Larry's Everest – A 2010 Leadville 100 Journey

- Mark, December, 2010



21 Hours into the 24 Hours of Leadville Mountain Bike Race:

It's 6:55AM. Above tree-line Colorado's great peaks, Elbert and Massive, are ablaze with the first Sun of an early September morning. Dona passes me a waffle drenched in syrup as we prepare to start mile 177 and lap 11 of the inaugural 24 Hours of Leadville. Two weeks ago I'd finished the 2010 Leadville Trail 100 run and with it the Leadman race series. But this new race, the Pb24¹, offers another shiny silver or gold buckle opportunity and a chance for 3 in a season from the Leadville trail races. Having completed ten laps and with 3 more hours until the finish line closes there's still time for one more. As I add extra 'vertical' to my season......and climb, the enormity of the year is like a companion on the trail. "How in the hell had it come to this", I wonder aloud?

2010 marked the year I would attempt a 10th Leadville Trail 100 Mountain Bike (MTB) finish. That endeavor had started back in 1997 a few seasons after the purchase of an old KHS fully ridged MTB, my first. I was immediately hooked after tiring of years of road and trail running. A MTB racing friend I came to know through the original Sand Creek Race series in Colorado Springs, Darin Carl, told me about the new



Leadville Trail 100 race and I was immediately intrigued. With 4 sub-9 hour and 5 over-9 hour finishes, I would make a focused effort in 2010 to even that score but what better way than to race the Leadman? In mulling over the commitment in January Dona sent me Larry DeWitt's blog (Quest for Leadman 2009, http://questforleadman09.blogspot.com/), a highly recommended treatise for anyone with interest in the series. After several readings, the obsessing began.

The Leadman journey, now charted after consuming Larry's journals, would require a crew. Larry's record in 2009 of Gold buckles in both the 100 bike and run and a cumulative finish time of 43 hours and 22 minutes was the

¹ Many have come to refer to Leadville by the Periodic Table Symbol for lead, Pb

summit. The series is 5 events in a 7 week span: the Leadville Trail Marathon, Silver Rush 50 bike or run, Leadville 100 Mountain Bike, Leadville 10K, and the Race Across the Sky Leadville Trail 100 Run, a total of 283 miles. Assaulting that mountain would take 15 years of ultra-racing experience and the very best support possible.

Advice was sought from key allies: Dona, first and foremost, my crew chief extraordinaire, with her usual enthusiasm, gave the endeavor thumbs up. Phil, who we simply could not begin without, came out of "coach retirement" to join the team. His guidance in 2003 had led to a good finish in the world's first MTB Ironman (Park City Mountain Extreme Triathlon) and a few weeks after that to my first and only 100 Run start and finish (http://www.run100s.com/reports/lt03mw.txt). Greg would prove critical to the equation as we constantly challenge each other along through our race seasons. My regular riding partner, friend, and an obsessed MTBer, Greg required just a little arm twisting before he signed up for the 100 bike and Silver Rush (SR). Joe, inspiring even years after retiring from bike racing, immediately signed on to pace in the run. Vicki may have offered the single most motivational tidbit of the entire season when she pointed out the 2010 run I had planned would have to be done 5 hours faster than in 2003,

"Mark!?!? That's FIVE hours!" And finally Joan, winner of 2 Leadville 100s herself, was the most enthusiastic of all; she, I knew, looked forward to living vicariously through my trials.

With family, friends, coach, and crew assembled - the stage was set. On the last day of January I logged onto the Leadville Trail 100 web site and with some trepidation selected just the 1 box marked Leadman.

The first event of the Leadman series is the Leadville Trail Marathon on July 3rd. Brutally rough terrain on a course starting in Leadville at 10152 feet and climbing to the asphyxiatingly high Mosquito pass at an elevation of 13185 feet makes this one as hard as they get. The training Phil devised allowed

for virtually no taper and it was as if this was another weekend training long run. In finishing in just over 5 hours I never felt lively and suffered along with





everyone else up and down the Mosquito Pass road. I was off to a trailing start, 9 minutes behind Larry's 2009 finish time.

Standing at the start of the tenth year of the Silver Rush Mountain
Bike Race was daunting. A sea of racers was gathered. Greg and I worked our way to the front for any advantage. Humm, I thought, maybe with all the trail running I might have an advantage with the sprint up Dutch Henry. It was 2 weeks since the Marathon and with 1 minute before the start I began to consciously hyperventilate.

