

Hey Dr. Horton!

Below is an email I sent to a good friend and running partner who is with 2D CEB in Afghanistan...deep in the fight right now (and who planted the seed which lead to my 2010 Big Horn 100M registration). Anyway, it's not a real running report, but thought I'd pass it along. I've also attached a picture of me with my new favorite Race Director ☺



Can't wait to see you at the next one!-Toni Aurilio

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Fr Dave,

Thank you so much for the intro! I will get in touch with Lisa and start the planning. You are the best...can't wait to meet her!

It is times like these that I wish I were given the gift of writing like you. I just finished my hardest race ever – Holiday Lake 50k+ - and wish I had the words to describe it, so here's my stab at it. Remember your words of wisdom...embrace the cold, the wet, the miserable. Well, this race had it all and more. 8-10" of snow on a single track trail for 32+ miles. The trail had not been traveled on prior to the race, so the front runners had to blaze the path, which became a rutted, snow packed mess! Think of the hoof ruts you describe, but with snow. I've never turned my ankles so much...and that was just in the first 2 miles! Heather and I started together, but as you probably have gathered from our group runs, she's a very strong runner. Much stronger than me. She grew impatient behind the pack and made a move early on – around mile 1.5. I couldn't follow...she's too fast, the trail was too narrow, the snow off the track too stiff and deep, and my little legs too short and slow. I still had her in my sights at mile 4 and thought maybe, just maybe, I had a chance at a clearing to meet back up with her. That clearing never came. By mile 6, she was long gone. And there I was, zapped of energy, still not able to find my groove...heck, ANY groove - and done. Done, done, DONE! I stepped off the very narrow snow packed trail, and as I was passed by at least 20 runners, I wanted to quit. I've never wanted to quit anything more in my life. I was paralyzed. But then there you were. In my head. Singing our Big Horn mantra. And your encouragement to embrace the cold, the wet, the uneven terrain. So, I stepped back onto the trail and finished my 32+ mile journey. It was hard, Fr Dave. But, I crossed that stinkin' finish line. With one hour and 7 minutes to spare. I was never happier to see a finish line. And during this adventure, I met people I will remember for a very long time. Rick, the shy, humble guy at the pre-race dinner who I thought for sure was a mid-packer...I saw him as I was about 3-4 miles from the turn-around heading in my direction with a huge smile saying "Toni!"...he was FAST, but encouraging instead of elitist. I love the ultra community! There was an are-you-dressed-warm-enough guy from the hotel. He started that morning in the hotel with tights, pants, long sleeve shirt and short sleeve shirt over that. I said "is that all you're wearing? Are you gonna be warm enough?" He said (with a charming southern accent) "Are you kidding? I'm worried I'm over dressed!" When I saw him as he was on mile 17 or 18, he had stripped down to just his short sleeve t-shirt and looked very comfortable. There was a green shirt guy who was checking out of the motel at the same time as me...he warned me about Dr. Horton's (the Race Director) sadistic ways (he was accurate in his description) and the "+" behind the race name. Lovingly called "Horton Miles" in the ultra circles. I saw him as he was on mile 18ish. "Hey! Motel guy!" "Hey!" he hollered back. At my mile 13ish and her mile 19ish, Heather gave me a smile and the all too familiar look of a long-time training partner. The one that says "keep pushing...it sucks, but you can do it."

Then there was Tony. I found him around mile 18. "Hi, I'm Tony." "Hi, I'm Toni." "Yes, Tony." "Hey, I'm Toni." "My name is Tony." "Yes, my name is Toni, also! It's short for Antonia. Yours must be Antonio or Anthony?" "Ahhh, yes, Antonio." And so it went for the next 12+ miles. By the end, we were "partners" and crossed the finish line together. He was my Holiday Lake angel. It would've been a miserable ride without him. Even the quiet miles when tucked behind him and concentrating on his footsteps - left, right, left, right - were encouraging. So, after 7:52:56 of staring down at snow, I found myself at the finish

reuniting with fast friends. All of them proud of me no matter my poor finish time. After having a few days to reflect, I realize that this race, for me, wasn't about a good finish time, or even a good showing or effort on my part (although, I did give it effort!) but about the amazing people I met. The Race Director, Dr. Horton, sick and twisted, but insanely kind with a smile that will light a snow-packed trail. Rick, the humble runner, who showered me with praise and made me feel like a rock star even though I'm not. Tony, who made me laugh when I wanted to do anything but! Volunteers who stood for hours in the cold and served me soup and crackers and chocolate and pepsi...all with a smile. Casey, who is also training for her first 100 miler and has plenty of girl power to get her to the finish. And all the people in between. This was certainly a great race! And makes me look forward to Big Horn!

Thinking of you and all the boys in the fight.

Much love!

T and Crew