

VICTORY AT THE JFK FOR DUMM AND SPROSTON

By George Banker

It takes a different mindset to run an ultramarathon. The demands are great both physical and mental. The commitment is made months in advance and there are many sacrifices. **The 48th John F. Kennedy 50 Mile** was presented by the Cumberland Valley Athletic Club (CVAC) on **November 20, 2010**.

The event did not have top international athletes nor did it pay out a large cash purse. The event was run for the right to claim top honors in this prestigious event. The demand on the body was great due to the terrain for the event. The race started in Boonsboro, Md., which was founded in 1792 by George and William Boone the cousins of Daniel Boone. The town has been the starting point since the inception of the race in 1963.

The challenging sections of the race was the 13 miles over the Appalachian Trail (AT) which was completed in 1937, the 2,157 mile trail stretches from Mt. Katahdin, Maine to Springer Mountain, Georgia. The race segment segment requires caution as one must negotiate the large rocks, rough and hilly terrain and injury is only a step away. The survival of the AT is not complete until you make your way down the switchbacks. The race allows 14 hours for those runners starting at 5:00 A.M. and 12 hours for those starting at 7:00 A.M. There are cutoff times along the C&O Canal to reach each checkpoint.

There is a more accommodating 26-mile section along the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal (C&O) which had turns and is flat. Along this segment the time lost along the AT is regained. The balance of the course is over paved surface with rolling hills. The majority of the course does not offer large crowd support but excellent aid stations.

Since 1980 the finish of the race is held at Springfield Middle School in Williamsport, Md.

The Saturday evening prior the Legends dinner is held when the prior performers are honored and inducted into various clubs, 500-Mile for completing 10 races, 1,000-Mile for completing 20 races. The leader of the club is Kim Bryon who has completed 41 races to date and began at the age of 12. Bryon was going after number 42.

Bill House Resolution 8803, Appalachian Trail Bill was sponsored by U.S. Representative Goodloe Byron, 6th District of Maryland which passed Congress on March 7, 1978 and was President Jimmy Carter signed into law on March 21, 1978. The Bill set aside \$90 million for land purchases to protect the existing trails and wildlands and to establish more trails where needed along the AT.

The keynote speaker was the Ultra Legend David Horton, the 1985 winner (6:16:00). The evening was filled with thought provoking statements such as, "We only learn our limits by going beyond our limits", and "Life demands before it rewards". A few words dealing

with the race, “Take one day at a time because you can’t take two. In the race run one mile at a time and the challenge is not easy”.

Horton shared a few lessons learned, “Run don’t think and no mater how you feel it never gets worst”. Another note, “Nothing happens by accident”.

In 1991 Horton broke the AT record of 62 days by covering the AT in 52-days, 9 hours and 42 minutes (Maine to Georgia).

Kimball Bryon had the pleasure of reading House Resolution 1728, November 18, 2010. The Bill was in regard to the recognition, protection, promotion, and facilitation of the annual JFK 50 Mile.

In part, “...the United States Government should recognize the desire to protect and promote the heritage and historical significance of the JFK 50 Mile held every year rain or shine, sleet or snow”.

(<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=hr111-1728>)

The first couple of miles of the race are along Main Street in Boonsboro with a major hill into the second mile prior to reaching the AT. The ultramarathons do not have the lead pack as you find in the traditional road races. Once the leaders reached the AT it was single file with a few exchanges as the space was tight and one false move a runner goes down.

Once the dust settled Captain Brian Dumm, an English instructor at the Air Force Academy (Class of 2005) in Colorado Springs took top honors with a time of 5:52:02. This was his ultramarathon debut. Last September Dumm took first place at the 14th Air Force Marathon with a time of 2:27:49. At the 2010 Marine Corps Marathon a fifth place was captured with 2:27:04.

The course record was set 1994 by four-time winner Eric Clifton with a time of 5:46:22.

David Riddle of Cincinnati, Ohio was second with a time of 5:53:09 followed by Jacob Edwards of Boulder with a time of 5:59:36.

“I am proud to have won the JFK 50. I am even more proud to have won it in an Air Force jersey. The crowd support was fantastic, highlighted by my best fans - my family - who were on hand to encourage and cheer. Having my mother, Meredith, and my brothers, Tim and Andrew, trading positions along the route kept my adrenaline and the excitement high for all 5 hours and 52 minutes. My father, Kenneth, was wishing me fast thoughts as he flew back to the States from a work trip overseas. It was also an honor to return to my unit - the Department of English and Fine Arts at the Air Force Academy - having won the nation's oldest ultramarathon. They have been incredibly supportive and enthusiastic about my athletic pursuits”, stated Dumm.

