

Rocky Road 100

Its 4:57am Sunday February 19th, 2012, my stomach feels like someone is squeezing it and twisting it knots...needless to say I haven't been able to sleep since I finished the Rocky Road 100 last night at 9:50pm...

It was difficult to describe to my classmates in Anthropology on Friday just what I was going to do this weekend, "So Nick, you're driving 7.5hrs to run 100 miles and then driving 7.5hrs back to make class on Monday? That's a ridiculously ambitious weekend...I think I'm just going to kick back a few beers instead dude". Though that may be the case for the typical college student, I've never considered myself typical.

5:00pm Friday February 17th, 2012. I meet up with my two best running friends Von and Derek, it's a quick pre-race meeting and then we threw down some Baja Fresh...shrimp quesadillas tasted way better than the 'usual' pre-race spaghetti. That night instead of the hotel, we camped and inadvertently saved about seventy bucks. I slept on a cot out in the open so it was pretty cold, not to mention the 10+ dreams I had that the race was starting but it was "Death Race" style and I was carrying a 40lb log while everyone else just got to run. Thankfully those were just dreams and my alarm(s) finally went off at 4:30am and we were off to start line.

As I stated to Derek and Von before beginning the race "yup I feel just as un-epic and normal as ever right now, these hundred milers don't really get 'magic' until way later in the race." And with some random 'chill' techno song blasting in my ear drum, the Rocky Road 2012 had begun.

Out n' Back 1 (Miles 0-15)

I didn't want to be upfront, I wanted to be running exactly a 9:00min/mile...that didn't happen of course, like an idiot I thought 'o but it feels so easy to run 6:50min/miles right now...I'll just do this pace for the first lap...' So needless to say, I was mingling amongst the front pack, at seven miles, Ben Hian who had been leading stopped off to take a pee break and me and another guy started leading, idiotically I thought, "Well if I can maintain this pace, I'll win this race outright..." (In hindsight I think even at that pace Jon Olson would have passed me). At the turnaround (mile 7.5) I pulled into the lead and since no one was setting the pace for me, I flew down the hills and started pumping the uphill's on the way back to the start/finish area. I felt great, running a 7:50min/mile regardless of the rolling terrain, felt 'manageable'...I was soon to realize that this was far from manageable and that the lack of food I had consumed would soon come to bite me in the ass. I finished the first out-n-back in 1hr and 56mins, about 19mins ahead of my desired time.

Out n' Back 2 (Miles 15-30)

I felt just as great starting off my second loop and I was feeling all 'cool' being in the lead as it really wasn't something that happened that often with me, I began to wonder if it was the others racers strategy and if they were just letting me 'rabbit' myself to death...either way I was about to dig myself into a deep low. I flew over the rolling hills and hit the turnaround in 58mins, about

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two minutes slower than my previous lap, my mom's voice rolled through my head "you have to either be consistent this whole race! Or do a negative split!" At this pace no way in hell was a negative split going down, so I chose to try and stay consistently around this really fast 'hour' per section that I had set...bad choice and worst choice? Not eating, really at all...I was about 1 mile out from the start/finish line (mile 30) and coming in at a sub 2hr pace again, when suddenly the hunger pangs set in, the lightheadedness followed and then the muscle weakness began... "Nick! This is a newbie mistake!! What are you doing!?!? Why didn't you eat more?" I tried saying to myself...Two runners passed me, I didn't care it was too early in the race to determine anything any, I needed to fix my eating pronto or else this race was going nowhere fast...I had ran like I was competing in a 50k not a 100 miler.

Von and Derek tried offering me our whole 'repertoire' of food, nothing looked appetizing my stomach hurt too much from not eating to eat...it's the most annoying feeling ever, plus I was too concerned with getting a 'move on' again that I didn't really pack myself much for the next 7.5 miles.

Out n' back 3 (Miles 30-45)

I knew if I could make it through this part, I could pick up a pacer at mile 45, all I needed to do was make it back to start/finish area...These hills were starting to get difficult though, hopping up and down curbs and avoiding sand bags was nothing compared to the HURT 100 but still the almost constant rolling hills at low grades were just getting annoying, especially for a lightheaded, ble runner that I was at the time. Coming into the last 2.5 miles of the out, (by far the hilliest section), I was really starting to fall apart, I wasn't running the hills and even considered walking the downhill's when the voice of another ultra-runner's mom came into my "and he even walking the downhill's! You never walk the downhill's!"...Ug she's right I thought to myself...you don't ever walk the downhill's, you plod, you run, you sprint, you let your knees buckle, you cry, you even roll if necessary but you NEVER walk the downhill's. Needless to say, when pathetically climbing the last ½ mile climb to the turnaround, I was hurting, I was in a low and there was no one to complain too. I got up to Von and Derek, they noticed I look like crap (it was pretty obvious) and so they sat me down and force feed me mashed potatoes, chicken broth and kettle cooked chips...it was delicious and finally I was in the mood to eat! (Yes I had very strange looks from other runners and crew as I chugged on a cardboard container of chicken broth, but I'm more or less known for eating weird things). On the way back, I was beginning to come out of my low, I was still walking the hills and a few more runners had passed me now, I was lingering in 5th to 6th place, again I didn't care, it was way too early in the race to determine anything.

