

I wanted to thank you for putting on such an outstanding race at Holiday Lake last weekend. The support was outstanding and the journey was spectacular.

It was my first Ultra and in the days leading up to the race I was a ball of nerves wondering if I truly had the guts to make it. During check-in at the 4H center Saturday morning I looked around at all these obviously experienced Ultra runners and I asked myself numerous times, "what in the world have you gotten yourself into?"

I began to wonder if I had done enough trail runs, why hadn't I cross trained more, did I do enough hill repeats, did I do enough sprints, should I have removed beer and pizza from my diet for a few months, the snow screwed up my training the last 2 weeks, how am I going to finish this race, and If I don't finish I will be forever a sissy in Horton world.

I will come back to the race details shortly. First, let me back up to Spring of '09 when in April my mother lost her 16 year battle with cancer and then barely a month later at the end of May my mother-in law passed away from the same disease. Two moms that my wife and I were care givers for during their battle now gone. It left a huge void in my life and to this day still weighs on my mind as I try to adapt without them, as well as protect my 2 boys from the pain of losing 2 grandmas so close. After they both passed, I retreated from running and really fell into a funk. I was zapped, no energy, so I said screw running (huge mistake). Weeks of hospice nurses in and out, oxygen machines humming 24x7, sleepless nights, medication timetables, all of this taking place at both my mothers house and our house had worn me out. When I tried to occasionally run, I struggled because my base was pretty much gone and mentally I was not into the runs. I was just going through the motions and not getting anything productive out of my runs.

My wife meanwhile, went the other way with the sudden life changing event, and decided to attempt her first half marathon by joining a local training team. She busted her butt for months and had a great race finishing her first Half in a little over 2 hours. I am still so proud of her for completing this accomplishment considering the circumstances. About a month before her race, Laura (wife) told me she wanted me to start running again because it would do me good. Now wait a minute, did I hear her correctly? She wants me to run again? She wants to go back to juggling schedules and kids around me training? Yes, I had heard her correctly, she said it, I am going for it. Thank You Laura for getting me up and going again, you don't even know how much it has helped me. I heart you.

Slowly and steadily I started getting back into running and began to actually enjoy the miles once more. At this point a few of my crazy running "chuckleheads" as we are called by Deb asked me to join them trail running. Part of Deb's definition of a Chucklehead is: the kind of person her mother warned her not to associate with. Apparently Deb did not heed her mother's warning as most of her friends are chuckleheads. After a few weeks I really fell in love with the trails and enjoyed the experience so much more than the road which I had run consistently for the past almost 4 years. Holiday Lake was the scheduled race on all my cohorts calendars and soon it became THE race on my calendar. Here is where I need to give a special thanks to these people because after my wife told me to get running again, you guys also made me find my inner fire to hammer it again. So to Hurley, Deb, Eddie, JT, B, and Chris, THANK YOU!!! I truly appreciate the company and inspiration all you guys gave me as I chased you thru the woods and dark roads for weeks on end. Yes, I am the slowest of the bunch, probably a direct correlation to my love of pizza and beer, and thus the finishing order at HL would continue to hold true on race day.

Now back to Feb.13th and HL 50K++. After I go thru my pre-race checklist in my head for the 1,000th time, we finally head outside for the start. My heart is jumping out of my chest, and I vaguely hear the prayer as I am already praying for myself just to live thru this race. National anthem being sung, Horton yells "GO", and off we go up the snowy slippery road in the dark. Once we turn into the woods I talk to mom and tell her "here we go ma, hang on because you and Doris (mom in law) are going with me for 32-33 miles today". The snow is tough to move thru and I am getting frustrated because I can't settle into my rhythm. Relax Jimmy!! If you get worked up and let your temper flare you will crash and burn. Thankfully, cooler heads like Chris, Eddie, and Deb prevail as they keep us moving together at a nice pace for me, although probably a little slow for them. We all stay together for 8 or so miles and Chris takes off. I do see him at the turnaround briefly where of course he checks on me to see how I feel and then he heads back out to run a negative split finishing in 6:54:58. Guy is tough as nails and I have learned so much from him. I plan to learn a heck of a lot more from Chris as we have many miles ahead of us to cover in the next years.