Dumm adds, “The JFK 50 was the capstone event. I knew I had stressed my body, so my plan was to go out in control and stay comfortable as long as possible. My watch broke a

couple days before the race. The AT portion of the course, the first 16 miles, was the one with the elevation changes and rough terrain. I concentrated on making sure everything felt easy - the pace, the climbs, the precarious footfalls. I face-planted once, probably around mile 12, but managed to scramble back to my feet not much worse for the wear and with a bit of extra adrenaline”.

In preparing for the JFK, “Having trained for the marathon and raced so much in the fall, my challenge was not overdoing it early and making sure I had something left for the last 10 or so miles. My longest run had been 28 miles, so I didn't know what to expect from my body after that point. I knew I could get through the first 35 miles. It was the rest of the race I was less sure about”.

Dumm comments about the competition, “Great. There were fantastic athletes in the field. That said, what's nice about distance running is you restrict your ego to your legs. Every one of the guys at the top are true athletes, hard-nosed competitors, and fiercely determined to win, but it is a respectful if not congenial atmosphere. I ran a good portion of the race with Jacob Edwards, a phenomenal runner, and we kept the pace even and in check for the twenty or so miles of the race. By the midpoint, I had moved into the lead and was very much missing the company despite the exhilaration”.

Riddle making his JFK debut comments, “The challenge was to run a distance 19 miles longer than my previous longest race and compete against some of the top guys in the country. I prepared for this event much like I would have for a road marathon. I just ran back-to-back long runs on some weekends and a 50k tune-up race about a month before. I also do quality work on the track once a week which I think is often overlooked by ultra guys.”

“I went into JFK looking to find out how I stacked up against some of the best ultra runners in the country. I also wanted to know if I could make it 50 miles. I now have the confidence that I have the ability to run with just about anyone in the country. I exceeded my expectations at JFK and now I'm having to re-evaluate where my running career goes from here on”, Riddle adds.

How Riddle managed the AT, “The rocks weren't too bad in my opinion. They made things interesting, but they weren't the most technical trails I've ever run on. I'm not sure I can explain how I run rocky trails. It just seems like something you either know how to do or not. I try to be very light on my feet and never completely commit all my weight to one foot, because you never know when it will land on an unstable rock and roll your ankle.”

Edwards shares his thoughts, “With the JFK being my first ultra distance race it was hard to know exactly what to expect. With that said there was no real plan of attack for the race. Just stay focused, try to get 60grams of carbs in every hour (Gu every 30min), run comfortably hard and don't look at the watch too much). From May I was running about 70-80 miles per week till the last week in September where I ran 5 weeks of 100 miles then did a three week taper for the race cutting roughly 10% per week.”

Edwards adds, “My challenge for the event was my lack of long runs in the training cycle. During my 5 week build I did not exceed 17 miles in any single run. The entire second half of the race was new territory for me meaning I have never run that distance. The other challenge was calories during the race. Food intake was something I did not practice in training so my body’s response to a high Calorie load while running was a mystery to me prior to the race. Luckily everything worked out fine.”

“My preparation for this event was simply to log miles, eat well, build confidence and have fun. I started to train for this event after my two marathons mentally broke me down. I found it difficult to train through the summer months partly because it seemed like running became a task of self-mutilation. In September I knew I had to find something to rekindle the desire to train seriously and to make running fun. As I said there was a lack of long runs in my training but I was doing intervals on the track frequently that were going fantastic. That gave me a lot of confidence to attack the race early”, stated Edwards.

Edwards continues, “In doing the ultra distance I thought that the experience would be a life-changing event before competing. There are so many stories told, books, magazine articles that glorify the distance as a journey to self-awareness and this euphoric connection created between man and God. My reality was sadly different. Looking back I can say I learned only that I now know I’m capable of running 50 miles. I would like to add that the race was a lot of fun and a challenge I recommend every runner with aspirations to test limitations to embark on.”

In fifth place was Dan Olmstead of Eugene, Oregon making his JFK debut with a time of 6:10:30, the strategy, “Just to run as well as I could. Stay relaxed and take care of myself. Along trail, I was ok and didn't fall at all. That may have been more luck than skill however”.

The challenge during the event and preparation, “The toe path and I have gotten used to some hills which enable me to use a different muscle group at times. With all the flat running, it was the same motion. I could have done some more workouts, but I had some solid long runs at 30+. I need to train harder if I want to run faster. I can't just enjoy it all the time”.

The race on the women’s side was closer than the men’s and it was closer than 30 seconds between first and second place. Amy Sproston of Portland, Oregon added her name to the winner’s list with a time of 6:57:16. Devon Crosby-Helms set the record last year with a time of 6:29:21. The first female winner was in 1968, Donna Aycoth with a time of 10:41:15. Aycoth went on to win through 1973 with a best time of 8:26:07 in 1973 which was the new record at that time.