The second event of the Leadman, the Silver Rush (SR) was started back in 2001 but in that year was called the Silver Rush 40. The next year the course lengthened to about 46 miles and more recently closer to 47. In 2008 the Silver Rush 50 mile run was added and is contested the day after the mountain bike race on the same course. Ken and Merilee in their ever devious scheming instituted the Leadman series in 2003 and in 2008 offered Leadman contestants the option of doing either

the SR Bike or SR Run. Anyone finishing both events back-to-back is crowned a Silver King or Queen.

In 2010 the Silver Rush MTB popularity had gone stratospheric. In 2001 67 of us toed the line, each year the numbers grew and this year 620 starters, nearly 10 times the first year's numbers, were amassed for the start at the base of the



The Leadman Race?

The Silver Rush Race creates a dilemma for those dedicated to rankings. How could Leadmen or Leadwomen finishers be tallied with the choice of 2 different races? A little statistical tinkering revealed the exact ratio of 4/7ths could be applied to the finish times of the 50 mile run to equate the 2 events. The record finish times are just under 4 hours and 7 hours and the finish cut-off times are double these numbers at 8 and 14 hours for the bike and run respectively. With a Gaussian (even) distribution of finish times assumed that makes average and median ratios exactly 4/7ths as well. We had a Leadman race and those wacky 50 mile runners weren't excluded from the fun!



now ever familiar Dutch Henry Hill. That first year I sprinted up this hill and was the first to top it, later in that race I would finish 7th (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/leadville/message/1659). Oddly in 2006 and again in 2010 the finish place was also 7th.

After the sprint to the top of Dutch Henry I found myself in 5th place. Maybe Marathon training can help I thought to myself. In the excitement I had moved up to third after the single track at about mile 1. Another ½ mile into the race I came to my senses and backed off, letting about 15 pass. I felt strong on the climbs and from 17th place at Aid 1 worked up steadily. I gained on 5th and 6th at the end and



finished 7th overall, 3rd in male 40+. The top 3 of us in that age group ended up finishing within one minute and 5 seconds of each other in 5th, 6th and 7th places. Apparently all the training was paying off, my finish of 4:33, a personal record by 10 minutes, now put my cumulative Leadman total just 90 seconds behind Larry's. This might get exciting as Joe and others reminded me.

After the SR there were 4 weeks before the Trail 100 Moutain Bike Race and time for 1 more serious training cycle primarily focused on the run. Immediately after the SR Phil laid out an 18.5 hour training week followed by a 24 hour week. He did offer a small taper with an 11 hour week and then an easy 4 hours in the 5 days leading up to the 100 bike. I felt OK but not energetic. With the good SR finish I might have been on track to break 8:30 but fairly low energy and motivation had me pedaling along at a steady sub-9 hour pace to earn a fifth Gold and the 1000 mile Buckle.

Many friends and acquaintances were there, always a few more each year. Greg and his "9 hour monkey", Durango Bob, Wyoming Wildman Shad, Dona crew chief extraordinaire, Karla and Chuck the Tandem 10 timers, Ricky, finisher of all 100s, and so many more Dona and I have come to know over the past 14



years of living and racing in Leadville.

Greg gave chase the whole race and we finished close together within 1 minute. He earned his first Gold buckle making for one very happy biker as he gave that monkey the boot. Bob earned another star for his black jacket with an astounding 12th finish, and Chuck and Karla garnered the first ever 1000 mile

tandem buckle. A finish of 8:49 took my total Leadman time to 18 hours and 29 minutes, 5 minutes behind Larry's 2009 record pace.

Sunday August 15th dawned extra early for the 100 MTB awards. Our new Leadville Trail 100 owner, Bahram Akradi, gave an enthusiastic speech and a thorough introduction. He took special notice of the Leadman and his intent is to elevate the series significantly. Bahram shook each of our hands. All I wanted to do was get off my feet and save a little energy for the Leadville 10K starting at noon.

