

Big's Backyard Ultra - 2018

Hourly Updates Posted by Laz During the Event

hour 1: long day's journey into night

with the ringing of a cowbell,
just a few minutes before sunrise,
the long day's journey into night began.

70 runners stepped into the starting corral to answer that bell,
and headed out into a light rain.

this is, of course, just the preliminary.
these early laps are only a time to stay relaxed,
stay fresh,
and start building mileage.

ahead are 12 hourly loops of the 4.16667 mile big dog trail
in order to get to night-time
and the road.

but the winnowing always starts early.
john price became a rare time-out,
leaving only 69 to begin the second hour.

here is the cast of characters who will be providing the entertainment for the next few days:

Adam Rood Louisville KY
Alicia Rich Boston MA
Allan Benjamin Columbia MO
Anatoly Ross South Lancaster ON
Andres Villagran Ecuador ECU
Andy Emerson Columbia MO
Andy Pearson Santa Monica CA
Anne Lang Gahanna OH
Ben Yancey Bell Buckle TN
Brian Grant London ON
Brian Trinkle Cumming GA
Camille Coombs Brooklyn NY
Casey Thivierge Belle River ON
Cassie Scallon Santa Barbara CA
Chris Hasselback Castle Rock CO

Chris Robbins Eagan MN
Courtney Dauwalter Golden CO
Daniel Shamburg Encinitas CA
Daryl Flacks Windsor ON
David Johnston Willow AK
David Lantz Leola PA
Deano Montreuil Suwanee GA
Derek Murphy Lebanon OH
Derek Tinnin Lebanon OH
Dustin Mitchell Lexington KY
Erika Boody London ON
Gavin Woody Bellevue WA
Glenn Kasper Meridian MS
Greg Salvesen Santa Barbara CA
Gregg Ellis Calhoun GA
Gregory Burger Lecompton KS
Guillaume Calmettes Los Angeles CA
Harvey Lewis Cincinnati OH
Heidi Kumm Silverthorne CO
Jasmine Chiaramonte Meadowbrook PA
Jeff Stafford Clarksville TN
Jeremy Ebel Lafayette CO
Jeremy Kaiding Shelbyville TN
Jerry Hughes Victoria BC
Jerry Palmer Houston TX
Joe Fejes Columbia SC
Johan Steene Stockholm SWE
Josep Barberillo La Garriga ESP
Kat Schuller Decatur GA
Kelley Fejes Columbia SC
Kelly Hutchins Paducah KY
Lindley Chambers Leighton Buzzard GBR
Maggie Guterl Chadds Ford PA
Marc Laveson Bainbridge Island WA
Marcy Beard San Jose CA
Mark Lattanzi Blacksburg VA
Marylou Corino Georgetown ON
Michael Anderson Winnipeg MB
Nathan Marti Courtland MN
Nick Vermeulen Sodus Point NY
Nikolay Nachev Redmond WA
Padraig Mullins Cambridge MA
Peter Cromie Limavady GBR

Phil Orndorff Oakville ON
Regina Sooeey Jacksonville FL
Ricky Haro Peoria AZ
Rodney Coombs Brooklyn NY
Sammy Daye Downpatrick IRL
Sean O'Connor Phillipsburg NJ
Shawn Webber Gainesville FL
Shenoa Creer Decatur GA
Slade McCormick Ponoka AB
Terri Biloski St. Thomas ON
Will Thomas Sequim WA

hour 2: slow burn

derek murphy joined jp on the sidelines.
and now we have 68 out on loop 3.

someone always asks after the runners start loop 1;
how many hours will it be before we have someone drop.

and the answer is always the same;
this one.

being on every hour is not as easy as it sounds.
and some random thing can take a runner out at any time.
including the first hour.

we rarely have a clean hour the first day.
it is not until you get down to the few
that hours and hours pass without a drop.
not until the investment is so great,
that no one will surrender without a struggle.

so that is the big question around camp on hour 3.
will we have a clean hour?
will we unexpectedly lose someone else....

and who will it be?

hour 3: chair people

we have a big area for chairs roped off immediately surrounding the starting corral.

tents and canopies fill the remainder of the yard in a gaily coloured gypsy encampment.
but immediately around the starting corral are only rows of chairs with coolers in front.

this enables the runners to finish a loop,
and quickly find their way to their chair.
the cooler in front serves many purposes;
food and fluid container
table
footrest.

for just a few minutes every hour,
the chairs are filled with runners
eating and drinking
talking and laughing.

it is important to have that close access,
because as time goes on,
the runner is less and less anxious to get into the corral.

after loop 1,
everyone came back at 3 whistles.
after loop 2,
they roused themselves at two whistles.
just now, with 3 loops in the bag,
everyone got up at one whistle.

67 runners headed out on the 4th hour....

lindley chambers came all the way from leighton buzzard great britain to spend 12 miles on the big trail.

as time goes by,
the rows of chairs will develop more and more gaps.
and the starting corral will grow less and less crowded.

everyone here still feels good.
but slowly the effects of the miles will start to accumulate.

this is a very slow way to die.

hour 4: drip drip drip

this time it was harvey lewis.
with the steady drip drip drip of casualties

no one is is safe.

it takes 12 hours and 50 miles to reach nightfall
and the road.

everyone wants to get there.

many won't.

66 are out on loop 5, now.
who will be the next to go?

hour 5: the first, but probably not the last

the last whistle sounded,
but sammy daye (ireland) had not yet emerged from the woods.
with less than 30 seconds remaining,
and the field assembling in the starting corral
he appeared,
sprinting desperately.

he had misjudged his pace out on the trail,
and as a result his race was in danger.

as the hours pass,
the runners learn every landmark along the trail,
and *exactly* how long it takes them to reach the finish from that spot.

sammy had not gotten his spots right
and he was in trouble.

the runners in the corral parted
to give him a track to the finish
cheering madly...

even this early,
the survivors have begun to pull together.

sammy hit the driveway
his arms and legs pumping madly

the seconds clicked off remorselessly.

just as sammy reached the back of the corral
his last second evaporated,
and the bell sounded.

he slumped over,
defeated.
his time had run out.
15 feet from the finish line
his time had run out.

there is no mercy in big's backyard.
there is no good try.
there is no almost.
there is only success
or failure.

65 runners streamed out of the corral
and on into hour 6.
the mood was a little more somber,
after watching their mate fall right before their eyes.

for 64 of them,
their own ignominious end awaits.
the only questions are when and how.

only one will end this contest with arms upraised in victory.

hour 6: word around camp

word around camp is that greg ellis is next.
camille coombs went down in hour 6,
but greg gave us another last second sprint to the finish,
this time successful.

successful by 2 seconds,
and that is not often a good sign.

25 miles in,
and the wear and tear is starting to show.
the strides are not quite so fluid.
the spring in the legs
not quite so springy.

people are heading straight to their chairs at the finish
and waiting a little longer to head for the corral for the start.
things have not started to get really serious yet.
but everyone knows they have been running.

hour 7: i hate that whistle

i can never take off my whistle
if i do,
it will be thrown so far in the woods
that it will never be found.

the runners come to hate the whistle.
they talk about hearing it in their dreams for weeks after the race.

tweet-tweet-tweet
happy minute is over!

the cadence of the backyard is relentless.
hour after hour
day turns to night
and night to day
and the drumbeat of time never ends.

only 29 miles in,
the merciless routine begins to wear on the mind.
just a little more rest.
just a little more....

but it never happens.
the clock never tires.

we lost 4 more after hour 7.

greg ellis, phil orndorf, terri biloski, and chris hasselback are all gone.

