
Fwd: TheBoogie30

Gregory McDowell <greglmac@yahoo.com>
To: <maygreg2000@gmail.com>

Tue, Jul 21 at 9:16 AM

Sent from my iPad

Begin forwarded message:

From: "McDowell, Gregory L." <gmcdowell@ci.charlotte.nc.us>
Date: June 14, 2009 at 2:51:11 PM EDT
To: greglmac@yahoo.com, mayrealtor@aol.com
Subject: FW: TheBoogie30

From: McDowell, Gregory L.
Sent: Sunday, June 14, 2009 2:31 PM
To: Graham, Harry; Adams, Tina P.; Marsicano, Marie R.; Schroder, Craig; Furr, Karen M.; Robson, Jennifer; Williams, Loni; Kasdorf, Kristi L.; Leonard, Elizabeth O.; Mays, Lori A
Cc: Trunk, John; Eisenberger, Troy A.; Kruckow, Monica; Horton, Ron; Hagemann, Robert; Burch, Julie; Dunkle, Brad
Subject: TheBoogie30

(I was going to do a shorter version for some of you, but sorry, you'll just have to skim if you don't want all the details.)

Greg's first ultra attempt: I met the challenge, introduced myself, and retreated quietly.

What seemed at the time like a reasoned, intelligent decision, now - just a few hours later - feels more like a psychological meltdown. First, I'm not that sore. Second, my perceived injuries are not so severe. I quit based on the following:

- * I was spent. The heat, humidity and hills drained me. "Just walking" was not an alternative for success. I was sweating as profusely after 25 miles as it neared midnight, with temps in the low 70s but humidity of 85%, as I had been when it was sunny and 85+ degrees. Walking up those hills at a reasonable pace took as much effort as any speed training I had done.
- * I was unprepared. I underestimated the preparation required, and overestimated my ability to endure. I am not sufficiently schooled to deal with heat, nutritional needs and late night running.
- * I hurt. Despite the Nine Inch Nails' (and Johnny Cash's excellent cover) of "Hurt" playing in my head, I backed down when faced with a different level of perceived pain and exhaustion than I had known, despite how temporary it proved.

But I will not despair. After 42 races without a DNF, I began to think I had not adequately challenged myself. The Boogie...is most definitely...a worthy challenge.

Achievements:

#1 I covered 30 miles, when honestly, during the first 10 I was doubting I would make it 20. Despite multiple marathons in 5 years, I had never purposely ran a step beyond 26.2.

#2 Four weeks after the Cleveland marathon, I went long. My previous short interval was Louisville in April 07,

seven weeks after Sarasota.

#3 I am relatively uninjured, and got a close up look at "the challenge." I will recognize this demon next time and only after properly preparing for the assault.

#4 I learned a whole heck of a lot. I will be processing the experience for quite awhile (which is why it is better for you to endure this missive than to ask me any questions!). I reaffirmed that I don't care for heat or hills - how did I forget that?

Good advice received:

Ron Horton said "Go slow to go long." Bob Hagemann advised "DON'T. DO. IT." I should have more fully considered each. I didn't realize that a 12 minute pace for the first 10 miles was too fast for conditions. That included what I thought was plenty of walking. And I can't say I wasn't warned.

Observations:

Preparation - 13 marathons would seem to be a good base. That reasoning would be incorrect. Ultra runners run more, and longer, and learn a new meaning of endurance. I considered Cleveland a training run, which would have been correct if I had gone out and run 10-15 miles the next day. I ran 10 a week later, and then two weeks out, ran a 10 miler on a Friday morning, followed by a hilly 13 miles Saturday evening in warm conditions. Warm is not hot. Hilly is not the Boogie. 23 miles in 36 hours, once, is not adequate preparation.

Race day - I was rested, appropriately nervous and had a positive attitude. I slept in, stayed off my feet, packed early, arrived nearly 2 hours before the gun, talked with runners and spectators while stretched out on a beach towel under a shade tree at Bethel Baptist Church and it's traditional cemetery. I watched folks putting up tents and race crews setting up grills for a bit of a party atmosphere. As John Trunk suggested in a phone call about an hour before the start, the nervousness would melt away once I started running. Boy, did it ever melt. I reconnected with Ricky Scott and met his wife Sharon. Ricky (friend of Ron) and I ran a few miles together at Virginia Beach Shamrock 08, and we shared several e-mails in the week leading up. Ricky had attempted the Boogie last year, dropping out at 30 after running 10 miles in rain.