The fourth in the Leadman series, this 10K race too had recently become popular. Started as an event for crew and others in town for the 100 bike race it now stands well on its own with 171 starters in 2010. The course is simple, the first and last 5K of the 100 mile run course. Half paved and half dirt

road, it's a beautiful course simply for the views of the vast western panorama. Dropping a handful of Cliff Blocks with a plan to power through this one on pure sugar I latch onto Katie running a pace I think I can maintain and what feels like a sub-50 minute effort. She and I finish together and we introduced ourselves at the finish. Turns out she had competed in the 100 bike the day before with a fantastic 3rd place age group win and a 9:33 finish time. With Katie's pace I had about matched Larry's 10K time and the great chase in my head would be decided in less than 6 days time.







Having been bested by one other Leadman, David Haase, in the 100 mile bike I had dropped to second in the 2010 standings, 6 minutes off the lead. I'd allowed another minute to Larry's lead and was also 6 minutes behind his record pace. Larry's 2009 and David's 2010 cumulative Leadman times were just seconds apart after 4 races at 19 hours and 12 minutes. The formula was easy. To summit alongside Larry and perhaps climb a bit higher, simply break 24 hours in the run. In five and one half days after finishing the 10K all that was left to do was run 6 hours faster than my one 100 mile finish back in 2003. I would start running the Leadville Trail 100 on 24 hour splits and maintain that pace for precisely 1 day. Yea, for Leadman competitors anyway, it helps to be a bit delusional.

Coach Phil had prescribed oxygen and COMPEX muscle stimulation immediately after the bike race and of course a thorough massage the next day. This all helped immensely but more important were the training plans he'd developed throughout the season which had me riding and running with such volume and frequency the 2 began to meld into a single activity. The volumes were high by most amateur standards, between April and August I trained for a minimum of 63 hours and as many as 75 hours in a month. That's a lot for a desk jockey; many hours were accumulated biking to and from work.

Phil knew back in February and I came to realize later the Leadman journey for me would be all about the 100 mile run. All training and every event were done in preparation for August 21st and the Leadville Trail 100 ultramarathon.

A few minutes before 4AM I walked up 6th street to join the largest assembly of Leadville 100 runners ever (797 registered, 647 starters, 363 finishers); I silently vowed to be one of those who would make it back to the finish. Historically the finish rate is less than 50%, the altitude and lack of a required qualifying event keeps this ratio low.

In any event like this one every runner goes through highs and lows both mental and physical. I held that 24 hour pace to Conduit at mile 26 and beyond. Carried along by the crowd of runners and worry of getting backed up on the single-track between miles 7 and 12 around Turquoise I made the May Queen



(MQ) Aid at 13 miles in 1:55, 27 minutes faster than my 2003 split. I made the Fish Hatchery (FH) in 3:50, and Half-Moon in 5:20. It was walking out of Half-Moon when the first low for me struck, 31 miles into the odyssey. My energy level was dropping and I slowed down as many started to pass. It's difficult to run predicted splits in a race like this, you have to treat it as a long

journey and overcome the obstacles along the way. I reminded myself there was no fixed split, the best mental attack was simply never to let oneself give up. It was hard, very hard. In the course of 2 hours I watched 50 runners go by between Half-Moon and Twin Lakes.

Approaching Twin Lakes at mile 39 I struggled on the down-hills as a knot formed in one quad, for the remainder of the race I was constantly reminded of the 100 mile bike effort the week before. I took on clothes and food for the climb to Hope Pass and departed at a slow jog into the marshy bog. It was 7 hours and 15 minutes into the race, I was slowing down but still leaving within 5 minutes of a 24 hour pace. I had 3 hours and 10 minutes to get to Winfield, the 50 mile point and the turn-around.



I limped into the Hopeless Aid station at 12200 feet and 45 miles. The legs were stiff and the energy levels had plummeted. That had been a very difficult ascent as I watched so many pass seemingly without effort. I sat

and consumed several cups of wonderfully warm potato soup then limped over to a log and lay on the ground with my legs elevated trying to loosen them up. A massage therapist was there as a volunteer with a group of High School runners from Golden Colorado and she offered to work on my quads. I am a massage addict and thanked whatever great power had sent this angel to my side. The pain she inflicted was exquisite. Ten minutes after



coming into Hopeless I waved goodbye and was off for Hope Pass 15 minutes ahead. I knew when I picked up Phil in Winfield there would be no

stopping, no excuses. I started to get myself psyched for the return run back to Leadville. The exhaustion continued and I struggled down off Hope Pass to the Winfield road. The quad knots screamed and it was a slow descent.