60 runners forged on into hour 8.

hour 8: the back of the packers

one of the harbingers of impending doom
is when a runner starts to finish their loops slower and slower.

falling behind the whistles
causes the whispers to start going around camp,
and the buzzards to start circling overhead.

it can be a vicious vortex.
a later finish means less time to rest
less time to refuel.

making it harder to extrude a better loop the next hour.

declining speed=less rest=worse speed=even less rest=even worse speed=no rest=

termination.

but, there is a contingent that does not draw any attention for coming in just under the wire.
they aren't in decline,
that is their strategy

jeremy ebel is the best known of this group
having run it down to the final 2 with johan steene just a couple of years ago....

running between 58:30 and 59:30 for two days..

no one is taking jeremy lightly,
even tho he is near the back of the field every hour.
nor are they discounting that little band that is hanging back there with him...

there is more than one way to skin a backyard cat.

heidi kumm refused to leave camp to start hour 9,
leaving us with 59 runners out on the big trail as the shadows start to get longer.

hour 9: the sun

crews were excited during the 9th hour,
as the sun made its first appearance.

i don't know that it will be as popular with the runners.

but, that is the way of things in ultras.
the cool temperatures that are perfect for the runners
are not that much fun in camp.

but warm, sunny conditions that make waiting so much easier,
are met with little joy for the ones out on the trail.

hour 9 took down a couple more;
allen benjamin threw in the towel out on the course
and walked in well after the bell.
rodney coombs declared that he had endured enough
and refused to continue.

57 runners pushed on in to hour 10.

hour 10: doomleaders

hour 10 was a clean hour,
with all 57 runners pushing on into hour 11.

the mercy of the road loops is now only 2 hours away...

i attribute the strong results so far
to the appearance of a team of volunteer cheerleaders
whose enthusiastic jumping around and motivational cheers
have been pumping up the runners prior to starting the loops

(it is hard to tell all the things that go on behind the scenes in big's backyard)

such classic cheers as:

G-I-V-E, just give up and you'll be free
and
F-A-I-L, at this race, you will fail

even in spite of the peppy doomleaders,
the signs of deterioration are unmistakable.

it is a slow beating.
a sort of gentle punch in the face.

over and over and over.

what the runners must do is concentrate on running one hour at a time.

they cant afford to let their minds dwell on the fact that the race wont even get serious for another 30 hou

or that predictions are that it will go for another 70.

hour 11: a new leader every hour

early on it was the young guy, dustin mitchell
picked first by ultrasignup,
with three 50k's and a 10 hour on his resume,
he had a hared time gearing down to multiday pace.

about 8 hours in he found that new gear
(smiley face)
and now we are back to the backyard standard;
a new leader every lap.

one lap it was the ecuadorean
the next it was johan
the next time someone altogether else.

the whole texture of a race changes,
when it does not matter how fast you run,
as long as you beat the time limit every hour.

runners go faster to stretch their legs
or to squeeze out enough time to hit the portapotties between loops
or just because they are feeling their wheaties.

runners lag back to the edge,
to battle thru a bad spell
or just for a change of pace.

at this point,
the pain is like cold rain...

slowly penetrating to the very core.
this loop will make 50 miles.
and you know you have done something.

and the end....

no one can afford to think about the end yet.
it is days away.
days of endless discomfort.
days where the whistle will never let you sleep.

every one of them is feeling it now.
and the real race wont start until the day after tomorrow.
(gawd, aren't we all jealous?)

rip glenn dell kasper and jeff stafford,
11th hour casualties.
55 runners are out on the 12th and final trail loop (for today)

hour 12: the call of the open road

hour 12 is always tough.
the sun goes down partway thru,
and the last of the trail has to be done in the dark.

we only lost 2 during the loop.
regina sooeey missed the cut
and erika boody reportedly took a spill and is hurt.

nick vermeulon refused to start.

for the 52 survivors to reach 50 miles,
there is no excuse to stop before 100.

the road loop is gentle and forgiving.
making the cutoff is ridiculously easy...

and that is the cruelest part.
because in the darkness
the race just stretches out in front of you past the horizon.

this is the time when the runners start to look at the others around them,
and wonder just how much they have in the tank.
100 miles becomes an ugly temptation,
as the mind starts to play its evil tricks;

100 miles is an achievement.
24 hour 100, lots of people would love to have that
these people will never quit, 100 miles is something.

we wont really know which part of the mind wins the battle,
until we see who returns to the trail in the morning.

what we do know,
is that for the next 12 hours,
every runner will face off with their toughest opponent....

the weakness that dwells in each of us
and does its best to prevent us from finding the greatness that is in there as well.

weakness volunteers itself.
greatness we have to seek....

and it is a lot harder to find
when it is dark,
and you are cold and alone....

but, greatness does not wait for us on the easy path.

Stats added by Mike Dobies
The depth of this year's race is becoming evident.

76% (53/70) made it to 50 miles compared to:

2017 - 48% (28/58)

2016 - 39% (18/46)

2015 - no race

2014 - 50% (20/40)

2013 - 38% (14/37)

2012 - 55% (12/22)

2011 - 31% (10/32)

All - 51% (155/305)

hour 13: bloody sunday

the road and trail will be strewn with bodies before this day is over.
already jerry palmer, gregory burger, kelly hutchins, and deano montreal are gone.
alas, we knew them well.

48 runners disappeared into the mists of hour 14.

it is easy to sit at home,
and imagine how you would face down the demons of the night.

it is very different out in the frigid darkness.

alone.

very alone.

hour 14: D-A-R-K

D-A-R-K

it's dark out there, so be afraid!

cheerleaders make all the difference.

we got a clean hour,

altho we are down to 47 anyway.

mark lattanzi belatedly reported in as having given up before hour 14.

we are in the stage where the winnowing gets tougher and tougher.

the small fry are about gone,

and the runners who have stuck will have to be broken down a little at a time.

an hour at a time,

that is being done.

next hour we pass 100k.

47 runners marched on into hour 15

hour 15: sobering thoughts

jeremy kaiding came in and dropped.he would be the only one.

ben yancey and mark laveson only barely beat the clock,

but they made u-turns in the corral and went back out.

talk in camp is....

well, you know what talk in camp is.

from somewhere deep inside,

ben and mark have to find something extra

so they can reach the finish in time for fluids or food or...

down here they call this nut cutting time.

46 lonely souls are out on hour 16.
two of them hanging by a thread.

here is a sobering thought...

after 15 hours
and nearly 63 miles,
the field is still about 2 days and 200 miles from where things are expected to get serious.

hour 16: the bad place (correction)

two more fell this hour.
marc laveson just ran out of gas.....

ricky haro refused to go on.

ben was over 30 minutes to the turn,
but he found something extra
and reached the finish with nearly two minutes to refuel..

but he is in a bad place.
a very bad place.

we all know the bad place.
it is not a place you want to be.
but sometimes,
the bad place is on the way to where you want to go.

ben is not the first to reach the bad place this weekend.
and he wont be the last.

the challenge for each
is to pass thru the bad place

and reach the other side.

easier said than done.
because it is a very bad place.

44 runners trudged on into hour 17.
the bad place is directly in their path.

hour 17: no reason

they just keep stopping.
and then they won't go on.

nothing will convince them to go on.

ben yancey.
gone after 17 hours.
derek tinnin.
gone after 17 hours.

the 42 survivors went grimly back into the night.
the cold and windy night.
the lonely, bitter night.
the night that might never end.

from somewhere they must find the hope that dawn will come.
because dawn will bring a revival of the spirit
a freshening of the soul.

they must not think about the 7 long hours that lie between now and dawn.
because this is only hour 18.

hour 18: the bloodbath continues

jeremy ebel escaped the post last hour, but he gave it up.

this hour it was kelley fejes and shenoa creer.
word from out on the road is that a fierce north wind is buffeting the runners going along ben's long field.

these are difficult hours,
and it is showing.

difficult hours that are paring the field down to the big dogs.

i saw a lot of grim faces,
as the 39 battered remnants moved out into the darkness of the 19th hour,
like refugees from some disaster.

we are getting close to half the field gone.
and, realistically, we should expect less than half the field to reach 100 miles.

and we are slowly grinding out the last miles to reach 100.

at the backyard 100 miles is a measuring stick.
we really don't know who is in it for the long haul,
until the 25th hour.

going on past 100 miles is making a statement.
it is saying;
i have come to play ball.

those who start the 25th lap will not go down easy,
they will have to be beaten down.

meanwhile,
we have 6 more long hours of darkness to cross,
just to reach 100.
the pre-race favorites have not gotten much attention.
they are barely noticeable,
as they go quietly about their business.

witnessing what the others are enduring,
and seeing them succumb,
one by one,
leaves no doubt about why the big dogs are big dogs.
and the little dogs are little dogs.

but there are still a number of little dogs left.
if they can cinch it up tight,
and hang in there,
they have their opportunity to become a big dog.

it is within their grasp,
and they have paid a high price to get this close.
but, we know that not all of them will make it to see the dawn.
not all of those will find it in themselves to continue into a new day.

i reckon that is why we call those who do the big dogs.
they have proved it on the field of combat.

the next 6 hours will separate the contenders from the pretenders

150 miles at Big's.

