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It has been nine days since I completed my eighth Holiday Lake 50K+++ . I've run this race in the cold, snow, rain, and mud. I've run it feeling great, feeling crappy, and feeling fairly neutral. This year is especially meaningful since I am debating retiring from ultras. This race was my 50th ultra, but in some ways it was my first.

In March 2009, I ended up with a blood clot in my calf (the size of a golf ball) following the Shamrock Marathon. While in the hospital, I was diagnosed with Factor V, a clotting disorder. This incident combined with two other clotting issues from my past led to a lifetime prescription of Coumadin. I was warned about the side effects - fatigue, stiffness, anemia, necrosis, etc. yet I returned to running - but with a greater sense of caution.

I have now ran for 2 years on Coumadin. My dosage has nearly doubled since my original diagnosis. My level of fatigue and muscle stiffness has gotten steadily worse. This all came to head at the 2010 Mountain Masochist; I had to drop due to just sheer exhaustion and total stiffness.

So, I debated. I pondered. I agonized. I entered Holiday Lake. I decided that if my experience was too bad, I would simply stick to shorter races. I was okay with this decision. I wasn't happy, but I was okay.

I've struggled with longer runs. Nothing is worse than feeling fairly good but having legs that just won't move. It happens every race; it happens every run. I was almost expecting to just feel horrible, finish, and then permanently retire my ultra gene.

Then I saw the race numbers for the race. 249? Normally, I could care less about seedings or times or even results. But did Horton really think I was number 249? Shallow? Maybe, but it certainly got my running juices flowing. I had to show Horton how wrong he was with giving me that number.

Race day came with a supreme reluctance to get out of bed. I felt like I had already ran 50K+++++. But that feeling is nothing new. I feel that way almost every morning now. I got moving and hit the road with plenty of time to spare.

The ride was uneventful. Check in was quick. I went back to my car to begin my regular routine of debating what I am going to wear. I was feeling colder than normal so I added a jacket and off to the start I went.

My timing must have been perfect. I got to the start, wiggled around a bit, adjusted my iPod, and then off we went. As I climbed the first hill, I actually felt good. I tried to move steadily and comfortably.

The first aid station was suddenly there, and I could not believe it. I was feeling a little bit like the Christopher of old. I grabbed some soda and motored along.

Things were going along quite marvelously. No stiffness, no worries, no real problems. Then I got to the first water crossing. The cold water gave birth to the first signs of stiffness. But I kept going, kept running, and tried not to think of the struggle to come.

Soon, I was circling the lake, going down the steps, crossing the dam, and heading toward the turnaround. Runners were flying past, heading back out. I was amazed at how fast they were going. It is so cool that so many fast runners were at this race. It was also cool that so many new runners were trying their first ultra.

I was having such good thoughts that I was really not paying attention to where my feet were going. Crash, Bam, Boom and headfirst I went into a forest of roots. I cut my knee, bent a couple of fingers backwards, and knocked the air out of me. How stupid.

From the fall to the turnaround, I had avalanche-like, cascading thoughts of just quitting. It would be so easy to just say goodbye and head to my car. I

could get a Coke and a milkshake. I could just escape. I refused to look at my watch.

I reached the turnaround at 2:25 - much faster than I expected. To avoid even considering the growing desire to head up the hill to my car, I skipped the aid table, switched hand bottles, and kept going. The stiffness was there along with sheer fatigue, but I just kept moving.

I recircled the lake; my energy was ignited by all the runners heading to the turnaround who did not know the rules of the trails. I am on my second loop; they are supposed to move aside for me, but they would not. I got bumped a couple of times. I could have just barreled over some of the idiots, but I didn't. I could have mouthed off, but I didn't. Even though I was in front of them, I stepped aside and made my way on the sides of the trails. I used this anger to fuel my steady, but slow, conquering of the power lines and the fire roads.

I will not lie. I was starting to feel really bad, but I kept going. Out of nowhere, I was at the last aid station. Only four miles to go. I could not believe it. Two years ago, I had reached this same aid station and then took over an hour to make it to the finish.

I kept shuffling along, but I started to feel better. Where was this coming from? I was passing a few runners. One guy even said as I went past, "I thought you were done back there." I powered up the hills and then pumped my arms in the air as I reached the pink 1 mile marking. I picked up my pace again. I was getting faster. My stiffness was still there, but my legs seem to moving of their own accord. I was soon powering down the hill, passing another runner. I crossed in 5:14:40.

Well, after I stopped, the stiffness and fatigue anxiously returned. I was spent, but I was not done. I am going to do the LUS this year. I may have to struggle a bit more as I do the next three ultras, but it is certainly not time for retirement. Notice, I say this after hobbling around on Sunday, 2/13/2011.

Enough for now. See you in March as the adventure continues . . .

Christopher Calfee