So now it is myself, Eddie, and Deb together. Sidenote: Hurley (chucklehead # 1) couldn't run because of an injury which sucked for us since he can tell the funniest damn stories for hours and he was the instigator in doing HL in the first place. Missed ya Hurley! Get that kankle better so you can do the next one with me. After we hit the 3rd aid station Eddie gets ahead of us and stays with another fellow Richmond runner the rest of the race. Now, Eddie had never even done a marathon before because he claims it takes too much time to train, so instead he decided an Ultra was the way to go. Eddie had a great race and finished in 7:31:40, nice work Chucklehead # 2. Dude is in amazing shape and became a great friend in a short amount of time as we trained together frequently.

Down to me and Deb now and we are a few miles from the turnaround. We cross a little stream and I step on a board that is snow covered and end up flopping on my back. Usually the falls are left for our buddy JT to perform, but apparently I

took over for him today since he could not join us. Deb tells me it looked graceful, I get up, and we head to the turnaround. Just before the turnaround coming the other way are the 2 guys I met that morning from the VA Beach area. They have both done some insane amount of Ultras and they promised me I would have fun today. Anyway, one of them yells as he passes me "YEAH VIRGIN, KEEP IT GOING". I wish I could remember both their names, but thanks for the encouragement, it helped me tremendously in losing my virginity just before Valentine's Day!!

Made it to the turnaround in 3:30 and both Deb and I run faster than we had all day to the restroom. Out of the restroom and inside real quick to change my socks. Shoelaces are frozen solid, rip off my sneakers, and have to use my teeth to untie them. New dry socks, by far the best move I made all day. Turkey rollup, pickle from Eddie's turkey sub, piece of a ham sandwich, potatoes, and off we go on the second loop. Oh crap, I forgot to drink my coca cola. I stress about this for a little while as I am feeling slightly nauseous. Now is when I know it is going to get interesting the rest of the way. Time to suck it up Jimmy, keep moving, keep chasing Deb. At this point Deb a.k.a. "The Warrior" is slowing down considerably for me. I tell her numerous times to go, I will be fine, please don't wait for me. The Warrior refuses to listen to me and keeps chugging along insisting she is not waiting for me and she likes the pace. This coming from the crazy woman who ran a Half marathon up Pikes Peak one day and then the next day ran a full marathon both up and down Pike's Peak. Oh yeah, and she also ran HL last year as well as Promise Land. Now you know why she is THE WARRIOR. I am now digging deep to just survive station to station and asking my mother to somehow help me keep my legs moving. I remind myself over and over no matter what pain I feel can never compare to what my mother and Doris endured in their fight against cancer, so I begin to mumble "BRING IT ON!!" The miles are all running together now and so I think it was somewhere around mile 23 or 24 that I get a burst of energy and feel really good. I ride this high for awhile and can only think this is my mother and Doris making me go. Deb and I reach the last aid station and I know now I will certainly finish what I started out to do about 4 months ago, I will also get that shirt from Horton and not even need the extra hour. The Warrior finally takes off from me with a couple miles to go after I tell her for the 100th time to GO. She finished strong and actually caught Eddie right before the line. She tells a great story of seeing Eddie on the road when she came out of the woods and giving it all she had to catch him. Great work Deb. Thanks for keeping me moving, watching out for me, and making my first Ultra a great experience. Deb finished in 7:31:34.

So here I come out of the woods, my legs glad to feel something different other than snow or mud. I told myself earlier that once I hit that ever elusive road I was going to let it fly with whatever I had left in the tank. Considering how sore I was, my legs actually did cooperate and I was able to pull off a good strong kick down the entire road to the finish. I thanked my mother and Doris as I came closer to the line. I thought I was going to lose it emotionally with a few hundreds yards to go, but I kept my composure and across the line I went. Dr. Horton shook my hand and told me nice job. 7:34:47. Mission accomplished and yes I enjoyed it.

Maybe Laura has created a monster not only by having me get back into running but now into Ultra running. I really hope so, but we shall see. I am seriously considering an attempt at Promise Land in April since it will be the same week my mother passed away. I feel like it is where I need to be and what I need to do to get thru that week of my life. Stay tuned and see if I can do it. Thanks again to everyone involved with HL 50K++, you did a super job and I never would have survived without the course support.

This one was for you Mom & Doris, and all the others that follow will be too!!

Rock on.

Jimmy Manning - Chucklehead # 3