I finished the third out n' back in about 2hrs and 34mins, this was my slowest out n' back yet and had been a clear reflection of a newbie nutritional mistake.

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Out n' back 4 (Miles 45-60)

Finally I could complain to someone! Unfortunately for Von, he chose to run the next 15 miles with my crabby butt. The lap started off at a good pace, we hit the first mile in about 8:50, and we were right on target for my 'ideal' goal pace, however that first mile is almost entirely downhill... (While heading out). Von tried inciting some small talk here and there and kept trying to feed me a really, really dry peanut butter and bread sandwich he had made for me...I refused as much as I could but reluctantly took a bite and nearly heaved... "...Sooo dry..." I was forced to eat odwolla bars and pretzels...these weren't very moist either. All I wanted to eat was more Cheetos and maybe some mashed potatoes...or chicken broth. On the way out to the turnaround things went generally smoothly, I was definitely feeling the mileage but I had told myself at the start of the race that I wasn't running 100 miles but rather I was doing 12x 7.5 mile repeats with a 1 min rest in between and a 10 mile cool-down at the end, so needless to say I didn't bother checking my time for the 50 mile mark, it had nothing to do with what I was running, "I'm doing repeats, not a 100 miler...silly Nick..."

Because the course was an out n back, it constantly provided intel on the whereabouts of the other runners, I was lingering in 4th place at this time and 2nd and 3rd were at least two miles (roughly 20 minutes) ahead of me, I didn't have the energy or the desire to try and catch them at this time, I said to myself, 'it's still too early in the race it doesn't matter'

At the turnaround Von and Derek forced more chicken broth, soda, chips and more disgusting odwolla bars on me, Von took it upon himself to fill my pockets to brim with random Cheetos and ginger snaps...When we started off back towards to the start/finish area, I was really beginning to feel these hills, but I was still trying to power up them. I was in a real low at this point, sadly for Von he had to listen to me whine and moan... "Von slow down..." "Nick, how are you doing?"..."ug"... "Nick eat some of this odwolla bar" "ug" "Nick.." "ug..." was pretty much the conversation for the next 7.5 miles, until I muttered in a frustrated and pathetic manner, "Von...you need to notice when I try to pick up the pace and not pick up the pace too and run ahead of me, its demotivating, I'm tired and I'm trying to move but when 'Mr. Fresh' legs just trots on ahead its really demotivating..." ya as I said, I felt bad for him, he chose to pace the whiniest portion of me. But luckily, he wasn't putting up with any of it, he just left me behind and would start running ahead, which left me with no choice to run after him no matter how crappy I felt. "Von, I just want to apologize for how I was on that loop, and just to let you know you are the ONLY person who has ever 'ran' me through a low, I usually fight like all hell to walk and do what I want, I cannot thank you enough for pushing my butt through that". Out n back 4 complete, 2hrs and 37, only 4 more 7.5 mile repeats to go!

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Out n back 5 (Miles 60-75)

I had taken an Advil at the aid station before heading out, combined with hot soup, avocado, chicken broth, mashed potatoes, chips, Cheetos, soda and an iPodNano loaded with extremely obnoxiously loud techno, I was back in the zone.

I hit my first mile in 6:50, I felt like I had just started the race again. No one paced me for this 7.5 mile out section, nor did I want anyone too. I flew past the 2.5 mile checkpoint at 19:25, I was hauling butt. I was now in third place again and knew Ben Hian, second place was somewhere up ahead of me, I didn't want to pass him at all, I just wanted to 'gain' on him, besides I thought to myself, "I'm not racing a 100, I'm just doing repeats..." I had gained about seven minutes on Ben in that very fast 7.5 miles, and was feeling like a 'boss' as youth these days say. I ran into the turnaround aid station and looked at my watch 1hr and 3mins (only 5mins off from my time on the first and second loops)...clearly I was back in the game and ready to rumble.