2018 - 16% (11/70)

2017 - 5% (3/58)

2016 - 0% (0/46)

2015 - no race

2014 - 8% (3/40)

2013 - 0% (0/37)

2012 - 0% (0/22)

2011 - 0% (0/32)

All - 6% (17/305)

hour 19: the eternal hell

i did so much better in my 24....but i knew at 24 it was over.

the virgins are discovering the cruelest trick of the backyard.
there is no defined end.

too many have allowed the burden of this long night
to be weighted with the potential of another night,
and another.....

and another?

if the key to success at the backyard is to run only one 4 miles at a time,
that is also its most difficult trick.

it is too easy to let allow your mind to ask the question;
even if we survive tonight,
do you really think we can survive another?

the mind games can be subtle.
as the contenders casually discuss plane tickets on wednesday.... or thursday.
and talk of changing them until later,
if necessary.

hammer blows to the psyche of runners fully challenged by surviving hour to hour tonight...

merely living to see the sun rise on sunday seeming at the edge of possibility.

as we move past the boundary of physical possibility,

the backyard becomes a contest of will.

humans can do one thing that other animals cannot.
we can will our bodies to continue past our limits.
but, while it is one thing to do that to reach a goal we can see...

to push ourselves towards an unknown end is a terrible mental burden.
one must learn to shrink the focus.
you must only find the strength to run 4.16667 miles.

not so easy alone in the dark
after nearly a full day without sleep
and a body pushed already to its limits.

from here, this becomes a contest of the mind.
the body is merely a tool to implement the will of the mind.

brian grant and marylou corino are gone.
brian crawling off an hour ago to hide in his tent
(we had to figure it out when he stopped appearing on the timing mat reports.
marylou just petering out in the last half of the 19th hour.

37 runners wobbled out into the 20th hour.

hour 20: halfway

nicolay nachev and david lantz
resting in peace.
at least for now.
how they evaluate their decisions in the light of day
will be seen tomorrow.

we have reached the halfway point.
35 of the original 70 are gone.

50% of the starting field have failed to even log 100 miles.

at the moment there is no obvious choice of who will be next to fall.
but, no one thinks all 35 will reach the dawn.

that is all they have to do now.
4 more hours.
because we all know that life will return when the sun comes up.

that can be difficult to believe when it seems the night will never end.

hour 21: are we having fun yet?

35 came in and 35 went out for hour 22.
no one looked great,
but no one was in obvious trouble.
everyone looks a little worse for the wear

half the field to 100 is still possible,
but not likely.

still,
i cant peg anyone in particular
as i likely drop.

only 3 hours to sunrise now!

hour 22: 35 in and 35 out

no one looks better,
no one looks worse.
i think there is a good chance we see 35 to 100.

only 2 more hours till the sun comes back.

i announced that to the crowd in the corral,
and anne lang responded in surprise;
oh yeah, i forgot about the sun!

hour 23: in an hour we will know

we lost jerry hughes.
so only 34 runners started the 100 mile lap.

everyone knows the first 100 is the hard one...

smiley face.

it is with great anticipation
that i look to see how many will start that 25th hour.

that will be the real contenders.

the sun will be coming up,
and the cold about to break...

but it also means hitting the trail again.
the "easy" miles we have enjoyed on the road all night will be done for the next 12 hours.

the first 100 might not be the hard one,
but it definitely serves as a sort of seeding contest.

after the beating everyone has taken,
continuing can be taken as a declaration that a runner still believes they have a chance to win.

back before this thing began,
when speculation was rife,
we ran thru a relatively short list of favorites.

all of those favorites are still in the game.
we lost a couple of darkhorses,
but most of the darkhorses remain as well...

along with a few runners that no one expected.

in an hour, the real race will begin!

hour 24: big dogs and jeer leaders

S-L-E-E-P,
unlike you we got to sleep!

the jeerleaders returned from a night of peaceful sleep
to continue their motivational magic.

it must have worked.
while all 34 survivors of the night made it in for their sub-24 hour hundreds,
only 3 chose to abandon their dreams:

darryl flacks
michael anderson
anne lang

and so the second day begins with the 31 big dogs on the trail:

guillaume calmettes
andres villagran
dustin mitchell
kat schuler
peter cromie
andy pearson
shawn webber
johan steene
andy emerson
sean oconnor
alicia rich
slade mccormick
courtney dauwalter
maggie guterl
chris robbins
jasmine chiaromonte
adam rood
padraig mullins
cassie scallon
daniel shamburg
david johnston
gavin woody
joe fejes
casey thivierge
greg salveson
brian trinkle
anatoly ross
josep barbarillo
nathan marti
marcy beard
will thomas

after watching the struggles through the night,
it was amazing to see how these folks were running in the early daylight.

there is a lot of toughness and talent in this field.
we are nowhere near the end of this.

100 miles at Big's.

2018 - 49% (34/70)

2017 - 24% (14/58)

2016 - 9% (4/46)

2015 - no race

2014 - 30% (12/40)

2013 - 19% (7/37)

2012 - 14% (3/22)

2011 - 0% (0/32)

All - 24% (74/305)

hour 25: a long day's journey into night

even tho we had been reduced to a dream field by 24 hours of running,
i knew that the return to the trail would bring some casualties with it.
the change in surface would exacerbate any incipient problems....

the losses were less than i expected.

alicia rich, nathan marti, and sean o'connor saw their race end in the 25th hour.

watching the rest of them,
i was struck by just how strong everyone looked.
if you plan on following this to the bitter end,
you might as well settle in for a long haul.

because there are 28 big dogs out on hour 26.
and they are going to have to be broken down bit by bit.

hour 26: fraying at the edges

we had another clean hour.
there is a core group of runners who look as fresh as when they arrived.
not that it necessarily means anything.

in this race,
where your opponent must quit for you to win,
appearances are important.
any sign of weakness feeds your opponent,
and gives them hope.

but some of the runners appear to be holding on by a thread.

each hour we watch them head out on shaky legs,
and wonder if this will be the hour they fall.

of course, this is multiday running,
and revival is not impossible....

but any recovery will have to be done on the move.
there is no allowance for a bad hour.

hour 27: shrinkage

i apologize for having missed the passing of kat schuller and josep barbarillo last hour.
i was fraying a bit myself.

however, a 15 minute nap has done wonders for me.
and i find that, following hour 27, casey thivierge, jasmine chiaromonte, andy emerson, brian trinkle,
and cassie scallon have joined the ranks of the undead on the sidelines.

21 runners scampered gaily out into the woods on loop 28.

the drop to 21 participants occurred in dramatic fashion, as the fraying runners bowed to the inevitable er

in the backyard, people do not drop when they can run no longer.
they drop when they no longer believe they can win.

those still on the course seem to have tapped into some inner source of strength
that allows them to continue beyond the boundaries of human physical endurance.
or else they have the ability to disguise any frailty or weakness.

hour 28: the usual suspects

four more bit the dust.
dustin mitchell
anatoly ross
chris robbins
daniel shamburg

17 runners lined up and answered the bell for hour 29.

the semblance of this to a gladiatorial contest grows more striking with every hour
as spectators along the sidelines scan the incoming runners for signs of weakness at the end of every lap

the moniker dead man walking generally comes within an hour or two of a drop.

a quick run through of the survivors

with totally subjective assessments

based on finish line and chair city observations:

guillaume calmettes: unscathed

andres villagran: the ecuadorean looks like a tough customer

peter cromie: ireland unscathed

andy pearson: showing damage, but still fighting

shawn webber: showing damage, but still fighting

johan steene: looks very tired, but has looked that way since his 48 nightmare trip to the race,
which ended with him driving overnight to arrive just in time for the start.

slade mccormick: showing damage, but still fighting

courtney dauwalter: unscathed

maggie guterl: unscathed

adam rood: showing damage, but still fighting

padraig mullins: stated he was quitting last lap... but could not resist answering the bell

david johnston: unscathed

gavin woody: unscathed

joe fejes: unscathed

greg salveson: showing damage, but still fighting

marcy beard: showing damage, but still fighting

will thomas: showing damage, but still fighting

the usual suspects seem likely to be still around this time tomorrow

hour 29: halfway

this time padraig was able to stick in his chair.