“It felt great to hold on for the win, after getting caught at the mile 46 aid station. It's always nice to win, but especially JFK being that it's a large race with a long tradition.

It's also part of the Montrail Ultra Cup, so winning JFK puts me in a good position in that trail race series” stated Sproston making her JFK debut.

Sproston continues about strategy and training, “With ultras it's hard to know who is going to show up, and it's hard to have a goal place, because who shows up has a lot to do with final placing. I just wanted to run my own race; to go out steady and try to be around 7 hours time-wise. Based on past years' results, 7 hours is usually a competitive time. I typically average about 60 miles a week throughout the year, but that reaches as high as 80 and as low as 40 depending on where I'm at in my training. I've been racing quite a bit this year, so after an event I'll take an easy week, and then work back up to a couple of weeks of 70 or 80 miles/week before tapering down a week or two out from the event.”

The challenge for Sproston, “The toughest part was the monotony of the C&O Towpath and then the final few miles on road, because my legs were really shot after so much running on the towpath. In many ultras, especially those in the mountains, there are opportunities to walk when going uphill, so your legs get a break. Even just switching from flat to uphill to downhill while running gives your legs a break in that different muscles get used and others get to rest a bit. Being that the towpath and road section is so runnable, it's just a lot of running, and really wore me out by the end.”

Sproston comments on lesson learned, “I don't consider myself to be a very strong competitor, in that I fear competition, and feel like I normally back down rather than going after something. I'm fine if I'm on my own, but if there's someone there to "race" I back down. The last 4 miles proved to me that I have a little more fight in me than I thought, in that I really wanted the win after leading from mile 16-46 and fought to hang onto it.”

The lead was taken later in the race, “I was in the lead from about a mile after the transition from the AT onto the C&O towpath until the end. Spectators let you know where you're at in the field, and in addition, the leaders have a bike escort, so as long as the biker was with me, I knew that I was in the lead.”

The competition was close on the heels, “There were some other women in front of me on the AT section, but Pam was behind me. I had no idea that she was reeling me in until mile 46. Earlier on the towpath, people kept telling me I had a sizable lead. Upon entering the mile 46 aid station, one of the volunteers commented on what an exciting women's race it was, and I looked at him puzzled, before I turned around and saw Pam entering the aid station. I hadn't been looking back on the road, so had no idea she was behind me. After a very quick conversation with Pam, who's a friend of mine from Oregon, I took off, and she never caught me heading to the finish. I was probably about 30-60 seconds in front of her from mile 46 until the finish and finished 21 seconds in front of her, as I was fading very badly the last mile.”

Pam Smith of Salem, Oregon was second with 6:57:27 followed by Riva Johnson of Carlisle, Penna., with a time of 7:08:53.

The strategy of Smith, "I wanted to run fairly consistently and try not to "die" in the final miles. I ran the AT section very conservatively and then tried to get into a good rhythm for the tow path. My weekly mileage training was 65-70."

"Oregon has a lot of beautiful trail, but little as rocky as the AT so I am not great on trail like the AT. I was slower than a lot of the front women on this section and came off the AT as 6th female, but I knew if I ran my race I'd be able to pass at least a few of them on the flatter sections" adds Smith about running the AT.

Smith comments on the competition, "To have Amy there to directly compete with and be so close to was amazing. It really made me push myself a lot harder. It seems like there were still many high caliber runners at JFK, but I wonder if the proximity (in date) of the North Face 50M endurance challenge with its huge prize purse will entice top runners away from JFK."

Smith's preparation, "I was really run down after Western States and suffered a lot of fatigue through the summer, so I took most of September off. I started training seriously for JFK the last week of September, with more focus on quality over high mileage. Because JFK has so much flat running, I trained for the race more like it was a road race rather than a trail ultra."

Riva Johnson was the first master and the record was set in 2007 by Anne Lundblad of Swannanoa, NC with a time of 6:42:50. Johnson ran her first 50 miler at JFK 2009 and I placed 6th female with a time of 7:38.

Johnson comments on the race, "After the Vermont 50 Miler (September 2010) I felt like I wanted to do one more ultra before taking some time off. I spoke with my coach, Howard Nippert, and we decided it would be fun to run JFK again and see what improvement we had made over the course of the year. Howard told me that the race is not won on the AT section to just get through it and then go for it once I was on the tow path. I took his advice and ran the AT conservatively. I train on the AT often so I am pretty used to the rocks but my goal was to get through it without falling or hurting an ankle."

