

## Lost 118 - My Graduation to 100+ mile UltraMarathons

LOST 118 UltraMarathon, February 2012

At least once a week someone asks me why am I running ultra-marathons? I do not have an answer, except that it makes sense, in fact it seems the most logic action in life. It all started less than three years ago when suddenly one Friday in March I've lost my reason to live. Being a rational person, I struggled to convince myself there is a point to wake up in the morning, but my mind could not give me a single reason. The emotional pain I felt was debilitating and would physically take me down to the ground. As it always happens, family and friends were telling me: "it will be OK," however my intuition was telling me otherwise.

Soon, I realized my intuition was right and needed to find a way to cope with the emotional pain. I decided to go and run until my physical pain will make me pass out. I had no knowledge of ultra-marathons, neither did I believe it was possible to run hours at the time. Soon I've learned if there is a will (and my desire was to feel physical pain), there is a way. From my regular 2-5 miles runs I used to do in the military and once in a while as part of my training schedule, I was capable to run my first 100 miles in 16 months just by pushing harder and harder every day in order to increase the pain.

With only 2 months before my first 100miles run (July 2010), I've learned about the world of ultras. I was fascinated and at the same time I started to increase my addiction to the satisfaction received from the ability to control pain, to win in the fight with that voice inside my head which was telling me to stop.

Lost 118 was my first race over 100miles, my graduation to 100+ mile ultras. I was a little bit worried by the lack of anxiety going into the race week. Perhaps it was the lack of sleep, the crazy schedule at work. After spending the previous weekend at Iron Horse 100, crewing for my friend Bruce and skipping sleep a few nights, Monday through Friday happened to be very full work days. Friday morning before race I felt exhausted, around 30% of strength with no desire to run 1 mile... The idea of running 118miles made me smile as I asked myself "how in the world am I going to make it happen?" Went to work and literally felt sick, flu like symptoms. Decided to get "medicated" so I purchased a bottle of vitamin C and one bottle of Zicam. Over the next few hours the vitamin C and Zicam bottles saw a lot of action until they ended up empty. After 11 hours in the office, got in the car and drove to Clewiston. It was time to get into race mode and find a way to convince myself I can run approximately 118 miles/190 kilometers around a lake in the middle of Florida.

Morning of the race. I felt better as I was able to get 5 hours of solid sleep, but still far from feeling 100%. I knew I had to give it all and actually that idea excited me more than anything else. At the pre race briefing I saw familiar faces, elite ultra runners, a few new ultra runners and the volunteers. Because I knew more than half of the people present, it felt good. It was like a nice family reunion where everybody is positive and in a good mood. Opened my Murphy's Stout beer and listened to Mike Melton's presentation of the course.

0700 and the start is given. I started running with a "goal" of finishing under 30 hours. I had a feeling I will not give up and somehow cross the finish line, however was not sure how I will do that. The fog prevented seeing anything too far, however it was supposed to lift in a few hours and be sunny for the rest of the day. It did not happen. A few hours later, it started to rain and realized it was overcast. My running outfit was composed of shoes, gaiters, short shorts, hat and sunglasses. I was freezing and knew I packed all my warm clothes in the drop bags sent to mile 73 and on... I guess the low temperatures forced me to keep moving without taking breaks.

As soon as the fog lifted the view was magnificent, the nature sent its ambassadors close to us. Alligators, snakes, birds and insects all over. They made the run more enjoyable. The first 40-50 miles were rough..., just could not find the rhythm. Ankle and knee pain made me worry a bit. Hit the first wall at mile 13-15. Generally I like the walls as they force me to search deep into my soul the motivation to go on and ultimately are the challenge I am looking for in an ultra. But mile 13-15? How in the world will I push it for another 100+ miles? First drop bag was at mile 23 so I was able to have a beer. The beer helped and soon I started to slowly feel the body getting in sync and accepting the idea of the run. Next beer at mile 37 continued my "improvement process" and started to have more confidence in the ability to maintain a decent pace long into the race. The next wall came close to mile 45, however by this time was pretty cold outside so the cold "froze my capacity to feel sorry for myself." Surprisingly by mile 50, things started to feel normal, my body was full with energy, the form was perfect, the motivation was there.

Started running with a small group of people, my friends Bruce, Dave, Eric, Michelle, Traci, Jodi, Seth, Joyce, Issie, Claire, Tom, Edward, Liz, June, Tim, Jim. Chatted a bit with some and some just took off. Because I've learned my lesson of not running at anybody's else pace, I let them run and encouraged Bruce who stuck with me to take off himself. Seeing the volunteers at the first stations, Julie then Brad, then Cindy and Bob helped. Susan and Dave are always a welcome presence and they lifted my spirits at several ultras. Karen was nice to waive at me while crewing for Tim. All those factors came into place and helped with the first 50 miles.