16 runners are out on hour 30...

musings around the finish line:

we are now halfway to last year's losing mileage.

we might be as much as 12 hours from halfway this year.

(the runners i talked to said; "maybe more")

i am predicting that we have 8 runners still going at sunrise tomorrow.

if mike has to leave to go time his next race,

i will do the timing with my barkley watch,

and the only results will be my updates.

hour 30: squinty eyes

marcy beard, slade mccormick, will thomas
they will be missed.

only 13 went on to the 31st hour.
we are one away from establishing the dirty dozen.

this deep into the race it starts to be really sad every time someone goes down.
sad for their competitors
sad for the race crew.
sad for everyone.

and a surprise, because no one left is acting like they are in trouble.

actually, everyone left looks pretty good.
except for one thing.

there are a lot of squinty eyes out there.
(including, mine, i am sure)
not a lot of sleeping going on around here.
and squinty eyes is the one thing you cant hide.

but no one is giving away anything else.

i can assure you, tho,
everyone is feeling it.

hour 31: the dirty dozen

we have our dirty dozen.
we lost andy pearson out on the trail.
he was too young,
but his time had come.

guillaume calmettes:france
andres villagran: ecuador
peter cromie: ireland
shawn webber:
johan steene: sweden
courtney dauwalter:

maggie guterl:
adam rood:
david johnston:
gavin woody:
joe fejes:
greg salveson:

these are the cream of the crop.
selected entirely by merit.

from among their number will come the one and only survivor of the 2018 backyard massacre.

i have been asked what it is that would bring athletes like these to participate in such a contest.
people who have won so many honors
and distinguished themselves in so many venues.
why would they risk their ego in a contest which results in all or nothing
a contest in which all but one will fail.

at the risk of speaking for someone else,
i know what the appeal would be to me.
it is very simple;
i love to compete.
and i believe that is what draws them here.

when you know you will be able to pit your own abilities against the best there is,
when you know that success is not certain,
maybe even unlikely,
the attraction is like a moth to a flame.

nothing makes me feel so alive
as putting everything on the line
in a win or lose situation.

i wont lie.
i love to win
and i hate to lose.

but if i could not lose,
then the victory would count as nothing.
and if i do lose,
it is not the end of the world.
because, as sweet as the victory might be
and however bitter the loss,

it was really the journey that meant the most all along.
it was the excitement, the adrenaline, the focus, and the challenge...

and the relationships.
with those against whom i compete,
it does not inspire hate,
but rather love.

we share something special.
you are never closer to anyone,
than the rival across from you.
you have shared the training, the preparation, the hopes and dreams.
you have shared the same battleground,
and the same experience....

i think i see this among the dirty dozen.
when i see one looking for a bottle of water,
one of their rivals will jump to offer one of their own.
i see them running together,
walking together
talking and laughing together.

even tho they cannot succeed
unless the other fails,
it is easy to fit both the joy of winning
and empathy for the disappointment of a very special friend
into a single heart.

and so we have them here.
out of this amazing field of runners,
have been chosen on the field of combat
the dirty dozen.

it is a singular distinction,
that can never be taken away,
and something they will always share.
just as they share the joy of having competed for this honor
with all the worthy athletes who had to fall
before these 12 warriors could be recognized.

so, i think it takes a special person to embrace the last man standing concept.
you must have both the ego to pursue the victory against the best competition available;
and the humility to be happy that you gave your all,

even if that victory is denied.

hour 32: short shelf life

the dirty dozen did not last long.
adam rood went peacefully ,
asleep on his feet.

11 runners continue on to hour 33

hour 33: cracks

now that we are down to the short hairs
it seems like time to start thinking in terms of handicapping the remaining field....

while i can observe each runner;
their physical movements
their demeanor
etc

while i can look at their past records
and the times they have been running while here

i just dont think i have any real feel for who will come out on top.

everyone is showing cracks physically.
they are not moving as gracefully
they dont have the same spring in their step
they are not the runner they were in hour 1.

all of them have deep resume's with many accomplishments,
and (for what it is worth) they have been consistently the fastest moving runners in the backyard since th

these laps now are much more impressive to watch
than the regular laps with everyone.

and i know they all have the hearts of champions.

so, there is really only one distinction i can draw.
guillaume is the reigning champion,
and with his win in ireland
he would have to be considered the premier LMS runner in the world right now.

so, if i had to pick,
i would pick the current king....

but it would not be an upset for someone to dethrone him.

hour 34: rifts

if every runner has cracks,
there is no telling when a crack will widen into an out and out rift.

we had a clean hour,
with all 11 continuing into hour 35.
but it was almost not so....

peter cromie, pride of erin,
got so far as unfastening his ankle strap
before a great outcry from the bleachers convinced him to go on...

at least for one more lap.

coming in on 34,
he looked as solid as anyone in the field.
but we do not have an x-ray to see what is inside.

tiny cracks might be over massive fault lines under the surface.

everyone is hurt.
and only they know how hurt they are,

will peter recover from this momentary lapse,
and go on to compete for many more hours?

there is no way to tell.
it has happened before.

but he also might cut it short and come back at any time,
or dawdle until the time limit passes...

or just come in and quit for good.

all it takes is one weak moment,
and the backyard can end for anyone.

hour 35: renewal

all 11 finished hour 35,
and all 11 set out on hour 36,
the last trail miles for the day
(taking them to 150 miles)

peter found new life out on the trails,
and he is solidly back in the race....

this is why you never, ever give up.
you aren't beat until you believe you are beat.

hour 36: the road

all 11 made it to the road.
there were some moments of near concern,
as the clock wound towards 57 with only two runners in camp
since the last half of the final trail loop is in the dark,
and much slower.

but, we can see the lights thru the trees as the runners approach,
and the survivors are running in a pretty close formation.
we were soon relieved of our concern as a string of lights could be seen making their way down towards :

the last runner came in at 59 minutes,
and a minute later they were all off.

now the discussion is centered on how many will make it thru the night.
the loops between 150 and 200 miles are not difficult.

but they fall between 150 and 200 miles.
no one is betting that everyone will survive.

there is peter,
whose near death experience is still fresh.
another runner has developed a worsening limp over the last few hours.

and, as i have said, every runner is showing some cracks now.
any issue can turn serious in a fairly short length of time,
unless properly treated or patched.
the worst issue being a loss of proper mental focus.

and time to tend to physical issues is painfully short.
and dealing with mental issues is dicey at the best of times...

alone in the dark is far from the best of times.

it is going to be a long dark night,
with 11 separate paths to sunrise.

150 miles at Big's.

2018 - 16% (11/70)

2017 - 5% (3/58)

2016 - 0% (0/46)

2015 - no race

2014 - 8% (3/40)

2013 - 0% (0/37)

2012 - 0% (0/22)

2011 - 0% (0/32)

All - 6% (17/305)

hour 37: why?

we lost sean webber.

he looked great on the road,
he even started to go out on hour 38.
but retreated to his chair.

i dont think i fully processed his reasoning,
but it had to do with his feet...

i thought your feet were supposed to hurt?

none the less,
we were reduced to 10

hour 38: how many will see the sun?

well, i stayed out this time to watch them come in.

once again i was impressed with how strong everyone looked.

there was some discussion in the timing tent,
speculating on how many would still be in the race when morning came.

estimates ranged from 6 to 8...

no one said "all 10"

i asked why?

it is going to be a long, cold night

i watched all 10 head out,
and then started over to check the fire
and then make my post...

leaving the fire i heard a voice i recognized.
it was peter cromie, bailing

just like that, we are down to 9.

hour 39: this morbid night

andres is gone.

the tough ecuadorean succumbed to stomach issues part way thru the 39th hour.

he had been sick for hours,
and we could see he wasn't quite right.