The 3 mile dirt road to Winfield was choked with cars. The runners walked or jogged on either side, depending on the wind, to avoid the dust plumes. I crawled into Winfield at 11:25 having taken 4 hours and 10 minutes to cross the demon Hope and had fallen back another 50 places. I was exactly 1 "lost" hour behind a 24 hour pace. I passed everything I could to my pacer and coach Phil, connived some Advil, and took off for another shot at Hope.



Something resonated there in the deep valley at Winfield. Maybe several things: the energy of the crowd, Dona and Phil, food, water, self-anger, and the ibuprofen. I was mad at myself for having given up and decided it was time to start running again. Phil and I started passing others as we ran the 3 miles of dirt road to the Hope pass trailhead. I was thankful to be climbing and had found a substantial second wind, breathing hard and sweating; it felt good. We passed lots of other runners, some coming down off Hope and others moving slowly in front of us. Phil helped push me to the top of Hope by being there and encouraging me on. We had passed several 10s of runners and as we crossed over the pass itself I was able to run slowly down to the aid station. We were excited by the pace and devised a plan to pass thru the Hopeless Aid station without stopping; Phil got me soup and caught up a minute later. We had probably passed another 10 runners there at Hopeless. Phil gave me several key pieces of advice as we descended. "Keep belly breathing", "keep your steps short", "continue to drink"... (Thanks Phil, Hope Pass was an amazing experience to share.)

We ran all the way to Twin Lakes arriving there 14 hours and 15 minutes into the race. Something had definitely happened at Winfield because we had made the 15th fastest passage any finisher in the race would do that day from Winfield, over Hope, to Twin Lakes and had made up 20 minutes of that lost hour. We



had also moved up 63 places. I was too fast, Dona, Vicki, and Joe were there scrambling for my "dinner". I had great success this season with a waffle, oatmeal, syrup mix and ate a small proportion along with a fruit smoothie. I was hungry and it all tasted great. My second pacer Joe and I left Twin Lakes for the 2 mile hike up to the Colorado Trail.

My goal there was to work this second to last climb of the race and then start running again. Joe encouraged me on and reminded me this year there would be less gabbing and more racing. In 2003 we had spent this night mostly strolling through these woods and talking, in 2010 we focused and we ran. I had taken a second dose of Advil and we gently cruised through the evening. I didn't stop at Halfmoon Aid, about 70 miles into the race, Joe pulled in though, refilled and caught up a few minutes later and as we

approached Conduit it was time to turn on the headlamps. At Conduit, one of the alternate crew support points, I sat down at my crew's car and we were all amped. We had made up another 10 minutes to the lost hour and were holding it together. I drank half a smoothie and off we went. Someone yelled to keep going, you're almost there. "What do you mean?" I yelled back "There's still a full Marathon left?". The



spectator and I both laughed, mine was hesitant.

Joe and I ran most of the way to Fish Hatchery, hooking up with others. Eighteen hours even at FH and there were still 25 more minutes left to make up to that lost hour. Joe kept a close vigil as I sat for 3 minutes. We both prepared silently for Powerline with vivid memories of this section from 2003.

In that first 100 race Powerline had been the single most torturous physical and mental experience of my life and Joe had been there to witness it. Things went much better in 2010. We ran to the base of Powerline and started a strong hike up. I continued to eat and drink and we passed many others. Someone who had just "yodeled groceries" not far from the spot I had done the same in 2003, said he felt much better and followed along behind us for some time. We crested Sugarloaf pass about midnight.

I struggled to run down Sugarloaf and Haggerman Pass Roads but the quads started to complain again. Joe handed me a peach and I inhaled it. When we hit the Colorado trail with about 1.5 miles to go to the May Queen Aid station we started a good run. Joe led so we could go faster. At the pavement ½ mile from MQ Joe went ahead to prep Dona for her final duties as pacer. We were still behind schedule and there wasn't time to stop... At least that's what I told myself.

I was in a kind of panicked frantic state but for good reason. We arrived at MQ at 20:55, 2 hours and 56 minutes after leaving FH, a fair time but that left only 3 hours and 5 minutes to get to the finish line. "Normally" at a 24 hour pace 3 hours and 20 minutes are needed for those last 13 miles. The final 15 minutes of that lost hour would have to be made up there in the very dark hours between 1 AM and 4 AM on Sunday morning. I walked straight through the aid station, grabbed a baggie of PB&J quarters and started running down the pavement. Dona paused a minute for a water bottle. I wouldn't see her again for 3 hours.