At the 5 mile checkpoint on the way back to the start/finish area, I caught up with Ben and my good ultrarunning friend Keith Kirby who had been there originally as part of Ben's crew decided to hop in and pace me for a bit. Myself, Keith, Ben and Scott (Ben's pacer) ran together for about two miles, Ben jokingly and admiringly noted, "Nick dude when I saw you back there walking on mile 40 I thought you were toast, you looked dead man...I'm glad to see you have bounced back!" I was glad too; I could now give this race or rather my repeats a good fight to the death.

Running this close to Ben made me pretty nervous, he was definitely the most 'elite' athlete I have ever ran this close to or tried to keep up with, and needless to say it was intimidating. What made it worse, was I started to pull ahead of him and once we were out of earshot Keith asked me, "So what's your plan? Are you throwing down with Ben?" I hadn't thought of it and very passively replied, "it's too early on in the race...I don't really care if he passes me again, I'm not fighting for second..." We trudged along to the start/finish area maintain a consistent pace and walking two of the hills on the way back, to my surprise, Ben and Scott weren't right behind me.

Out n' back 6 (Miles 75-90)

I threw down some cheese pizza, soup and soda at the aid station and Von stated "this ain't no picnic get your candy ass going man!" And just as Ben and Scott were running into the aid station myself and Keith were leaving. Maybe I was going to try and beat Ben? Maybe I would start now? Either way I was just doing repeats I reassured myself.

Keith paced me all the way to the turnaround and I kept an extremely consistent 'trot' throughout the uphill's and downhill's, despite wanting to walk here and there, I kept running as I knew this would be the last time I would have to go through the races hilliest section. At the turnaround, I thanked Keith for pacing me and he joined Von on the crewing side. My good high school friend

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Derek then volunteered to jump on in with me, it was great to have Derek there, his jokes and attitude make him one of the funnest people to be around during a 100 miler...

We started beasting it through the hills, I now had about a 14 minute lead on Ben and wasn't planning on slowing down, I didn't speed up either, I just stayed consistent, which in and Ultra is key. We passed the field that smelt of cow fertilizer, passed the immaculate rich houses and made our way consistently back to the start/finish area in around 2hrs and 35minutes, I wasn't getting faster, I was just staying consistent and now my repeats were done...just the cool-down

The cool down (Miles 90-100)

The cool down was really anything but a cool-down, Von told me at the aid station that Ben was gaining on me and was now only about 3-4mins out, "ahhh Derek we need to go" I threw down some soup and loaded up my iPodNano for the last charge on this course...I hit my first mile in 6:55, not bad for mile 91 I thought...I told Derek as well to watch out for Ben's headlamp and his pacer, as when they appeared I wanted to look 'extra-fast' as an attempt to demotivate my competition. We spotted them in distance and I kicked on my tunes and brought my pace from a 7:30min/mile to 4:30min/mile for the next 300m until I was out of sight. Derek couldn't help but grin and laugh at the Ben's pacer's expression as we flew by as if I was competing in a high school track meet.

We didn't keep up the 4:30min/mile pace but ran down to the 5 mile turnaround in about 40mins, leaving me exactly an hour to return to the start/finish area for a sub-16hr 100 miler...and I wanted that, I threw on my tunes and apologized to Derek in advance if I wasn't very talkative during this last five miles, I wanted to focus.

About two miles back, we passed Ben headed the other way, I was no longer worried that he would catch up to me, I had secured second place...that is unless he starts running 4:30's...So we started moving faster regardless, I told Derek "We walk NOTHING!"

So we walked nothing and ran a strong pace all the way back to the start/finish line, with a mile to go, the fact that I was about to break my previous PR by five hours started to settle in, I had come such a long way as a runner, and at age 21, I was only getting better and better...my career was just beginning...

15:43:27! My new PR, I hugged Derek, Von and Keith and was extremely elated, it was just barely night, back at college the bars were just barely opening up and I had just completed a hundred miler! I was beside myself...The race director presented me a huge belt buckle and a statue with a rock on it congratulating me for my second place finish. Despite the food issues at the beginning of the race, this was one of my best races ever...and now as they say in Monty Python 'for something completely differenet...' training for the Barkley Marathons...

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In a final note I want to give a huge thanks to Derek, Keith and Von, without your continued support as pacers and crew, this race would not have turned out the way it did, you motivated me and pushed me beyond my limits into a whole new realm of running, I am truly grateful for friends like you. I also want to thank Carbopro for their continued support in my ultrarunning career, to quote Keith, “you don’t notice when you use the amino acid recovery pills, but you sure as heck notice when you don’t use them”. Not a single time did I cramp or feel overly tight in the muscles, Carbopro is by far the most superior ultrarunning sports product on the market.