(tiny cracks)

unknown to us, his stomach had been emptying itself, while refusing to accept anything ingested

(great rift under the surface)

until he was too lightheaded to continue.

just like that we were down to 8.

maybe i am wrong,

but it seemed like the sparse assemblage in the starting corral for hour 40
was more subdued than before.

as if the distance was beating them down

as if the night was closing in on them.

last night seemed like an endless dark tunnel.

but tonight is a morbid black shroud.

and everyone left has tiny cracks showing.
we still dont know how many are the outward manifestation of giant rifts underneath.

it is going to be a long cold night;
and only the strong will survive it to see the sun rise.

hour 40: hang on for dear life

it was not my imagination.
the survivors are fighting for their lives.
we didn't lose anyone this hour,
but there are several who are teetering.

this is the reality of the last man standing format:

night time is hell.

night time is always tough.
but, when you can never stop
and never rest
night time is hell

the second night is hell squared.

you know how night is in any ultra.
it is the slowest,
the most difficult time.

it doesnt even have to be an ultra.
in everyday life
night time magnifies things.
scary is scarier
sickness is sicker
loneliness is lonelier....

pain is more painful.

for the 8 tortured souls hanging on in big dog's backyard
the night is not something to relish
it is something to be survived.
it is not a time to run fast
it is a time to avoid falling behind

there is nothing for the night,
but to hang on for dear life

i have my fingers crossed for the gladiators out on the road.
i saw their grim faces.
i saw their twisted bodies
i saw their limping, shambling gaits.

i know that it is all temporary.
that with the morning light things will seem less hideous
that there will be a ray of hope in the sunshine
i think they know this, too...

but, with more than 170 continuous miles on their feet
will they remember?

it is always easiest to give up at night.

there is not a house on the road loop.
only the darkened woods and fields.
their only company tonight,
the yipping cries of packs of coyotes.

vaya con dios, gladiators.

hour 41: another hour in the books

eight came in and eight went out into the 42nd hour.
funny how close the whole field is sticking together out there.
the pack looked a lot better this time around.

not exactly joyous,
but the ones struggling an hour ago
seemed to have stabilized things....

that is an ultra thing, tho.
we go thru ups and downs.
when we are in a down,
we have to remember it wont last forever.
and when we are in an up,
we have to remember it wont last forever.

the important thing is,
we are one hour closer to the dawn.

at the end of this hour it will be 6 hours to the trail,
and the night will be half over.

hour 42: changing places

another clean hour.
8 in and 8 out.

the overall mood has markedly improved.
but the individual struggles continue.
one runner had gone thru several grim hours
uncommunicative
with a very unhappy expressions
bent over as if in abdominal distress
and was the last person thru the splits.

he seemed to be in what we call the bad place.

last hour he ran quite well,
and was smiling and talkative,

while another runner who had been moving well
had apparently swapped places,
and was in the bad place.

hour 43: not a lot of happy faces

in the corral this time.
guillaume did have a cheerful response when i tried to raise their spirits by telling them we were probably

happy, or not happy, all 8 answered the bell once again,
and trudged out into hour 44.

only 5 more hours until sunup, where they will hit 200 miles, and move onto the trail again.

dave johnston went out... stomach problems.

the magnificent 7

guillaume calmettes:france

johan steene: sweden

courtney dauwalter:

maggie guterl:

gavin woody:

joe fejes:

greg salveson:

hour 44: assessment

the magnificent 7 did not last long.

joe fejes dropped after the 44th hour.

here are the 5 remaining competitors:

maggie guterl:

maggie started to develop a slight limp about 12 hours ago.

it has slowly gotten worse with the passage of time and miles,

and at this point she is limping badly with apparently some issue with her hip.

greg salveson:

greg was a darkhorse to be around this long. but he is a relatively young runner, with previous backyard

johan steene:

johan had a nightmare trip to tennessee,

his plane forced to return from midatlantic to sweden by mechanical issues,

he found another flight, but ended up stranded in washington unable to find a flight to tennessee, so he r

courtney dauwalter:

courtney was among the pre-race favorites

guillaume calmettes:

guillaume is defending champion, and currently the most experienced last man standing runner in the wo

he went through several bad hours, when he was running slowly, and seemed to be bent double with sto

but he is currently back to his normal self.

hour 45: the beat(ing) goes on

maggie guterl only made it a hundred yards or so into the 45th hour before succumbing to her hip probler

and i owe an apology to gavin woody for leaving him off the earlier assessment.

gavin is definitely still in the race, and has quietly been putting together a very impressive first 200 miles.

the 5 surviving runners:

courtney

gavin

johan

guillaume

greg

have all put together a very impressive first 45 hours.

in 3 more hours they will be at 200 miles,

and heading out on the trails in the daylight.

i dont think the question right now is who wins,

it is how many of them will make it past 3 days.

hour 46: your lion eyes

we watched the fab five disappear around the corner...

watching them with the eyes of a predator.

to be honest,

they all looked like easy prey.

their movements were stiff and a little awkward.

their steps were choppy

not that they looked bad,

for someone who was approaching 200 miles of running on their legs.

but, we looked at them with the eyes of a predator...

if i were a lion,

picking out the gazelle i wanted to cut from the herd for lunch,

the easiest prey;

which one would i take?

it goes against my instincts.

i stand in awe of what they are doing;

what they have done;

what they are about to do.

my natural reaction is to want to see them succeed.

but i need them to fail.

one by one,
i need them to fail.

just like they need each other to fail.

i have been up,
except a couple of 5 minute naps,
since 0400 saturday.

it is monday morning now,
and i cannot get actual sleep until 4 of the 5 have dropped out.

so i have an unsavory interest
in which one will fail next.

what i see is not too encouraging.
i don't see anyone that looks like they are ready to feed the lions.
they might be a little wobbly.
but they look resolute.
determined.

while i have some ideas about who will go down next,
i think it will be a long time before i get that sleep.

i wonder if they look at each other the same way.
they have the same stake.
each one cannot rest until the others have quit.

the only difference is,
they have a choice.
they can end the suffering any time,
they can be the one to give up.

i must stay the course,
until 4 of the 5 have given up.

it is a paradoxical situation i find myself in.
in my heart,
i want to see each of them succeed.
but i need 4 of them to fail.

they face the same paradox.
the mutual misery makes them compatriots.
but their only escape is if the others fail.

i wonder what it would be like to be one of them.
i wonder if the hair prickles up on the back of their neck...

knowing there are 5 sets of eyes on them.
watching them with lion eyes;
searching for any sign of weakness,

hour 47: here comes the sun

not much of a writeup this time.
all 5 forged ahead into their 48th hour.

it makes me proud for them,
as they have only to run 4.166667 miles this next hour
to break 48 hours for 200 miles.

that is no mean achievement.

by the time they start the next hour,
the sun will be up,
and they will face the challenge of making time on the trail,
with weary legs.

between now and then,
i think i have time for a 20 minute nap.

i better take it.

this thing could last a while!

hour 48: here comes the sun!

people logged 200 miles in under 2 days in the same race.
i wonder how often that happens.

the sun seems to have reinvigorated the survivors,
as they set off on the trail at a pretty healthy clip.
all 5 are now out on hour 49.

speedy start or no speedy start,
the trail has been a challenge for the runners coming off a full night on the road annually.

it will be interesting to see if all 5 can make the time limit on this first loop,
and by how much.

as the cumulative time mounts,
being able to finish quickly enough to get what little rest is possible becomes ever more important.

200 miles at Big's.

