

## Holiday Lake 50K++ 2008 Race Report

Justus Stull

Friday evening I loaded up my wife and 5 month old daughter and we headed to Farmville to spend the night at a Super 8 motel. We arrived with no problem. I tried to sleep but the race was dancing through my head and the person in the room above us was watching a loud tv and jumping around. Finally around 2AM I fell asleep only to be woke up by my alarm at 4:30. I woke Kathy and Sydney up and got dressed. It was 10 degrees warmer than I first thought it would be, a great sign. We drove the 40 minutes to Holiday Lake and Kathy dropped me off in the parking lot. I was very anxious and nervous. This was my first Ultra, I have never even run a marathon before, but I had trained hard and was 100% injury free. I walked to the dining hall to find a busy scene of strong looking athletes. I remember feeling a little out of place at that moment and not sure about what I was getting myself into. I checked in and got my race number. Then I prepared for the run. I started talking to a man named John and he eased my nerves. We all went down to the start line and Dr. Horton called out names of those people who had not signed in yet. One lady yelled from the parking lot "I am coming". Then without any fanfare we were off.

We ran up the road and hit a large bottle neck where the course turned into single track. It was slow going until we crossed the dam. Then things opened up a bit. I was feeling good at this point. I was carrying two water bottles, which was one to many. This gave me the luxury of skipping the first aid station all together. I ran hard down the hill after this aid station and into the woods. I was taking an occasional walk break, mainly on the uphill. This was all part of my race plan. As we hit the pavement I was running hard again downhill. I was thinking about how much fun it was going to be coming back up all these hills in lap 2.

I arrived at the second aid station and filled up a bottle. I quickly ate some food and continued on to the first water crossing. I crossed on some rocks, next time I will just run right through. We ran down a long hill and then back up the other side. Aid station 3 was more of the same, fluid and food. I was still feeling great. I was at 12.3 miles when I passed Bradley Mongold, the eventual winner. Of course he was going the other way! I was announced as I entered aid station 4.

I was feeling good about making the first loop in 3 hours and hopefully on pace for a 6:30 finish, but the extra distance I heard rumors about had other ideas. The last few miles of the first loop was difficult as I was passing other runners on steep and narrow single track trails. I finally hit the start finish and had plenty of time to spare. I dropped a water bottle and continued into the second loop.

The second loop was like a late round heavy weight fight. I was on the ropes for a while, but as they say things do not always get worse. The trip back to aid station 4 was long and brutal, but I fought hard and made it. On this section I saw a lady running in a long heavy dress. She looked like she belonged in another era. I thought I was seeing things for a while, but my wife and I saw her on the road as we were driving away from the race. Very strange experience.

After I saw the lady in the dress I tucked in behind an experienced runner named Pete and struck up a conversation. We ran together to the next aid station. Soon after this he passed me and I never saw him again.

The trip from aid station 3 to 2 was almost all uphill and I walked a lot of it. Pete had told me not to walk to much because it gets addicting and before you know it you will be walking for 10 minutes. This section is where it began to feel better running than walking. Aid station 2 to aid station 1 was another struggle, but overall I was feeling better. I stopped at one point to clear the debris from my shoe and then continued on. I heard the cow bell ringing as I approached aid station 1. Only 3.5 miles to go!

Everything was feeling good now. I had weathered the storm and made it to the last round. I realized that I could make it in under 7 hours if I picked up my pace a little. I started to run as hard as I could. I was not going to walk, I wanted 7 hours bad. I dug deep inside myself. I wish I could of found this inner strength 10 miles ago, but at least I had it now. As I neared the dam a lady passed me. She looked fresh and was moving very fast. I crossed the dam and soon could hear the finish line across the lake. I was running hard now. I passed another runner named Sam who had been leap frogging me most of the second loop. He said "looks like you get the last pass". I told him to follow me and we can make it in under 7 hours. He started running hard behind me down the trail.

I pushed hard up the last hill and onto the road. I knew I was going to make 7 hours. As I sprinted down the hill I saw my wife and daughter, video camera in hand cheering me on. What a great way to end the race. I finished in under 7 hours and Sam finished right on my heels. We had done it. It was a great feeling to shake Dr. Horton's hand as I finished and congratulate Sam. It felt great to hug my wife and hold my daughter.

Thank you Dr. Horton for putting on a great event. Thank you to all the volunteers for giving up a beautiful day to make this possible. Thank you to Kathy for always being my number one fan. Lastly and most importantly thank you Jesus for giving me the ability to complete such a task. I now have the Ultra bug. I could not have asked for a better race or better weather (50 and sunny) to run my first Ultra.