

Holiday Lake 50k would have ideal conditions. After last year's snowy conditions I was sure that this year would be a more enjoyable race. Last year I ran 7 hours and 5 minutes which is just 5 minutes behind a friend of mine who had challenged me to beat him at another race. Since I was not trying to beat him last year and I was only 5 minutes behind him, I thought that this year I should be able to make up time on him since I ran a 5 hour 26 minute 50k road race in November last year.

Then I saw the numbering system in an email with the challenge from Dr. David Horton saying that I was going to be 199 out of just over 300 while my friend that I finished 5 minutes behind last year was given a race number less than 50. Even though I am almost 50 years old and know better, I took the bait and told my wife that I was going to beat my friend. Game on! She laughed and thought that I could not be serious. After all, he runs ultras all of the time and I do not train to run fast. My friend is a very good technical and uphill runner. I am better on the downhills and roads so my strategy was to try and not loose to much time on the hills or the root infested parts of the trails.

On race morning I decided that I was going to take Dr. Horton's challenge to go the next level. I was going to be the absolute last person to cross the finish line and I was going to pass my friend before the finish line. When the race started I was talking with my wife and forgot that I had to take off the sweatshirt she had given me to keep me warm. When I finally got it off and started running for the finish line all of the runners had passed through the gate. I was surprised that family members seemed to be carried through the gate after the runners like water through a sinking ship. I had to politely wait and squeeze through them to get out of the starting gate. I knew it would be a challenge but I was determined to also have fun.

The beginning is all up hill which meant that if I could run without walking (not my strength) I could take out a good number of runners. So I put my head down and ran as fast as I could till I got to the stairs into the woods. While waiting to go up the stairs I was able to catch my breath. I took my first hard fall after only about 2 1/2 miles because I was running hard through some roots. The girl behind me helped me up and

I was able to catch up to the people that were around me before I fell. I broke the tension when I asked everyone around me if they thought I had drawn first blood for the race. We hit an uphill stretch that we had to walk and the other runners were looking at how banged up I was. Fortunately there was just a scrape on my left knee, a few scratches and some mud. We all started talking and that was the first of many good conversations I had along the route. Two of the people around me were doing their first 50k and I tried to encourage them. As I ran with one of Dr Horton's students through the first two miles I was able to learn a bit about how much his students enjoy his energy. She told me that they are required to read some running books and write a report about them. I told her a few of my favorites including one that features Dr. Horton running the Barkley marathon, which is not a marathon but a very hard 100 miler.

The stretch between aid station 3 and 4 back the same route to aid station 5 are the toughest for me because they are hilly and technical. I reached my lowest point during this stretch when I fell the third time. As I was laying on my back I thought about quitting. Thankfully, the runner behind me helped me get up and I was back on my way.

When I reached aid station 5 my wife told me that I was 14 minutes behind my friend. The stretch out of aid station 5 and the last stretch to aid station 6 are all up hill. I forced myself to run as fast as I could but I knew my pace was not much faster than a quick walk. I was determined not to let my friend get too far ahead of me so I pushed the pace as hard as I could. Then came the down hill sections, water crossings, and small up hill sections to aid station 6. Just before aid station 7 I saw my friend and I yelled to him that I was daring him to walk. He laughed and said that he was having some muscle cramps. I told him that I appreciated the motivation he gave me. About a mile after aid station 7 my right calf and my right thigh started cramping. I could not believe it! I was determined that I was not going to let my body stop me from finishing now that I had met my goal of catching my friend. I ended up walking a few of the hilly sections but still passed another 5 people before the finish. At the finish, Dr. Horton greeted me and shook my hand. My wife took a quick picture of us arm in arm and I showed him my number and told him that I started dead last and who I had beaten. He laughed and

said my friend is a very good runner and that it was quite an accomplishment. Even though I am not a front runner it was great to hear some encouragement from Dr. Horton. I can see why he motivates so many people. Thank you Dr. Horton