The pavement out of the MQ Aid station is slightly downhill and straight leading to the Turquoise lake trail. I ran smooth and strong and picked off many runners and pacers. When I hit the dirt I realized Dona would not catch me at this pace. In hind sight I should have stopped and waited but with the baggie of PBJs and water access from other pacers on the trail I decided to keep going. A mile down the trail I described to a runner and his pacer how I had lost my own pacer and needed some water. In typical Leadville fashion the pacer handed me a full water bottle and told me to keep it. I thanked him for likely saving my run at sub-24 hours.

At the first boat ramp (Tabor) about 80 minutes and 5 miles after leaving MQ I got a water fill from a vigilant crew awaiting their own runner. They encouraged me to drink and refill, the water was cold and a shiver quaked through my body as I swallowed. I had made it in 80 minutes and if I could hold it together for 100 more I would meet Larry's challenge, barely. It had been a warm day and at this point I was wearing shorts, a sleeveless running top, gloves, and a windstopper vest.

I shrugged off the cold and planned to pick up the pace for warmth but as I left the comforting light behind something had changed. The energy had dropped and I could no longer hold a steady pace. Over the course of the next 15 minutes every joint and muscle from the hip down began to shout its disapproval. Several runners I had passed came by and offered

encouragement. Struggling to follow I watched the light from their headlamps quickly fade. I walked and ran slowly in the dark as my headlight neared exhaustion. It was 2:30 AM and suddenly very dark, very lonely.

At the Dam I asked some spectators there (it's now about 3AM) to tell my lost pacer to come get me. It turned out Vicki was there but didn't recognize me. I limped down the short powerline-cut off the dam and onto the dirt road about 5 miles from town. Dona and Vicki drove up and quickly dressed

me in several layers. I had been shivering for the last 30 minutes. My legs had shut down and we walked slowly to the Blvd. and the final 3 miles of the course. I had abandoned the attempt at a sub-24 hour finish and knew I could limp to town in under 25. The walk to town hurt but the pain was softened as we crossed the finish line in 24:44, three hours and 49 minutes after leaving MQ.







The Leadman/Leadwoman race series was conceived back in 2002 and first contested in 2003. Many before had finished the bike and run, the first of them in 1994, the first year of the 100 bike. In 1994 Barb Dolan of Burro racing fame and nearby Buena Vista became the first. Bill Perkins followed Barb 3 years later in 1997 with Gold Buckle finishes in both the bike and run.

In 1999 Scott Hirst came to Leadville on a mission; in a blistering 30 hours and 3 minutes he completed both events with a 21:36 run and an 8:27 bike, simply amazing. Humm, if someone could equal Scott's times would it be possible to break the 40 hour barrier for the series? Here's one way:

Mara+SR+100MTB+10K+100RUN 4:40 + 4:35 + 8:30 + :45 + 21:30 = 40:00

Postscript:

After the 24 Hours of Leadville Race and a second place finish to Travis Macy, September wore on and it was difficult to stop riding and running; we were having fun and decided on 1 bigger event. The 25 Hours in Frog Hollow fit the bill. A race contested near St. George, UT during the weekend of the Daylight Savings Time change on November 6th. The race starts and ends at 10AM but has a 2AM bonus hour. 20 laps and 256 miles of the 12.8



Lap 20 - The 25 Hours of Frog Hollow

mile course in 25 hours and 48 minutes broke the inaugural record of 17 laps set in 2009. I could not have been happier but was surprised neither of the 2 riders I had chased since the start had dropped. Both had shown up with similar intentions, all three of us finished 20 laps between 24:02 and 25:48. The butt was more than a little bruised after that one but a great time was had throughout.

