

Big Dog's Backyard Ultra ("BDBU")

Joe's picks - 2019 edition

I've had several people ask what resources and statistical models I use to predict runner's performances. My primary resources for historical objective performances are Ultrasignup (for domestic US runners) and DUV Statistik (for International runners). I also review the runner bio's that laz compiles.

To mitigate against observer bias, I have my final selections reviewed by another veteran ultrarunner who has numerous Big Dog's Backyard Ultra ("BDBU") credits to his name. Finally, I use the esteemed 6 CIPA (6 pack craft IPA) predictive algorithm throughout the selection process.

My selections are based primarily on actual past performances at the BDBU as well as other ultrarunning events. I acknowledge that BDBU's unique winner-take-all format may cause a substantial number of runners to quit the race prematurely and before they have encountered complete and utter mental or physical breakdown. That is one of the gems of what makes the BDBU so special. Trust me when I say it is a mental bitch to continue running once you start believing that the remaining competition is stronger than you. Below are some of the common excuses that BDBU runners use for quitting:

- I had a plane to catch on Monday so I stopped
- It became apparent to me that I couldn't beat Johan so I dropped at 100 miles, but I know I could have run more miles
- I just mentally lost focus but physically I was fine
- My fiancé, spouse or life partner was upset I was spending my time at BDBU and away from them. Ultrarunning is merely a hobby. I put life priorities in perspective
- I decided to save myself for next year.

For runners that haven't run BDBU, I reviewed their prior race performances and put them in mileage tiers based on my subjective analysis. I also awarded extra miles to runners who successfully completed tough ultras such as Hardrock, Arrowhead 135, Iditarod Trail, UTMB, Marathon des Sables, Barkley, Transcon, etc. Note: I did NOT award bonus miles to multisport triathletes, mountain climbers or obstacle course specialist. Last I heard laz didn't allow bikes or swimmers on the BDBU course and there are no mud or firepits to crawl through and no mountains to climb.

I also awarded miles to runners based on subjective criteria such as physical build or sleep deprivation ability. Runners who are frail may have received a mileage deduction if I thought they would have difficulties as the days progressed. I also may have assessed mileage penalties to runners known to have problems with sleep deprivation. Mountain trail runners generally received bonus miles. For runners who submitted Dexafit Xray scan profiles, miles were added to those with above average bone density.

Bonus points were not awarded to BDBU veterans. In my opinion, experience is not really necessary to do well at the BDBU. Last year's results speak volumes: Dauwalter, Woody, Salvenson, and Guterl all ran exceptionally well in their BDBU debuts.

I did, however, award points to runners who share traits with some of the prior top BDBU performers.

Ultrarunning Racing Profiles of Top BDBU Runners (Men & Women):

Johan Steene (age 44) (283 miles): World Class 24 hour runner: (165+miles), Täby Extreme Challenge 100, Leadville Trail 100, Spartathlon, Vol State 500k self supported, Ouray 100 Tahoe 200, Montane Spine, EMU 6 day race, Tor des Geants 330k, World Class 24 hour.

Courtney Dauwaulter (age 33) (279 miles): World Class 24 hour runner: (158+ miles), Superior Sawtooth 100, Ouray 100, Moab 240, Ultra Trail Mount Fuji, Tahoe 200, UTMB.

Gavin Woody (age 41) (270 miles): Plain 100, Bigfoot 200, the Bear 100, HURT 100, Susitna 100, Tor des Geants 330k, Arrowhead 135, Moab 240, Montane Spine Race 268 miles, Fat Dog 120 mile.

Guillaume Calmettes (age 33) (245 miles): Gorge Waterfalls 100k, Angeles Crest 100 mile, UTMB, HURT 100, Barkley Marathons.

Harvey Lewis (age 41) (241 miles): World Class 24 hour runner (158+ miles) Harvey is atypical in that he is primarily a road runner though he did attempt the Appalachian Trail FKT.

Greg Salvesen (age 32) (233 miles): Leadville 100, HURT 100, Fatdog 120, Hardrock 100, Across the Years 6 Day, 6 Days in the Dome.

