

David Broman – Race Report – Holiday Lake 50K+

Previous – 2010 – 7:10 / 2016 – 6:33

After finishing the Charleston Marathon in 4:06 which was 30 minutes faster than my last Marathon, (Phoenixville 1/1/16) I felt very strong for the upcoming Holiday Lake. After checking the weather I was even more confident as early predictions showed a mild day with little chance for rain. This was going to be awesome. Fast forward two weeks as things changed just a bit from the early predictions...17 degrees with 15 mph winds...OK no worries as it's hitting my back just as much as my face right?

One of my favorite things about the Holiday Lake race is the weather. My last Holiday Lake saw six to eight inches of snow the morning of the race. This race is touted as relatively easy with limited elevation changes. Understand that the weather makes up the difference for any lack of hills.

Arriving early enough to get a good spot, check in with the staff and downing some breakfast had me ready. The weather had me trying to figure out how much to wear, shorts or tights, gloves or mittens...too many choices.

The race was not as populated this year as past but I've always been impressed with the groups that race the Beast Series. A hearty bunch with a great mix of young and old, racers and middle of the pack runners like me; all with a common goal – to enjoy the day.

We lined up, sang the National Anthem and took off head lamps showing us the way up the hill to the woods. The first mile was marked. Why was the first mile marked? This I hadn't seen before, (didn't remember it from the 2010 race either) but it would make sense later...much later. Mile 1 had me at 11:45. A bit slower than normal but OK as it was dark and I didn't remember the course. I'd make up the time later. I settled in the next few miles at the targeted pace of 10 minute miles and all was well except that the cold weather had frozen my water line. This wasn't something I planned for...then I hit the first aid station, (mile 4.5) to music and cheers...I love this race! I shared my troubles with Kevin who, without flinching told me to take off my jacket and put the Camelbak inside my jacket. He told me with great confidence that within two miles it'd be thawed and I was off to conquer the lake! I hit the next two miles and took a drink...it was cold but it was flowing. Problem solved...Kevin rocked.

In the next ten or so miles I maintained my target pace of 10 – 10:30 miles and felt awesome; the cold was there. The wind was there but the ground was frozen and the mud wasn't there. The snow wasn't there. It was going to be a good day and I was going to beat six hours.

The field really thinned out which challenged me to actually pay attention to the trail markers. I think I added at least a mile throughout the race just because I didn't pay attention to the markers. It wasn't the markers fault; it was me not paying attention, having too much fun or just barreling ahead...torpedoes be damned.

At mile fifteen or so you hit the dam. You navigate down a bunch of stairs which are freaking steep and cross the dam. No problem right? I went flying down the stairs and jumped onto the landing. All was

good except that I felt this little twinge in the middle of my right hamstring. I figured it was just fatigue and it'd work itself out.

I had been running by myself for the most part. I'd had conversations with Mr. Rogers, Sunshine, Speedy and the Virgin. All names I'd given to people as I'd never remember their real names. We'd pass each other at various points and see one another at the aid stations. All looked strong but the race wasn't half over. We all still had the dream still strong in our vision.

By mile 16 at the 4H center, (the turnaround) my hamstring was royally pissed. I actually thought for a brief minute to walk up to the car, (parked about 100 feet up the hill) and call it a day. The only thing was I paid for this and if I didn't finish I wouldn't get the shirt along with explaining to everyone why I got my first DNF). After calculating that I could probably walk the second half and still finish under the eight hour cut off I decided what the heck...how much could it hurt?

The next three miles saw me cursing, pouting and contemplating turning around. I ran 15, 17 and 15 minute miles. At that point I sat down and took inventory. I was OK. Nothing was bleeding. I was able to run as long as I greatly reduced my stride and focused on something other than my leg. For the next two miles, (20 & 21) I ran a 14 & 15 minute miles but I ran. At that point I finally got a bit of a rhythm. I started pulling off 11 – 12 minute miles. I was back! I may not break any records but I would finish and get my shirt. All in all it would be a good day.

The way back at Holiday is where you meet people who you will race with. These people have your pace. They've settled in like you. They are familiar and you judge how you're doing against how they're doing. Speedy was long gone. Mr. Rogers, Sunshine and the Virgin all passed me shortly after the turn around. I had a new group of people I was racing with but I wanted to catch the Virgin. For whatever reason I didn't want him to beat me today.

As I felt better I picked up the pace and was steadily passing people. Focus and leg speed was my key as I didn't dare lengthen my stride.