2018 - 7% (5/70)

2017 - 3% (2/58)

2016 - 0% (0/46)

2015 - no race

2014 - 5% (2/40)

2013 - 0% (0/37)

2012 - 0% (0/22)

2011 - 0% (0/32)

All - 3% (9/305)

hour 49: mind games

out went the 5 once again.
smiling
laughing
running hard and strong.

hidden inside are
the pain
the stiffness
the fatigue...

and the sleep deprivation.

you cannot show weakness in big's back yard
it feeds your opponents
and gives them hope.

at some races you must beat the distance

at others you must beat the terrain
at still others the climate.

in big's back yard you must conquer your weakness
and beat your opponents

if you were here to watch,
you would think that these people were as fresh as when they started saturday morning.

that is the facade they show to the world.

but inside, they feel just like anyone would feel
running endlessly for hundreds of miles.

and so the five go in an established formation.
hour after hour.

dauwalter, calmettes, steene, and woody all in a pack.
salveson trailing by a short distance, but in sight.

they are true warriors, these five.
in the finest tradition.

but sooner or later,
someone must break.

who will be the first to go?

hour 50: fun size sleep

watched them all go out again for hour 51.
(212.5 miles after this lap is completed)

even tho the signs of damage are unmistakable,
and (in my opinion) a couple of them have some serious damage,
no one is blinking.

it seems almost a certainty that we will watch the mileage creep past the 300 mile mark by tomorrow mor

these guys have return tickets for as late as thursday
(which would be 500 miles)
with the express intention of changing them to later if necessary

for all the strains and sprains

that are no doubt accumulating,
one of the most remorseless and inescapable punishments
has to be the fun size sleep increments.

have you ever seen those "fun size" candy bars?
what is fun about a candy bar the size of a postage stamp?
well, getting your sleep in "fun size" segments is no picnic.

after completing a lap,
every second is precious,
going to your tent,
any kind of fueling or clothing adjustments
then the whistles starting at 3 minutes till

it is hard to ever get a full 5 minutes for sleep.

a successful backyarder becomes an expert at making use of every second of sleep time that is available

johan is the master.

in the chair section,
where each runner is allowed enough space for a chair in close proximity to the starting corral
(larger camp-sites/supply depots/etc are further away)
johan has his chair with a blanket draped just so
and his box of food underneath.

johan will cross the finish mat,
make a bee-line for his chair,
sit down, pull the blanket around him,
and be asleep.

for johan difficulty falling asleep means having enough time to flip the top of the blanket over his head.

usually he is asleep before he can do that.

but no matter how efficient you are with your sleep time,
the amount of sleep is minimal,
and only accumulated at a few minutes an hour.

as the days go by,
there is a deficit being built up.

just one of many challenges that go along with this format.

hour 51: the easy gazelle

speculation started last night that guillaume was not mechanically 100%

much as happened with maggie,
what was a scarcely detectable hitch in his stride
is reaching the point that you would call it a noticeable limp.

it looks like he is trying to work thru it
but the back yard format is sort of merciless for anyone needing to treat an injury.

if anyone can beat this,
it would be guillaume.
but there is concern that his race is in trouble.

hour 52: sandbags?

all five came in from the 52nd hour,
but guillaume was dead last,
and barely beat the time limit
finishing within about 20 seconds of starting again.

his demise seemed imminent.....

but he torched the shakeout loop,
and entered the woods far ahead.

so, does he have an issue?
was he just sandbagging?
or did he do a couple of slow loops to rest?

no one knows but guillaume,
and possibly his crew,

one of the beautys of the backyard
is that it allows for gamesmanship.

running a lap really close to the cutoff is not a big deal,
and easy to recover from.

with the knowledge of the small loop runners accumulate
(especially if you have done it more than 100 times like guillaume)

they know exactly how fast to run from any given point
to get the specific finish time they want.

what, if anything, is up with guillaume?
nobody knows...

but, if he has them thinking about it,
then he is already ahead.

what we do know is that all five are out on the 53rd hour.
and this race is far from over!

hour 53: muhammed ali

i am reminded of a tactic heavyweight boxer muhammed ali used to use.
tagged with a hard punch,
his knees would buckle,
and his opponent would charge in swinging wildly to finish him...

an unhurt ali would use the lapse in caution to deck his opponent.

this tactic had another advantage.
after his propensity for playing possum was common knowledge
i saw him get tagged with punches that really did stagger him.
but his opponent would hesitate to follow up on the advantage,
for fear of walking into a trap
giving ali time to shake off the cobwebs.

backyard is a different sort of ultra.
you are competing against people,
not distance or time.

as i slowly get to understand the personalities out on the course
i am less and less willing to pick a favorite.

after his two barely under the cutoff loops,
guillaume blistered one in about 48.

you have guillaume, playing perfectly the role of the master
(as befits his position as the reigning world champion)
unpredictable, indecipherable.
then there is his foil, courtney. the joe frazier approach. boring in with heavy punches, knocking out laps I
not to be counted out is johan, a ray mancini, capable of taking an astounding amount of punishment and

gavin. what can you say about gavin, except he is too quiet.
nobody is talking gavin,
but a look at his background (both on and off the field of competition) tells you there is no reason he can't
he just quietly and unobtrusively keeps racking up miles.
if you watch him, gavin might be the least damaged runner in the field
(everyone has taken some damage. you dont run 217 miles without taking some damage)

and then there is greg.
since he looks so young,
and has consistently been well to the rear,
greg is easy to overlook.

but it isnt like greg doesnt have any skins on his wall.
and he demonstrated when he needed a little extra time for a pit stop,
that he is easily capable of running a faster lap.

nope.
this race is far from over,
and not just in terms off how far it will go.

hour 54: i need longer hours!

all 5 came in,
and all 5 went out on hour 55.

at this point in the run
all of them have honed their aid during transition to a fine art.

if you ever decide to shed blood in a LMS event,
one of the easily overlooked technical details is how you spend that time between hours.

these guys do not have the luxury of time at an aid station,
as you experience in regular ultras.

from the time you arrive
until the time you have to be back in the corral
is a finite and defined number of minutes,
and not very many of them
and you have to prioritize what will get done.

eat, sleep, change clothes, treat a blister, poop, all those little things that you do at an aid station...

if they take more time than you made available you have to pick what gets done.

if you need to do more than your time will fit,
then you have to run a faster loop.

or you can be like anatoly;
who changed one wet sock,
and then was not able to change the other for 3 more hours.

hour 55: the champion is down

we now have our final 4:
greg salveson
courtney dauwalter
gavin woody
johan steene

guillaume is still out on the trail,
being attended by his crew and race personnel.
as yet i am uncertain as to the nature of his injury,

but according to reports,
for all the rocky, rooty, treacherous sections of the trail,
he fell on a section that is essentially flat and clean.

this is a heartbreaking way to see his outing end,
but with all the tens of thousands of miles that have been run on the big trail,
sooner or later someone was bound to get injured.

i will pass along more information as it becomes available.
(with guillaume's permission, of course)

hour 56: the show must go on

even tho we knew he would not be coming,
we could not help but look up the trail in hopes that guillaume might appear anyway.

he did not,
and the starting corral felt empty without him.
but we blew the whistles and rang the bell
and the final 4 took to the trail for hour 57.

guillaume, as it turned out, had not fallen.
the tendons on top of his foot,

where it attaches to his ankle.

the body endures tremendous stresses
over distances like this.
and guillaume's body had taken enough.

it is my hope that an injury caused by repetitive stress
will heal quicker than one caused by a trauma,

hour 57: steady state

57 hours came with no greg.
and just like that we were down to 3.

courtney, johan, and gavin.

one will survive.

but there is no telling how long it will take for the race to be decided.
even after 240 miles,
the three musketeers have plenty of vinegar left.
what is important now is to keep beating the time limit.
there is no advantage to running a fast time for a loop,
as everything becomes equal again every hour.

the key to this next phase of the race is the same thing that is the key to a consistent performance at any
finding a steady state.

in spite of the gradual accumulation of physical stress
the burden really shifts to mental.
after two and a half days of continuous racing,
they are looking at an unpredictable distance further.

this thing could still go on for days

winner after winner at the backyard,
when it came down to the final few runners
approached the race the same way.

never run more than 4 miles.
dont worry about how many days it will or wont take.
dont think about reaching the road at night,

dont think about reaching the trail during the day.just run the loop in front of you....

until there is no one left,
and no more loops to run.

hour 58/59: laz needed a nap

the musketeers did what they do best,
they were steady.
but now they are out on the record-breaking 60th hour.