Maggie Gurterl (38) (183 miles): World Class 24 hour (146+ miles). Note Maggie is atypical in that she is primarily a shorter distance ultrarunner (100k or less) though she is a world class 100 mile (14:47) and a prolific mountain trail runner: Duncan Ridge Trail, Barkley Fall Classic, Georgia Death Race, etc.

Joe Fejes (53) (183 miles): World class 24 hour (156 miles); 6 days (606 miles); 96 hours (400 miles); 72 hours (335 miles), Former CR Vol State 500k. Terrible trail runner but exceptional multiday specialist.

David Johnston (179 miles): 6-time Iditarod 350-mile Trail Run Champion & CR holder. Also 6 Day personal best of 551 miles.

What are a few of the common traits or characteristics that can be gleaned from the profiles above?

- (1) Competitiveness -- must have burning desire to win and demonstrate a past-history of winning tough ultras;
- (2) Toughness -- must have desire to push boundaries, embrace discomfort and pain, and handle sleep deprivation.
- (3) Typically, the tougher or longer the course, the better they perform.
- (4) Helps to be younger. The average age of top 6 BDBU men (200+ miles) is 36.8 years old; Average top 2 BDBU women (180+ miles): 35.5 years old.
- (5) The top 2 BDBU women and two of the top 5 BDBU men are world class 24 hour runners.

Two interview excerpts with Courtney Dauwaulter and David Johnston are good illustrations of the "Toughness" trait mentioned above:

Excerpt from Dauwaulter's interview with "The Trek" backpacking blog:

Much like long-distance backpacking, mental toughness proves to be the competitive edge in ultraraces, as Dauwaulter can attest. "For me the mental piece is huge. I'm not more physically fit than anybody in these ultra marathons. The physical fitness of these people is incredible. What I'm trying to do is be mentally stronger."

How exactly does she achieve this?

“I refuse to give my physical pain any value. I shove the pain aside, focus on something different, and force myself to keep moving.” Dauwalter cites her preferred mental tactic being race-day mantras. “I keep repeating over in my head, *‘Keep moving. Keep moving. Keep moving.’* Or sometimes it’s, *‘You’re fine. You’re fine. You’re fine.’* If I’m being nice to myself, sometimes I will cheer myself on and repeat, *‘You’re doing a good job. You’re doing a good job. You’re doing a good job.’*”

IRUNFAR’s interview snippet with David Johnston immediately following his 2014 Iditarod Trail victory:

iRunFar: How’s it going?

Dave Johnston: Oh, a little rough. The last couple days, I think, have been harder than the race. I’ll tell you, all the aches and things now.

iRunFar: You’re feeling a little bit older now than before you started the race?

Johnston: Definitely. I can feel the things coming back to life that got numb out there. They’re not coming back to life very happy.

iRunFar: Is this numb from cold or numb from the mechanical effort?

Johnston: Oh yeah, just from pushing it too hard, pushing without stopping. The muscles are just... everywhere muscle damage.

iRunFar: Big picture—how is your body? A lot worse than last year?

Johnston: Maybe a little more beat up than last year because last year I didn’t do the Susitna 100 the week before the race. So my feet hadn’t recovered from that in that week’s span. So then they’re a little more numb than last year. The toes are a little blacker. I’ve got a few more blisters. I think my muscles (quads and calves) seem a little more tortured this year.

iRunFar: What do you mean your toes are black?

Johnston: All the toenails and everything just turned black, you know, like they normally do in a marathon.

iRunFar: We’re not talking about frostbite; we’re talking about the normal pressure build-up-type stuff.

Johnston: Yeah. It’s weird, the tops of my feet are bruised. I think it’s just from having the laces tied so tight for so long. Things that normally wouldn’t happen over 100 miles, over 350 miles it really starts to bruise you.

2019 Predictions:

Laz previously remarked in a Facebook post that he believed at least 50 runners will go 24 hours or more. I concur with his assessment. I also believe we will see greater number of runners exceed even further distances than any prior BDBU. The chart below lists the runners who I believe will exceed the specified mileage tiers.

