are running for the wrong reasons, they never seek to improve themselves. These have to be left alone, sooner or later they will get bored and go to run 5Ks or marathons where the pool of potential sexual partners is greater and where “sporting” an ultra t-shirt will give them all the attention they seek.

The “Hero Wannabe Syndrome” – these are guys always running for some causes, they always run for someone else, to prove something to someone else, to achieve fame, etc. Generally they are good hearted, have great intentions, but they will ultimately fail because in order to be successful in an ultra one has to find out exactly who he/she is and where he/she goes. Running ultra races is a test of where we are in life, how well we trained, how strong we are, how dedicated we are, etc. The everyday activities and life style have a huge impact in the ability to finish an ultra. People who run to better themselves will always progress/succeed, the ones running for someone else/something else will stagnate or regress. I am not saying that is wrong to help a noble cause, I am saying is wrong to run because of that.

The “Cry Baby Syndrome” – most runners fall into this category. How do you recognize them? Well it is simple, they always complain about something. They are the negative runners. They always tell you how hot it is for them, how much their feet hurt, how much worse they have it than anyone else. All of their excuses are beyond pathetic. It is hot outside? Well, f***ing yes it is, but is also hot for others who traveled from cold climates and they finished. “My foot hurts” – I always felt like wanting to show them what real pain is, what means to really hurt. To all of them, the only advice is to “toughen up, buttercup” They are in the presence of strong individuals, competing in some hard races. What in God’s name made them believe it will be a walk on the beach? They should shut off their negativity and either finish or just not start. They are not ultrarunners yet and they will never be unless they learn to suffer with pride.

Lastly, the “Hypocrite Syndrome” – these are people who always talk about peace and serenity. They post inspirational photos about rainbows/unicorns/nature on line, they promote happiness and project it (or they want us to believe their crap). Often they are big into yoga, cross fit and any other thing but ultrarunning. They use religious beliefs (mostly oriental philosophies, but at times they can be just radicals), they talk about saving the planet, saving something every day. More than likely they have no other contribution to society but converting oxygen into CO2. How do you know they are fake? Well is f***ing simple. Generally these people are the most negative, insecure, full of drama individuals. They simply suck at everything. That is why they do yoga, cross fit, save the planet, and so on, in order to be justify themselves and to others. When in a running group that they are yogis, in a yoga class that they are cross fit people, in a cross fit group they are runners. This way they can live mediocre lives, suck at everything but in their minds still be able to justify their “own perceived greatness and enlighten life.” Sure there are a small group of true believers and followers. For them I have the outer most respect. Remember Jodi Weiss? Well she is one such person. She is a yoga instructor and yoga helps her. She is positive and she has a positive influence on the world. Several more people are like her and I am trying hard to point out that I do not have a problem with true believers, I have a problem with hypocrites. How can you tell them apart? Not very easy because in yoga there is no finish line to cross, you can simply just project fake happiness and most will believe you. However, test them. Say something contrary to their belief system to them and guess what, they will be the first ones to get angry with you, they will be the first ones to be defensive and to threaten your “friendship intentions,” they will be the ones who promise a lot and do nothing. There is not much you can do for them either, they will fail because their fakeness and self deceived lifestyle cannot lead them to anything great. Because of their negativity they will likely not finish their races, but in most cases these people will not even have the courage to start. They seek to “associate themselves” with successful people and get crazy mad when their failures are not validated. Let them be on their own. If we do not entertain their crap, they will go to sell it to a different market.

So why so much criticism? Well, because I love the sport of ultrarunning, because I believe it is the most simple opportunity to maximize one's potential, to heal the body, the mind and the human spirit. All the above categories are only destroying this option by DNFing and sending the signal that is OK to fail, that there is some "great thing" to be learned from failure. They send the message to addicts that is OK to give in the temptation of quitting, that is OK to be negative and find excuses, that is OK to be weak, that is OK to be a loser. Well, that is NOT OK with me and for that I am choosing to move on to a different stage of performance where I can only hope for a while it will be restricted access to the above mentioned individuals. Too much negativity brings everybody down and I feel I am not strong enough/or have time to fight with a mass of ignorant wannabes. Realistic speaking it is not my job to change them, so I took the advice to "let them be."

Success can be accomplished very, very easily through a simple concept. Just RUN MORE. Remember that correlation does NOT equal causation, that means if 10 successful ultrarunners wear pink shirts you can correlate that with their success, but it is not a causation of their success. The only characteristics which seem to lead to success in ultrarunning are high mileage, humility (less talk more training), complete elimination of negativity. Use your anger, do not suppress it, use it to better yourselves. When you fail, do not become "zen" about your failure, be angry with yourself, be hard on yourself and use that anger to train so hard that you will never fail again. The reason I created the "International 100+ UltraRunning Club" was to find those common characteristics and to offer a forum very exclusive, open ONLY to athletes who completed at least a 100 race, in order to maintain a high level of integrity, eliminate as much as possible negativity and to inspire each other through personal example rather than "empty slogans."

The level of ultrarunning is pushing some individuals to amazing accomplishments and I cannot be more grateful to know some of them and more proud of their accomplishments, however the popularity of the sport brought with it a huge mass of "wannabes/fakers/posers." They are the dangerous ones for everyone else. They are the ones I have a problem with and have no respect for at all, because they interfere with the truly beautiful, amazing ultrarunners who just happens to be some of the nicest human beings on the planet.

I will always keep in touch with my friends, I will always try to inspire and offer tough love to the ones interested. If anyone feels like arguing with my views, I can only suggest in the most polite way to use their time more wisely and train. If anyone wants to prove my philosophy wrong, can only do so by getting themselves stronger and succeeding. That is the point when I will buy them a glass of wine and a steak (or in the alternative a plate of organic grass and organic tea), shake their hand and give them my total respect.

Ultrarunning is a phenomenal opportunity. All I ask is if someone does not want to take advantage of it, at least to not f**k it up for everyone else. Succeed because it is the most efficient way to progress, succeed because it is a responsibility to inspire others, but most of all SUCCEED, do not DNF because life is too short and "ain't nobody got time for that" – Great Contemporary American Philosopher