250 miles.

it doesn't sound like much,
but 250 miles is a long way.
of course every hour they go is even a longer way.
but 250 miles is special
because it is further than any man has ever gone in a last man standing event.
this is a singular goal that can be attained together.

with all that behind them,
now it comes down to a matter of pride.
because after this,
there is only one thing left to chase.
victory....
and victory can only belong to one.

three great warriors.
champions who neither give nor ask for quarter.
two and a half days of continuous running
and that was only a preliminary for the final battle.
two men and a woman who have never backed down from a challenge
locked in a fight that cannot end
until two of them surrender.

when the smoke clears,
there will be only one winner,
and the other two will have the same result
as those who dropped in the first hours of the contest:

DNF

what happens next no one can predict.

but it will be a story for the ages.

hour 60: breaking new ground

there was a moment of excitement when the runners came in to the finish in the 60th hour.

but no one had much time to celebrate.

the runners retired to their tents to prepare to continue.

i went down to get a fire going for the night

everyone went about their normal routine,

because the run was not done,

and the record was not going to last but a single hour.

the immediate demands of the ongoing race was all that counted. celebrating can wait until business is closed.

250 miles at Big's.

2018 - 4% (3/70)

2017 - 0% (0/58)

2016 - 0% (0/46)

2015 - no race

2014 - 0% (0/40)

2013 - 0% (0/37)

2012 - 0% (0/22)

2011 - 0% (0/32)

All - 1% (3/305)

hour 61: where is the line?

seriously;

what is the limit of human potential.

courtney ran her fastest lap of the race in the 61st hour.

possibly making a statement to the men.

we have been discussing where it goes from here.

how long this thing might last.

how it might end.

nobody is giving an inch.

no matter what.

if any of them could be broken,
they would have broken long ago.
the pain load is something off the charts.
the runners cannot show it.
it would only feed the opponent.
but the pain load is off the charts.

the truest words i have heard was one runner to another;
this can end any time you want.

blunt and to the point.
the only way out is to quit.

and since no one is going to quit.
the real question is;
how far can a human run?

hour 62: i am the thing that lurks in the dark

so it is that the third night is in full swing now.
10 more hours of cold, dark, emptiness
before we see sunlight again.

it is counterintuitive that most of the backyarders refer to the night loops as the "hard" ones,
because the footing is more secure, the terrain more gentle, and the times faster.
but, talking with one of the entrants who has gone deep into the race before
he believes the quits, when they come, will come on the night loops.

i dont think those quits are anywhere close.
courtney ran her fastest lap of the race in the 62nd hour.
johan was on her heels.

it seems that everyone's focus is on just finishing the current lap right now.
of course, that is why they are where they are.
you can only finish the lap you are on..

hour 63: motivation

what is it that drives them?

there was not a moment's hesitation as the musketeers lined up in the corral for hour 64.
no whimpering about what has to be unbearable pain

no loss of focus from the sleep deprivation.
nothing seems to deflect their attention from their goal.

the laser focus that keeps them homed in on their goal,
regardless of the overwhelming distractions is one thing.

another is what drew them to this small farm in the woods,
to push themselves to the very limits of human endurance,
and beyond...

in obscurity.

there is no fame or fortune.
they finish each lonely lap to a smattering applause from other participants and crews.

every hour i walk out there in the cold wind and darkness,
to sound the whistles
and ring the bell

and they line up yet again,
to vanish into the darkness of the loneliest road on earth.
and tack on 4 more miles.

what drives them to do things others cannot even imagine.

hour 64: efficiency

there is one big advantage to a multiple loop course.
after some 64 hours of repeating the same routine
the whole performance has been stripped to its most fundamental requirements.

three mornings ago,
when they began running,
i blew the first warning on the whistle
and the runners all lined up for the start.

tonight,
when i sounded the three whistles for the first warning,
there was not a sound
not a flicker of movement.
i was greeted with the same on the two whistles,
signifying two minutes until the start
and at one whistle....

watching the seconds tick off the clock,
as i counted down to the 30 second warning
it seemed that no one was going to answer the bell.

it was like standing on the corner in a ghost town.
even tho i repeat this same play every hour
and have been doing it for more than two and a half days,
there was this sense that no one was going to show up for the start....

as i began the countdown,
10-9-8-7
the musketeers materialized in the corral.
6-5-4-3-2-1

clang clang clang clang

and off they went,
their figures fading into the darkness.

everything is about total efficiency now.
with their physical resources stretched to the breaking point,
every action is solely designed to move them onwards.

hour 65: gavin woody

out in the darkness
on a lonely road
a drama played itself out, unseen.

for more than two and a half days
and some 270 miles
gavin woody had stood in the face of every challenge

he had run on and on,
as attrition tore through the deepest filed of endurance talent ever assembled,
until, finally, gavin was one of three runners still answering the bell.

but when the survivors lined up to start the 66th hour
gavin woody was in trouble.
his back was bowed
under the weight of the countless miles.
his feet were sacks of broken bones and bruised meat

and his leg muscles turned to blocks of unresponsive wood.

i dont know where gavin found the strength to answer the bell.
and, as i watched his bowed and broken figure shamble out into the darkness,
i wondered if i should stop him,

but, if he had the courage to answer the bell
i felt like he deserved to finish on his own terms.

it was not that long before gavin came staggering back into race headquarters.
his buddies rushed to his side,
and half carried him back to his chair,
where he slumped,
racked with sobs.

he might not have succeeded,
but gavin had met every challenge head on,
and, faced with insurmountable obstacles,
he had refused to back down.

gavin won't get any records
or fame.
all he will get is a DNF

just like everyone else.

but woody won't go home emptyhanded.
he will take home the knowledge that he has been to places that few will ever go
and found in himself strength
that few will ever know.

hour 66: NO REPORT

hour 67: NO REPORT

68 hours: dreamtime

the race for me had become an endless repetition,
as i made my way around my circuit of duties.
hour after hour i went thru the same unchanging tasks.

the core task was the bells and whistles.
that was the one that had to happen every hour
and had to happen at the same time every hour.

walking across the nearly empty field to tend the fire,
it was filled with the ghosts of the throngs that had crowded it at the beginning..
a couple of isolated tents were all that remained of the once bustling tent city that had flowed across it a f

the fire itself had once been surrounded by defeated runners and crews warming themselves by the glow
and flickering yellow flames.
now only a couple of lonely souls without tents huddled beside the fire in yard chairs.

the fire was almost burned down,
so i added a few logs
and started across the empty grass towards the sole remaining pocket of life,
the timing tent.

on the way i thought about what to write about in the update i would send out after the start.
i was determined to come up with something concise
and squeeze out a few minutes to sleep
before i started out on my rounds again.
i had amassed a total of 37 minutes of sleep since getting up on race morning
almost exactly 3 days ago.

a couple of sleepy timers sat in the tent
trying to keep warm .
their duties had dwindled along with the field.
and there were now only 2 runners left alive.
courtney dauwalter and johan steene.

they were the best of the best.
tough, talented, and extremely competitive.
we were resigned to an indefinite stay
as they whittled each other away.
we all looked forward to the sunrise,
now only 5 hours distant.

the remaining competitors were ensconced in a pair of big tents about 20 feet from the empty starting cor
wrapped in tarps to keep out the freezing wind,
they appeared deserted.

i watched the clock accrete its numbers,

and at 3 minutes till blew the whistle three times.

there was not a sign of life from the tents,
as i thought back to 3 days earlier...

when three whistles had drawn a throng of runners to crowd the corral.
at two minutes till i sounded the whistle again.

up until a few hours earlier,
courtney had come out to stand alone in the corral at two whistles.
it was a blatant display of indifference,
as the rest of the dwindling field had come to the corral later and later,
scraping for every second of rest they could get out of their too brief interloopal periods.
there is a little bit of poker in the backyard race,
and runners took every opportunity to show strength.