In last year's BDBU slugfest, only 5 runners (Steene, Dauwaulter, Woody & Calmettes) exceeded the magical 48 hour/200 mile barrier. Of these, only Calmettes and Woody are running the 2019 race. Nevertheless, based on the uber talented field entered in this year's race, I'm picking twenty (20) runners to exceed 175 miles (42 hours); ten (10) runners to exceed 200 miles (48 hours); 6 runners to exceed 250 miles (60 hours) and finally, two runners to exceed 300 miles (72 hours).

175+ miles (42 hrs)	200+ miles (48 hrs)	250+ miles (60 hrs)	300+ miles (72 hrs)	Big Dog
Gavin Woody	Gavin Woody	Gavin Woody	Joe Fejes	?
John Logar	John Logar	John Logar	David Johnston	
Guillaume Calmattes	Guillaume Calmattes	Guillaume Calmattes		
Harald Menzel	Harald Menzel	Joe Fejes		
Marco Farinazzo	Marco Farinazzo	David Johnston		
Grant Maughan	Grant Maughan	Marco Farinazzo		
Sean Nakamura	Sean Nakamura			
Dave Proctor	Maggie Guterl			
Maggie Guterl	Joe Fejes			
Joe Fejes	David Johnston			
David Johnston				
Amelia Boone				
Thomas Oderud				
Andreas Loeffler				
Andy Persson				
Tobbe Gyllebring				
Troy Allen				
Chris Ragsdale				
Liz Canty				

I'm sure many peeps will be surprised with my picks to say the least. Before the hate text and private messages begin, allow me to justify:

- (1) Except for Dave Proctor, Fejes and Johnston are the only two runners in the field that have exceeded 300 miles in 72 hours -- Fejes (335 miles) and Johnston (315 miles). Proctor didn't make the top 10 because of a steep "sleep deprivation" penalty that I (fairly or unfairly) assessed against him.
- (2) Extreme Hunger—at ages 53 and 49 respectively, both runners realize that the 2019 edition is likely their last opportunity to put a strangulation death grip on the jugular of their younger competitors. If Bob Hearn were running, he would refer to applying the "Vulcan Nerve Pinch".

Concluding Comments:

Any of the top 20 have a shot at winning based on their credentials. In fact, there are many other runners outside my top 20 that can win such as Youngren, McCarthy, Webber, Rivera, Redpath, Speirs, Collins, et al.

Woody and Calmettes seem like prohibitive odds on favorites based on their prior BDBU performances; however, I think both are susceptible this year. Woody is recovering from his last tough ultra and Calmettes struggled with a lower leg injury last year. Will these monsters still have the hunger to win it all.

Finally, below are a few of the noteworthy accomplishments (running & non-running related) that particularly impressed me from laz's runner bios:

Non-Ultrarunning Related

- Amelia Boone: 3 x Toughest Mudder
- Liz Canty: 3rd degree blackbelt & mountain ultra-specialist
- Robert Youngren: Mountain Trail Unicycler
- Marcy Beard: Ironman finisher
- Chris Ragsdale: 5 time National 24 hour Cycling overall winner and record holder 502.6 miles; World Record 1,000 kilometer road cycling 31:40;
- Andy Pearson: (Summited Aconcagua)
- Grant Maughn: (Super Yacht captain, Summited Everest)
- Will Hayward: Yale University Varsity Cricket
- Thomas Øderud: former professional golfer;
- Nikolay Nachev: Orienteering Champion
- Mark Haigney: All UK Pool champion representing Ireland

Ultrarunning Related

- Maggie Guterl: World class 100 miles (14:47). 24 hours World class 24 hour (146 miles)
- Grant Maughn: Vol State champion; 100 miles 14:53; champion La Ultra the High (330 kilometer)
- Philip McCarthy: former American record 48 hours (257 miles); World Class 24 hour (154 miles);
- Dave Proctor: 100 miles 12:32; 24 hours 161.8 miles; 72 hours 310 miles; 6th place 24 hours WC; Canadian Records 24, 48, 72 hours;
- Marco Farinazzo: 2019 Badwater 135 Champions, Brazil Badwater Champion, 16th 2017 Spartathlon, Arrowhead finisher.

Best of luck to all runners and many thanks to laz & Sandra & Big for allowing us to run in their backyard!