Lap 1 - Technically, the 10 mile "laps" consist of a 6 mile loop followed by a 4 mile out and back (picture a string tied to a balloon). The check point is the Bethel Hill Baptist Church, which sits atop (surprise) a hill. While the 6 mile loop is hilly, the 2 miles leading away from the church are mostly downhill. The first 6 miles were competed in a huge outdoor oven. I discarded my shirt and hat the first time I passed my car. (40-50 cars, along with a few tents lined the two-lane road next to the church.) It was mile 7 when I said - ah, I'm still a runner. Miles 9 and 10 on the return suggested no, I was only a walker. Surprising to me, I completed the first lap sub-2:00. I figured a 10-15 minute dropoff each lap would allow me to meet the 4am (10 hour) cut-off for 40. If you don't complete 4 laps in 10 hours, you aren't allowed to run the last one. I took a 6-7 minute break at my car, dropping down beach towels to sit and change shoes and socks. I had 4 pairs of shoes, and many changes of clothes. I discarded the waistpack and phone; cell reception was spotty and I had nothing clever to share twitter-like. And it was becoming uncomfortable. I poured half a gallon of water over my head as I bent over to keep the water from soaking my shorts and shoes. That felt pretty good. Each time I passed my car, I grabbed a 20 oz. G2 (Gatorade). At 6 miles, I also picked up a bagel. I was heeding the advice I had heard to intake calories on the 2 miles out, absorb same while mostly walking back up, and voila! Hit the loop again.

Runners - There were 65 registered 50-milers and 80 marathoners. Seemed to be quite a few no-shows. The marathoners started in the opposite direction and would run "away" .1 mile and turn around, so as to get to the "start" after completing .2 miles, finishing after 2 laps plus a third loop. About a mile in, a few marathoners ran cruising by as the 50's muttered "marathoners" while being passed so quickly. Compared to the marathons I've been at, which have runners of all shapes and sizes, the Boogie attracts the more hard-core. You won't find many first-timers. (The Marine Corp typically has at least a quarter, maybe half who are attempting their first.) The majority here were male, smaller and bit wiry. Oh, and older. While I saw a teen and some fellows in their 20s, many were past 50 or 60 y.o. The Mangum Track Club was well-represented, judging from their shirts. (And yes, they know Ron H, but were surprised when I admitted to being a friend.) And several "Marathon Maniacs" were in attendance. (There are several qualifications, and many "star" levels for the MM's. Two marathons in 2 days earns a star; 4 marathons in 4 different states in 6 weeks earns one, etc.) Overall, I found that ultrarunners are nicer than marathoners (more on that later).

Lap 2 - After the break, I grabbed my head lamp but just carried it for a few miles. Right after I put it on, a couple guys passed me and asked whether it gave my brain electrical impulses (must have been marathoners). Later, most

everyone had a head lamp, or carried a light. Off and on I ran with 3 guys who had camel back water supplies. Two had to go off into the woods and I didn't see them again. There was a water and snack stop at 3.5. By then, each lap, I needed to refill my bottle (\$5 savings if you agreed to not use cups - mostly to avoid trash). 4-5 good old boys sat out there all night providing company and support, mostly for each other it seemed. Other than my own supplies, that's the only stop I made, getting water and eating a half banana each time. Despite having huge quantities of supplies, I only consumed 2 GUs, one bagel and one Balance Bar in addition to the bananas during the race. I had eaten a Balance Bar just prior to the start, but never felt nutrition was an issue. I may have been wrong, but I concentrated on drinking 6-7 oz. per mile, plus more each time I passed my car. Around 15 miles, my stomach was feeling a little upset and I didn't think adding stuff would be helpful. Lap 2 was as hilly as lap 1, maybe more so. I met up with an older guy Gill from Maryland at about mile 14. He was an experienced ultrarunner, just doing the marathon this weekend. He seemed to run a couple races each month. He was happy to stay at my pace, such as it was, despite my suggestion that I wouldn't mind if he left me and my erratic pacing. We talked all the way to 20. He found me at my car changing shoes and said he'd be happy to pace me another lap after he finished. I said he was quite the gentleman but I couldn't possibly predict if or when that next lap would occur. At my stop, I noticed a huge blister on the right side of my right foot. I surmised that the rubbing was due to constantly running on a slanted roadway. There just wasn't much flat road out there. Not the hills, the tilt of the road which allows rain to drain easily. Usually, you can find a peak where you don't end up favoring one leg. But that was not the case at Boogie. I poured water over my feet and thoroughly dried them. I had some large band-aids and used one on the right foot blister and a second on the ball of my left foot. Smaller band-aids were applied to some toes and I cut new toe pads to replace some others. Vaseline was re-applied in copious quantities. The head lamp was quite useful during the changeover, as darkness had descended in full.

