

Mary Scruggs Holiday Lake 50K++ race report.

I arrived at the 4h center around 5:45 so I could park, gather my nerves and have time to stretch. I went to the bathroom twice before we started. I had toilet paper in my pack, but I really didn't want to use it. I put my drop bag with the rest and suddenly it was 6:20. We all lined up to the start around 6:20 and sang the national anthem and Horton led the prayer. Next thing I knew we were off! I started up the hill with Elizabeth, most of the runners were excited and chatting, but we were silent. I think we were both realizing what we'd signed up for in that moment. By the time we got off the road to the single track, Elizabeth was gone and it was just me. I kept thinking you can do this, you trained really hard, a lot of people believe in you to finish, there's going to be food and all your runner friends will be at the aid stations. You will be fine. Just keep running.

I got to the first aid station in what seemed like a second just as the sun came out. I saw Bethany and Gina with jugs of what looked like water which turned out to be tailwind (shows you how new I am). I'd never had tailwind, but I heard it was like Gatorade but better and everyone seems to tolerate it well so I had a cup of tailwind and got out of there. I tried to remember Horton's long list of tips for first timers- 8. get what you need and leave. 12. Don't tie your shoes too tight. 39. Don't stop even if you throw up. 32. Run right through the middle of the stream crossing. 2. Don't run too fast first half. About 5 or 6 miles in I tripped on a root and fell. Crap. I'll see if there's blood at the next aid station, I have to keep moving. Despite the fall, I still felt good so I kept running. I had my strava app on in my pack and I heard I was at about a 10:20 pace. This was about how I was running on the training run and felt like I was running too fast then so I tried to slow down a little. 2. Don't run too fast. Got it. Slow down, Mary Ann.

When I got to AS2, I heard someone yell out "Go Carrie! You're doing awesome!" Who the hell is Carrie? Oh, that's me! Mary! Its Tracy and Rue! I was so happy to see them. They asked how I was doing, and truthfully, at this point I really was fine. I thought I should start eating, so I snagged some oreos, a banana and more tailwind and ran away. I was feeling like a rockstar. This guy in a white shirt and I started talking because he liked my tattoo. He was so friendly and congratulated me on my first ultra. Everyone kept saying really nice things like "good morning" and "great job, sister." What a friendly bunch ultrarunners are. I got to AS3 and I was very happy to see that Jon had really gotten the oreos I'd requested the night before. More tailwind, more oreos, and off to the turnaround!

This was kind of a long section. My cousin Amy had cleared her Saturday to come see me and I was excited to see her at the turnaround. I remember the first time I ran this loop with Kim, Rhonda, and Dave; this section sucked then. By this point a lot of people were coming back through on their second loop. I saw my friend Jeremy and I tried to high five him because he was killing it, but I think he missed it and punched my hand instead. I kept running and definitely almost fell off the bank a couple times to let other runners through. Race tip 37. Move over for faster runners. When I was less than a mile from the turnaround, I saw Elizabeth. Wow, she's rolling today! Wait, no, she looks ill. This can't be good, I hope she's ok and she isn't running too fast.

Finally, I saw my crew chief, Amy, at the turnaround. She was almost as happy to see me as I was to see her. She took some of my trash and gave me ibuprofen and shared some really encouraging words to

keep me going. Then I remembered race tip 8. I need to keep moving, get what you need and leave. So I ran away onto the second loop. I saw I finished the first loop in 2:57. Wow, I could finish in 6 hours!

Thanks to Horton's race tip 24., I had prepared myself for the possibility that the second loop might be the hardest thing I've ever done. And it was. I hit a wall about two miles before AS4 but kept pushing myself to get there and regroup. I had some more tailwind when I got there and this nice girl helped me fill up my bladder. I kept going. I felt better and I was looking forward to getting to the next aid station. Just 4 miles until you're at the next aid station. My friend, Kim, and I kept passing each other the entire race and she was so encouraging. She kept asking me how I was feeling and I really appreciated it. I stopped to use that toilet paper I was avoiding somewhere between aid stations and never saw Kim again until the end. She had mentioned she thought she was going to PR and I was really hoping she did.

I was feeling good when I got to aid station 5 (there's pictures to prove it). More oreos, potatoes, tailwind. Gone. And what felt like 10 miles that was actually 4 miles I hit the "dark spot" I was told would happen. I was on this single track running parallel to the road and for the first time in the race, I was truly alone. There was no people, just me, the trees, and this random guy walking alongside the road who clapped for me when I passed. I kept hearing voices that I thought were coming from the next aid station. Well I kept running and realized I had lost my mind and I was actually hearing voices that were not there because it was a long time before I made it to the next aid station. But when I got there Todd and Gina snapped me out of it even though I honestly don't even remember what they said to me. All I remember was I had salt, potatoes, chips, and a newfound will to keep moving and ran almost the whole way to the finish. I was so ready for it to be over.

Finally I made it to the road. About half way down the road, I saw Elizabeth and she had this huge, ear to ear smile on her face as she was walking toward her car and cheered for me. Then I could see the finish and I tried really hard to hold back tears. I couldn't believe this was real, I only signed up for this race because other people believed in me, not myself. I had been consumed with thoughts of being late (I'd been having the same dream about once a week that I was late for the race), missing cutoffs, and injuries for the last 2 months. I found out what I was made of by running this race. I heard Horton yelling my name over his megaphone and I crossed the finish line and shook his hand. It was everything like one of those moments where there's a crowd and noise but you hear nothing because you're so in it. I finished my first ultra in 6:24 when I had predicted a time of 7-7:30. Horton's race tip 50. You will live, the pain is bearable, and you can FINISH.