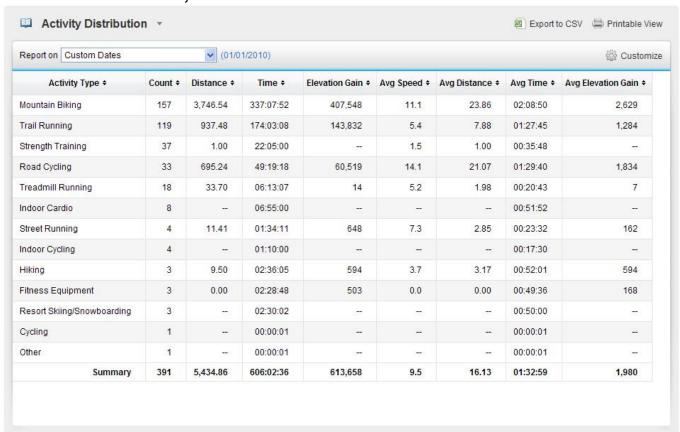
(http://www.gropromotions.com)

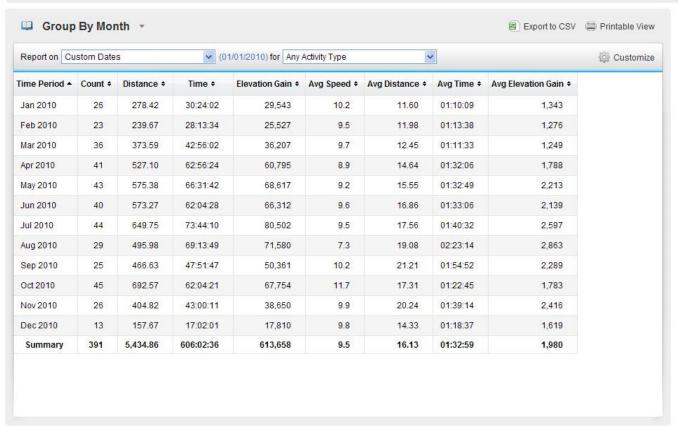
In 2010 I'd conceived of a Leadman/Leadwoman winner. Larry's 2009 Everest had proved a summit 40 minutes too high. I saw the summit and turned back somewhere on the shores of Turquoise Lake as the last vestige of physical will wafted off leaving just mental conviction to finish the last few miles of the 283 mile Leadman odyssey. My cumulative 2010 Leadman time ended up at 44 hours and 2 minutes.

Year after year it amazes me what each of us is capable of when we put our minds and time to a task. Ken has lectured us on the depth of our inexhaustible well, there are ways to make that well deeper certainly but if there's one thing I relearned again this year is that it's always possible to find yourself scraping the bottom of that well. For some that's the point, to discover how deep our well can be made and where the well is exhausted.

See you on the trail, Mark

The Year in numbers, 1 Jan 2010 to 31 Dec 2010:





The 2010 timeline

894 miles raced in 108 hours for an average speed of 8.3 MPH and 115,000 feet (21.8 miles) ascended:

Jan 23 - Pb Snowbike Race #1

Mar 6 – Pb Snowbike Race #3

May 8 – Front Range 50 (Bear Ck Lk Park)

May 30 - Growler 64 MTB

June 5 - Dirty Thirty - Golden Gate 50 KM run

June 26-28 Leadville Run training weekend (not a race)

July 3 – Marathon (Leadman Race 1)

July 17 - Silver Rush (Race 2)

Aug 14 - 100 MTB (Race 3)

Aug 15 – Pb 10k run (Race 4)

Aug 21 - 100 Run (Race 5)

Sept 4 - The 24 Hours of Leadville, A.K.A Pb24

Nov 6 - The 25 Hours in Frog Hollow

http://leadvilletrail100.info/index_files/Results/Results.htm http://www.nyx.net/~mwallace/video.htm (Pb24 hour videos)

LT100 Run Split analysis

This table shows my place at each check point against all participants and against only those who finished. The right column shows where my split time ranked. As an example, at TL-inbound I was in 114th place among all runners and 96th counting only finishers. From Winfield to TL-in I had the 23rd fastest split overall, 15th fastest among finishers.

| | All Participants/Finishers | All Participants/Finishers |
|----------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| | Place | Split place |
| MQ - out | 57/39 | 57/39 |
| FH – out | 72/51 | 116/86 |
| HM – out | 77/58 | 132/101 |
| TL – out | 126/99 | 387/301 |
| WIN | 177/146 | 332/270 |
| TL – in | 114/96 | 23/15 |
| HM – in | 92/79 | 51/46 |
| FH – in | 86/77 | 79/73 |
| MQ – in | 73/70 | 59/59 |
| Finish | 89 | 192 |