courtney had finally succumbed to the need for that extra minute of rest.

one whistle sounded.
still i stood alone in a nearly empty field
in front of an empty corral.
the darkened tents betrayed no signs of what was (or was not) going on inside.

it was impossible not to wonder what i would do if no runners answered the bell...

and there was no winner!

at 30 seconds the two gladiators emerged from their tents
and walked to the starting line
standing silently awaiting the bell.

as i counted down the last 10 seconds i saw courtney turn to johan,
and say something.
they exchanged a few words
blown away in the wind,
and then they embraced....

and i knew instantly what had just happened.

only one runner remained in big's backyard.

i watched johan's slender figure disappear into the darkness,
as courtney walked over to her husband (boyfriend?)

and they stood a long time in a sad embrace;
then she walked over to me
a deep sorrow washed over me as we hugged.
what could i say to this magnificent warrior?
she had fought a good fight.
she had run 279 miles in less than 3 days
and broken every man in the field,
save one.
she had absorbed unbelievable punishment without flinching
endured intolerable pain without a whimper.
she had run to the very brink of victory.
but walked away with nothing.

truly. what could anyone say?

she went into her tent,
and the backyard seemed totally empty.

it was a long wait for johan to complete his victory.
he would later tell me it was the hardest lap of the race.
once i knew i had won, i could feel all the pain.

the joy of victory was overshadowed
by the loss of his last rival and companion.

it is always this way when the backyard ends.
you have suffered so much together.
shared the pain and the effort
gone through so much
for so long.
in the end losing them is like losing a piece of yourself.

after it was all over
i went to the little house to start my update.

the update i had been putting together in my mind was,
of course,
gone.

how to express the flood of emotions
how to explain the loss of purpose
i could not.

i thought about the wasps we had seen around camp all weekend.
while they were everywhere,
no one got stung.

this time of year the wasp nests are dead.
and the wasps who had tended them all summer no longer had a purpose.
they flew, or walked, about aimlessly.
they were still alive.
but they no longer had any purpose.

i felt like one of those wasps.

i looked at my laptop,
sitting there and waiting for me to put words in it.
and no words would come.

so i gathered a few of my possessions that i would need in the morning
and walked up the hill to the big house to get some much needed sleep.

maybe tomorrow i would be able to explain big's backyard ultra.

backyard postmortem

there is a balancing act in writing about a race like this.
while the real story is the warriors who make the drama happen,
i don't want to put words in their mouths...

they should be allowed to tell their own story.
with johan's permission, here is his recap of the finish
(an amazing job of capturing his feelings in a second language):

If there had been a predestined finish line at Big's Backyard my money would have been on Courtney to win, she would beat me at any such race and distance. But at the Backyard you draw your own lines. As long we are at least two remaining there is a feeling of purpose, that this painful game has a meaning. That illusion disappears in a blink when only one remains. The actual winning needs to be the sole focus if that is what you're after. That focus was feeding me and let me put all other things aside. At the moment when Courtney congratulated me and remained in the coral as I jogged away alone into the Tennessee night I didn't feel joy. I felt empty and without purpose. You can not carry the illusion by yourself. It takes at least two to play. Thanks Courtney Dauwalter for taking us this far. We are good at playing this game..

2018 Big's Backyard Ultra Results

Name	Laps	Miles	Gen	Age	Home
Johan Steene	68	283.34	M	44	Stockholm, SWE
Courtney Dauwalter	67	279.17	F	33	Golden, CO
Gavin Woody	65	270.84	M	41	Bellevue, WA
Greg Salvesen	56	233.34	M	32	Santa Barbara, CA
Guillaume Calmettes	54	225.00	M	34	Los Angeles, CA
Maggie Guterl	44	183.33	F	38	Chadds Ford, PA
Joe Fejes	44	183.33	M	52	Columbia, SC
David Johnston	43	179.17	M	48	Willow, AK
Andres Villagran	38	158.33	M	34	Ecuador, ECU
Peter Cromie	38	158.33	M	46	Limavady, GBR
Shawn Webber	36	150.00	M	44	Gainesville, FL
Adam Rood	32	133.33	M	38	Louisville, KY
Andy Pearson	30	125.00	M	34	Santa Monica, CA
Slade McCormick	30	125.00	M	51	Ponoka, AB
Marcy Beard	30	125.00	F	49	San Jose, CA
Will Thomas	30	125.00	M	40	Sequim, WA
Padraig Mullins	29	120.83	M	36	Cambridge, MA
Dustin Mitchell	28	116.67	M	23	Lexington, KY
Cassie Scallon	28	116.67	F	36	Santa Barbara, CA
Daniel Shamburg	28	116.67	M	38	Encinitas, CA
Anatoly Ross	28	116.67	M	54	South Lancaster, ON
Andy Emerson	27	112.50	M	49	Columbia, MO
Chris Robbins	27	112.50	M	33	Eagan, MN
Jasmine Chiaramonte	27	112.50	F	42	Meadowbrook, PA
Brian Trinkle	27	112.50	M	56	Cumming, GA
Casey Thivierge	26	108.33	M	44	Belle River, ON
Alicia Rich	25	104.17	F	32	Boston, MA
Sean O'Connor	25	104.17	M	39	Phillipsburg, NJ
Nathan Marti	25	104.17	M	42	Courtland, MN
Josep Barberillo	25	104.17	M	34	La Garriga, ESP
Kat Schuller	24	100.00	F	31	Decatur, GA
Daryl Flacks	24	100.00	M	47	Windsor, ON
Michael Anderson	24	100.00	M	40	Winnipeg, MB
Anne Lang	24	100.00	F	34	Gahanna, OH
Jerry Hughes	22	91.67	M	38	Victoria, BC

David Lantz	20	83.33	M	29	Leola, PA
Nikolay Nachev	19	79.17	M	41	Redmond, WA
Brian Grant	18	75.00	M	42	London, ON
Shenoa Creer	18	75.00	F	42	Decatur, GA
Marylou Corino	18	75.00	F	40	Georgetown, ON
Kelley Fejes	18	75.00	F	44	Columbia, SC
Derek Tinnin	17	70.83	M	51	Lebanon, OH
Jeremy Ebel	17	70.83	M	34	Lafayette, CO
Ben Yancey	17	70.83	M	45	Bell Buckle, TN
Ricky Haro	16	66.67	M	40	Peoria, AZ
Jeremy Kaiding	15	62.50	M	42	Shelbyville, TN
Marc Laveson	15	62.50	M	34	Bainbridge Island, WA
Kelly Hutchins	13	54.17	M	47	Paducah, KY
Mark Lattanzi	13	54.17	M	52	Blacksburg, VA
Jerry Palmer	13	54.17	M	50	Houston, TX
Deano Montreuil	13	54.17	M	50	Suwanee, GA
Nick Vermeulen	12	50.00	M	39	Sodus Point, NY
Gregory Burger	12	50.00	M	52	Lecompton, KS
Regina Sooeey	11	45.83	F	47	Jacksonville, FL
Erika Boody	11	45.83	F	35	London, ON
Jeff Stafford	10	41.67	M	61	Clarksville, TN
Glenn Kasper	10	41.67	M	55	Meridian, MS
Rodney Coombs	9	37.50	M	53	Brooklyn, NY
Allan Benjamin	8	33.33	M	62	Columbia, MO
Heidi Kumm	8	33.33	F	32	Silverthorne, CO
Chris Hasselback	7	29.17	M	46	Castle Rock, CO
Phil Orndorff	6	25.00	M	44	Oakville, ON
Gregg Ellis	6	25.00	M	48	Calhoun, GA
Terri Biloski	6	25.00	F	42	St. Thomas, ON
Camille Coombs	5	20.83	F	48	Brooklyn, NY
Sammy Daye	4	16.67	M	48	Downpatrick, IRL
Harvey Lewis	4	16.67	M	42	Cincinnati, OH
Lindley Chambers	2	8.33	M	44	Leighton Buzzard, GBR
Derek Murphy	1	4.17	M	47	Lebanon, OH
John Price	0	0.00	M	64	Virginia Beach, VA

10/26/2018