The Holiday is enjoyable for a multitude of reasons but one is the variety of terrain. There is a long stretch that is open territory on what I'd call a Jeep road. It's in these areas that you can see your competition and develop your strategies to clip one and then another. It was in one of those stretches I saw the virgin and right in front of him was Sunshine and yes...Mr. Rogers. Onward and forward with speed, purpose and focus...they were in the distance but I wasn't without hope.

I don't know at what mile the hill is but damn. This hill goes on forever. All of us were walking up this puppy. I could see my prey all walking up the hill so I walked. I didn't want to piss off my hamstring and screw up my great victory after all I think I had twelve or so miles left. Plenty of time to catch them and secure my victory...

At the top of this monster hill is an aid station. Sunshine, Mr. Rogers and the Virgin all were there as I arrived. We exchanged pleasantries, noted our various aches and pains and discussed our postrace celebrations. It was here that I knew I was going to beat the Virgin. He felt great. He had decided he

was going to push the pace. I just had a feeling he hadn't been challenged yet and we still had a lot of race left. We hadn't yet hit the mental half way point yet. In my mind the half way point in this race was at mile 25. That's where the body stopped and the mind took over. If you weren't mentally ready for it...suffer you will.

I left the aid station before the three and focused on a steady focused pace. At this point I was passing people picking up speed and confident that I'd finish in 6:30 which wasn't the goal but better than my previous race and a heck of a lot better than a DNF. I would get my shirt.

I knew we'd have two more aid stations. My plan was to pass the first without stopping then a brief stop at the last station to thank Kevin and let him know how much I appreciated his wisdom. I was maintaining a comfortable pace still in the 11 – 12 minute range and felt I would surely beat my friends. It was then that I saw Thor. Thor was the name I gave a guy I saw at the 4H center during the prerace meal. This guy was huge. He had a flowing beard that covered his face and half his chest. He had decided on wearing shorts that showed his monster legs that could surely hold up a bus. I had seen him at mile 14. He was on his way back around the lake frozen beard and all. What happened? I decided to take a minute and walk with him. He said it just wasn't his day. His legs gave out and he wanted to save himself for another day. Made sense...but not for me; I had miles to go and I wasn't giving ground at this point. Off I went. Ouch...damn went off way too fast.

I passed the Aid station; waved and thanked the volunteers, (the best in the business) and kept my pace. The last aid station was in site and my plan was working. Mile 28 was in the books and I was on pace to get in under 6:30. I stopped and looked for Kevin. I heard him yelling asking me, "Did it work? Did it work?" Son of a gun remembered me! After a hug and a hearty thank you I was off.

In the distance I heard a woman laughing. Who in their right mind would be laughing at mile 29 in this race? I'd find out soon enough it was Sunshine. I picked her name well. She was laughing hooting and hollering to beat the band and she was running. She caught me at mile 30 which I was fine with as this was her day. She had run a terrific race and was the victor even if she wasn't racing me for I was racing her.

At this point she was the only person who passed me since mile 20 and I wanted to keep it that way. I kept it that way until I saw the one mile mark. Remember the one mile mark? Why had they marked the one mile location and no other? Now it made sense. I had one mile to go. 6:30 was not happening but 6:35 would. I thought I kicked it into gear. Unfortunately so did everyone else for two other racers had just a bit more in the tank than I did...no worries as I was filled with joy, pain and joy? Did I say joy?

We made the hard left out of the woods onto the road downhill to the finish. Blue, (he was wearing all blue) passed me in the woods and I was OK with letting him go. Young buck.

This last half mile is one of the best parts of the race for the middle pack runners. The fast crew is leaving so you get to wave to them and the supporters are hooting and hollering for you. At this point it's all about the glory of a job well done. I looked behind me and didn't see Mr. Rogers or the Virgin. I was OK. My leg was screaming but all was good. I hollered to Blue that I was going to catch him telling

him not to let the fat old man catch him! He didn't have anything to worry about but he did look back and smile...

I was greeted by Dr. Horton at the finish with a generous smile and a hearty handshake giving me congratulations. Looking at my watch – 6:33:33...I got my shirt. All in all a happy day...

A great race – first timers, veterans...it doesn't matter. This is just a great race. I'm off to the Hat 50K followed by the Dam 50k and the Promise Land. I'm sure I'll see Kevin. I hope to see Sunshine, Mr. Rogers, the Virgin and Thor. They all helped me realize that my races stopped being true races a long time ago...