Johnson continues, "Once I hit the tow path, I just got into a pace that I felt comfortable with and ran. Many people don't like that section of the course but I do and I love being able to see people ahead of me and try to catch them. I ran several miles with two guys and really enjoyed their company and conversation. It helped pass quite a few miles. It was amazing when Chris (one of the guys I was running with) said, "oh, we only have a marathon left to run" and I was so excited and thought "that's not much!" Strange how ones perspective changes over time."

"By the time I hit the final road section of the race, I knew I had a pretty good time going. My goal entering the race was to break 7:30 and perhaps hit 7:25 which I knew I could do if I kept it together the last 8 miles. I felt strong and just kept eyeing the people

in front of me and trying to close the gap. I crossed the finish line in 7:08.53 which was good enough for 3rd place female and 32nd overall. It was almost exactly 30 minutes faster than I had run the previous year which was so much better than I ever expected. Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would run that fast. I guess I learned not to underestimate myself and what I can achieve” adds Johnson.

A strategy used during the race by Johnson, “I usually train with my iPod so running JFK music free I thought was going to be a real challenge for me. Last year I came up with the idea of assigning someone’s name to each mile of the race. I made little pieces of paper with 5 names on each and pinned them to my number. Every five miles I would tear off the top paper to expose the next five names. I would look down at the names and think about what that person meant to me or what adversity they had overcome. Names ranged from the famous (Lance Armstrong, Joan Benoit Samuelson, etc.. to people that I personally knew that overcame life threatening illnesses (my mom's battle to overcome leukemia), to kids I had coached and people that had helped me achieve my dreams (like my coach, my massage therapist, my husband etc). I found that it took my mind of the miles and pain I might have been in especially when I looked at those that had suffered through way more than I ever would. I decided to do it again this year and once again, it helped especially in the later miles.”

“I do most of my training based on time and not mileage but I would say that generally if I am in the "ultra" mode, my mileage is about 50-70 miles a week. I don't run as much as many ultra runners because I just find at age 48 that it's harder and harder to stay healthy. I try and do more quality than quantity. My marathon PR is 3:09”, stated Johnson.

“I had begun to battle with a knee injury in the few weeks leading up to the race that forced me to cut back on training. Going into the race my primary concern was with my knee becoming so painful that I wouldn't even be able to finish the race. I had actually even been training less than I did for last year's JFK, which was my first ultra, and so I was really just hoping that I could match my last year time of a 9:11”, stated fourth place finisher Jacqueline Palmer of Hagerstown, Md., with a time of 7:29:18.

The ultras take concentration, “...When I was more than halfway through on the C&O canal segment, and still had no pain, I stopped playing conservative and let go, just running at a pace that felt right. I stopped worrying about everything else about a race that most runners, myself included, get so caught up in...like 'Is my pace too fast?' 'too slow?'.. 'what was that split time?' ..'Mile what???'.. 'when should I take my next energy gel?' And I started living in that moment running along the side of the same canal that I went canoeing and fishing in with my dad and brothers and bounding through the woods that I romped through when I was a kid, making forts and chasing my brothers with sticks. I just thought, *this is my home. My own stomping grounds.* There's no greater thing in this world than being gone for so long and then coming back to the home that you love and the people that you love. I was loving every minute of it. I was further lifted in the last few miles of road when my best friends pulled up beside me hooting and hollering. When someone is willing to travel 600 miles to just come see you attempt to

complete this stupid crazy adventure, and the whole time support you through every step of the way, that's when you know you have real friends”, Palmer stated.

“The AT trail just killed my quads! I am lousy at running treacherous down hills on trails, which was a good bit of the AT section. Up hills don't bother me one bit but I tense up and brake on downhill trails and this is a quad killer. I made a lot of rookie mistakes; I think I could do better next time. My strategy was to survive the AT section! People blew by me on the down hills like I was standing still, almost fell about 20 times, my eyes hurt after 10 minutes from staring at the ground in front of me”, stated fifth place finisher and second master, Tammy Slusser of Monroeville, Pa., with a time of 7:34:20.

Slusser was making her JFK debut, “JFK was my first real competitive ultra. I did a low key ultra in July: Annie's Run 6 Hour run put on by Sammy Bertenthal as part of the Greater Pittsburgh Road Runners Club. I ran 40 miles in 5:50 on a hilly 1.25 mile wood chip trail loop. The 40 miles was my first and only time running over 26 miles prior to JFK. I wanted to do one ultra when I was no longer very competitive in the marathon, but didn't want to change my training because I had so many shorter races I was focusing on all year. Endurance is definitely my strong point; I can do 50 miles without walking with very little food (I need to learn to eat more in an ultra.)”

Kimball Byron will continue to be the trail blazer as number 42 goes in the books with an 11:46:48 completion time. The race posted 1,038 finishers (806 males, and 232 females).

Thanks is extended to many volunteers and sponsors who all made the event possible.

