

Promise Land 50K 2013- Jamie Swyers

Being injured is no fun. And in my brief ultra running “career” it seems to be what I do best. After suffering severe hip pain in October from what turned out to be a femoral stress fracture, I virtually disappeared from the running scene for 7 months. I didn’t run a step for months and returned to running with short 1 mile runs on the treadmill for many months more. Promise Land 50K was always the goal for my comeback race, but when I was finally starting to get back in some sort of shape (“round is a shape”) the hip pain reappeared only a few weeks before the race. I was frustrated and disappointed but I decided to take it easy and still try to run Promise Land.

The pre-race briefing brought back so many memories. Three years ago Promise Land was my first ultra, wide-eyed and nervous, not knowing what to expect, or that I would have a top 5, 6:22 finish. Brent and I had just started dating and training for this race was possibly the biggest component of our time spent together. Then two years ago Brent proposed and we ran the entire race together and he pushed me to finish under 6:30. Last year we had just returned from our honeymoon and I got to help my new sister in law run her first ultra, also throwing down my first official DNF when I got so cold pacing up Apple Orchard Mountain that I quit after the hail got bad (Sissy!). There is a reason why our license plate says “PL50KLV” (Promise Land 50K love). It holds so many memories for us. It is my FAVORITE race.

I slept better than I ever have at the start of an ultra. I actually was shocked that I woke up feeling refreshed and rested. My body felt rested and strong and I knew it was going to be a great day. I ate my bagel (and a half) and enjoyed it, even at 4:45 am. Good sign for the stomach. Heading out at 5:30, I started with Brent and said “Let’s break 6, I know we can”. We ran the hill as much as we could and passed a lot of runners in the dark. I didn’t know my placement at that point but I do know I made it to the top of the 4.5 mile climb in 54 minutes and I lost Brent. I didn’t see any females as I started down the grassy road but enjoyed this section, as I usually do. I leap-frogged with a few men and enjoyed some conversation with some younger college runners.

I saw a female runner behind me as I headed toward the parkway and I didn’t really pick up the pace but I kept what I felt was a solid pace. I took my 2nd GU at this point, sticking to my plan of 1 GU ever 40-50 minutes. This section passed quickly despite the climb and the road down to Sunset Fields was wonderful. I was having so much fun. Coming in to Sunset Fields I saw my parents! It was my mom’s first time coming to an ultra, which is not surprising since she thinks these ultra events are “stupid” “dangerous” and “the same as self-mutilation”. She DOES have a point. I got a huge boost giving them a hug and the Aid Station workers yelled 2nd woman.

As I ran down the technical section, I knew I must be running way too fast. The top 3 seed females were solid and I knew I had no shot at beating them. I expected at least 2 to pass me shortly. But I pushed those thoughts away as I barreled down the rocks. Technical terrain is one of my stronger points and I wanted to make up as much time as I could. Coming into AS4, I saw Dr. Horton. He looked surprised and said “Keep eating and drinking GIRL!” I had already

taken 3 gels at that point and I was feeling great physically. I ran down the road without stopping feeling quite happy and strong. I heard footsteps behind and saw Martha Nelson (3rd seed woman). I think I said “Good! Now all is right in the world” as she blew by me like we weren’t doing 7:40 pace on the road. I really was happy she had passed, I didn’t have any business being ahead of her. Not too long after we turned on the single track trail I saw Emily Warner (1st seed woman). She went by me and I told her she was doing great and we talked about how I start too fast and she thinks she starts too slow. Well, that makes perfect sense.

Now that the top 3 seed woman were all ahead (I never saw Alison Bryant the entire race), I felt content and less uneasy about my spot. Unfortunately, this is also where I physically started to go downhill. I had started way too fast and I was sure of that when I hit 20 miles in 3:10. My legs started feeling like lead and mentally I started feeling discouraged. I saw another female close behind and I was tired of being passed but I couldn’t will myself to run hills much anymore. I hiked a lot in this section, it is the section I like least in the race, because I always think it is less uphill than it is. My stomach was still feeling okay but GU tasted terrible. (I did stick to my nutrition plan, which saved me here). All the sudden I saw Rene Orth behind me. I was surprised, it is her first ultra and she is an LU student in Dr. Horton’s running class. She is GOOD. I spent enough time with her on long runs to know she would have a solid performance, and definitely top 10 but she still surprised me here. She looked strong and I knew I would let her go and not pursue. I never saw her again.

I came into the AS before Apple Orchard feeling run down from my least favorite section. Coming up the turn around, I was walking chowing down on a few saltines to ease my stomach. I saw my husband and a few females close behind. Brent said “Are you not feeling good?”, which annoyed me slightly so I said “I’m feeling awesome!” (which I did mean, because I knew we were really almost done). Hiking up Apple Orchard was actually more fun for me than the previous section and getting to the top I had a huge high. Brent wasn’t far behind and he was with a female so I didn’t stop and kept moving through. Todd Thomas was sitting, and got up and said he was ready to run again. We were at 5:31 and knew 29 minutes was virtually impossible for more than 4.5 miles at this point. But we wanted to come as close as we could! When I hit the road both Brent and the female runner I kept seeing all day, Robin Watkins flew by. Not willing to chase, and knowing I had no shot at a sub 6 hour, I accepted the 6th spot graciously and really enjoyed the last 2 miles. When I saw the infamous squirrel... I was giddy with excitement. Sitting down sounded amazing.

The clock time said 6:04 as I finished and I received my Horton hug and top 10 finish bag. My parents were there and it made being done all the more sweet. I was so happy to PR by almost 20 minutes with less mileage than I’ve ever done before in training. 6th woman was more than I could have hoped for and I was very excited. I found out Brent beat me by only 1 minute. (So close!)

Promise Land 50K is a very special race, runners can’t help but come back. It’s a wonderful course with great people and you really do get an “experience”.