Running on the levee is a great idea, you feel protected from traffic, it is paved for almost the entire way and the view is great. Catching up with runners here and there and exchanging stories for a few minutes, making new friends one of the best parts of an ultra. Learning what motivates someone to run ultra distances is fascinating to me. The "trail" portion of the levee is not bad, however the coral rock grinds your feet slowly. My trail shoes were a great choice as the sole is hard and protected the bottoms of my feet pretty good.

Nevertheless, at the end of the trail, the feeling of asphalt under the feet resembled a nice sheet of silk or balm... :-) God, I love the roads. The next 50 miles went much better than expected, body and mind worked in sync and before long I reached the check point/aid station at mile 73. Was pleasantly surprised with my time of 14 hours. Definitely the best time so far and on track for a 100miles PR. The previous PR on 100 miles was at Long Haul 100, 4 weeks earlier (21:57: 11). I had to make a decision of trying to break the 20hours and risk the ability to finish or conserve the energy to finish. Went for the second option however pushing forward to have at least a few minutes PR at 100.

After mile 73, had to leave the levee do to construction and run on the roads and towns near the lake. Pitch black outside, dressed in black and without light (had lights, just did not turn them on). Loved it! One or two complains about a runner without lights, but I felt so much more safer in the dark. The only "scary" situations were dogs when passed through several areas with houses.

Last check point at mile 92. Bob was the man in charge, he offered me some of his wife's home-made soup we chatted a bit about races and future plans while I stretched my legs and got the weight off my feet. From mile 92, back on the levee, then just a "bit" left. Felt good leaving the aid station, started running again and reached 100 miles in about 21 hours. Personal Record of about 1 hour compared to the Long Haul 100 race.

Because no race can be that easy, things started to get hard after 100 miles. My body was feeling hot and cold in short intervals, the bottoms of my feet were burning to the point of not being able to keep my weight vertical. Tried to lie down and lift my feet up a few times, but the mosquitoes were extremely aggressive and more than a few seconds lead to frustration and anger towards mother nature... :-). After running what in my mind seemed like ½ miles I would just get on the ground fight with the insects and repeat. At that point it was difficult to take fluid in as I was not sweating much, and was over hydrating, but needed the energy to continue. Forced myself to drink some Cokes and threw up right away, so I decided to just “death march” the rest. I felt I was running/walking in place.

Suddenly the wind picked up which prevented the mosquito attacks so I was able to get on my back and rest for about 5 minutes. Not sure if I passed out or not during that time, had some interesting short vivid dreams, but when I finally stood up, things were back to normal. Started running again and felt good. The only problem, the earlier episode made me believe I was on track for 26-27 hours finish. I was surprised when at some point I see Seth and ask him if he has any idea of how close is the finish (I was thinking, maybe 10 miles). Seth tells me “it is just around the corner, maybe less than ½ mile.” I was pleasantly socked and a new wave of energy filled my mind and body. Continued running and reached the finish line in 24:28:57 taking the 3rd place. Not only have I graduated to 100+ ultras, but for the first time I finished “on the podium.” What I remembered at that point were the words of Jesper Olsen “you can run much better than you think, you are a good runner,” apparently he actually knows what he is talking about... :-)

Have to say, thank you to all volunteers. Amazing Job! Thank you to all who encouraged me through facebook messages. GREAT RACE, Mike! I am already sold for next year. If you do not know much about LOST 118, all I can say, it is an amazing race. I am sure it is just a matter of time before it will be one of the prime ultra 100+ miles race destinations in US.

So, why I run ultras? Because it just makes sense! Why race ultras? Because every time I reach the finish line before the voice inside my head, who tells you to stop actually succeeds to stop me, I am winning! If 3 years ago, I was not capable to imagine possible running ultras, now I cannot imagine living my life without running ultras! If there is one song which expresses what I feel regarding ultras in my life, it is "Beauty from Pain" by Superchick. From a world of despair and pain, ultras are bringing the most beauty in my life.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqBMYoctFZM>

Ultra running saved my life, gave me a reason to live again and while it made no difference regarding the original emotional pain which started all this, ultra running taught me to control pain (both physical and mental), make it part of my life and live with it in harmony.

If you read this, I sincerely hope I will see you at Lost 118 next year either as a runner, a volunteer or support crew. I promise, you will love it!



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