Lap 3 - The break had cost me 15 minutes and I began calculating whether I could come in under 3 hours (2:45 actual) for this segment. I think my first two laps were 1:58 and 2:25 (including 7 minutes break). I started slowly and at about 22 miles began to picture myself reaching 40, or even 50. I recall one ultrarunner's comments on the challenge of the 50. He said on his worst day he could strap on his shoes and do 26.2. But with a 50, you just never knew if you would finish. Yep, that was an unknown. I enjoyed the solitude of running alone, or walking, which was becoming more frequent and in longer stretches. I had heard the warnings of delirium setting in during an overnigher. I thought my worst case was when I signed up for this thing. But I tried to be cognizant of my body and my brain. The sense of encasement in darkness, with only the head lamp lighting a small area in front, was a type of sensory deprivation. It was between 11pm and midnight; I heard an occasional animal sound which I could not identify. Few cars passed, and only sometimes could I make out the distant bobbing of another head lamp. One head lamp was bouncing around as I approached 25 miles. I identified myself as "Greg from Charlotte" as I approached. "It's Ricky" came the reply. He said he had a fork in him. I thought he meant a calf or hamstring, but no, he said he was done - "put a fork in me." We walked, talked and jogged just a little. He walked pretty slowly and drifted behind after saying he "might" run 4 more after resting at 26. It just wasn't his day. I reached my car and grabbed a new cold drink before hitting the downhill which would suggest I still had some run in me. It was rewarding to think I could run a few steps, after completing a marathon. I thought that maybe I would just skip the break after 3 laps, save time and keep walking. That might allow me to beat the 4am cut-off. At 26.5 I passed Sharon, returning up the hill. I told her I had seen Ricky...with a fork in him. At about mile 27 the blister on the outside of my right foot burst and it felt like raw meat was being caressed by sandpaper. I still had a mile to reach the turnaround, which was barely lit by a small light and marked by white spraypaint on the asphalt. I laughed when I thought about returning short of the turnaround. So much of this race was about personal discovery. More than once I had asked at the Church checkpoint - 'would you think less of me if I just got in my car and drove away?' I received several responses along the line of "you're doing great" or "do what you can" and lots of encouragement. After 26 miles, the number of runners thinned significantly, and more than half the cars lining the road had disappeared. Shockingly, at about mile 29, Ricky reappeared, running up behind me. We jog/walked the rest of the way in. He thought Sharon would keep going a bit, but he gave all indications that he was ready to call it a night.

The End. After 28, any time I attempted to run, my hamstring would begin to tweak, so I realized that any further "racing" would be all-walk. And the likelihood of beating the cut-off diminished. And, and...I rationalized - and from 28-29, my mind was made up. The End came quickly enough; suddenly it was over. But I was satisfied, and certain I was making the right decision. I bid adieu to Ricky and many volunteers at the checkpoint, thanking them for their support. I ran into Mr. Boogie (Doug "Boogie" Dawkins), who expressed surprise/disappointment, saying "there's still plenty of time; you sound like you have a lot left." I assured him that only parts of me had "a lot left" but I felt like I'd let him down. He and others have run this thing for 15 years, only adding the marathon a few years back. The runners here are a different breed. Apparently, I am not yet. But I left, assured that I was making the best decision for me. Stopping to stretch my legs half way home at 2:15am, that feeling was re-confirmed. I really didn't want to pay the price for a greater achievement. I had learned that more preparation is required, and I had achieved my minimum goal of 30, all while avoiding significant injury. And I was going to rest in my own bed, while it was still dark, and maybe enjoy a relaxing Sunday afternoon. I hobbled through the parking garage after 3am, carried only a portion of

my supplies up the elevator, started laundry and took a shower. May called me from her hotel room before I went to sleep at 4. I will pick her up this evening at CLT.

After The End. Ron e-mailed me that Ricky completed the 50 miles in 12:19, 32 minutes after Sharon. I have no idea what happened to his fork. I anxiously await tales of his re-invigoration. I am further humbled.

Final thoughts:

It was only 3.8 more miles than a marathon.

The first 26.2 was enough to bring me to my knees. Really, really harder than I had imagined.

The wise philosopher Yoda said - "Do, or do not. There is no try." I did not, on this occasion accomplish the goal.

And yet -

A little Boogie is better than none.

glm

Till NYC '09