

Diary of a long-di

This past Saturday Yorkton resident Dan Calef became the first non-U.S. winner of the Lewis and Clark ultra-marathon. Calef completed the 50-mile run in six hours and 36 minutes, finishing 10 minutes ahead of the second-place finisher, Rob Peitzman of St. Paul, Minn.

Yorkton This Week editor Dave Ramsay accompanied Calef on the run, which was held on a course near Bismarck, N.D., and kept a diary of the day's activities.

5 a.m.

Wake up call for the run (4 a.m. Saskatchewan time) in our hotel room in Garrison, N.D. We (Dan, his daughter Sarah, and I) quickly get dressed for the 50-minute drive to the start of the run. Outside it is still dark, with temperatures below freezing and the wind blowing at 30 kilometres an hour.

5:30 a.m.

We arrive at race starting point where 11 vehicles are stopped on the side of an otherwise deserted stretch of road. The number of racers is down this year and only 10 runners will be taking part in the ultra.

6:50 a.m.

Ten minutes before race time. The temperature is -3 celsius and a strong head wind is blowing from the east. Dan hadn't anticipated the weather being this cold. He improvises by putting on some extra clothing and by using an extra pair of socks for mitts to help keep warm. Dan is asked if he wants to wear some sunscreen. He laughs, takes a look around and says he doesn't think it's necessary today.

7 a.m.

The race starts in a very low key manner. Someone says go and the 10 runners begin the first of 50 miles. Dan slips into second place after the first hundred yards, and the field quickly separates.

7:08 a.m.

Dan drops back to third place, after being passed by a runner who is only running the marathon distance. He looks cold but is running smoothly.

7:30 a.m.

The first half hour is over and the lead runner, Rob Peitzman, hits the four-mile mark. Sarah yells encouragement to her father: "Only 45 miles to go dad." He smiles, then asks for a toque. It begins to snow quite heavily, reducing visibility on the highway.

7:54 a.m.

It's starting to warm up slightly. The temperature is now 2 celsius. Dan remains in third place, with the lead runner ahead by several hundred yards. I'm told this is the coldest day ever for this race.

8 a.m.

Dan reaches the eight-mile mark, running at a pace he will maintain for the entire race.

8:30 a.m.

Dan enters the town of Washburn, at the 12-mile mark in the race. He is running smoothly but is falling back slightly on the leaders.

9 a.m.

We hit the 17-mile mark and Dan asks for a coffee. That's not usually a drink for ultra runners but Dan is cold—he says later he almost seized up during the first 10 miles—and wants a coffee to warm up. The field is now well spread out and Dan is about five minutes out of first place. He continues to wear a toque and socks for mitts.

9:13 a.m.

The lead changes hands for the first time. Dan is still in third but is slowly moving up on the front-runners.

9:57 a.m.

Dan changes his shirt. The race is close to being half over.

10:11 a.m.

Dan is narrowing the gap on the lead and is about two minutes out of second place. The first-place runner drops out, having decided to quit after finishing the marathon distance—26 miles.

10:16 a.m.

Dan says he is running well and has picked up his pace a little. Peitzman says he thinks he's going to be caught.

10:33 a.m.

The lead changes at the 30-mile mark. Dan moves into first place as he catches Peitzman on a hill.

10:44 a.m.

The two run neck and neck. It remains cold but the wind is at the runners' backs. This is a very scenic part of the course, with rolling hills and panoramic views of the Missouri River. Dan has a 20-second lead.

10:54 a.m.

Dogs from a nearby farm house join the runners. They do some barking but stop short of interfering with the competitors. Dan is feeling the effects of the first four hours on the road. He pushed the pace between miles 20 and 30 and is now in some discomfort. He runs in silence and seems very focused on just continuing the race.

11 a.m.

Dan has just finished climbing one of the biggest hills and there are about 20 miles to go. Dan asks how far he is ahead of Peitzman. I estimate he has a 30-second lead.

11:07

Dan increases his lead while running uphill but then loses ground on the downhill portions.

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11:17 a.m.

The lead changes as the two front-runners are again bothered by dogs.

11:22 a.m.

Dan drops about 20 yards back. He looks very tired as he takes a water break.

11:27 a.m.

Dan continues to drop back but he is doing fine.

11:54 a.m.

There is another change in the lead as Peitzman stops to change clothes and heads into the bushes for a bathroom break. Dan moves 150 yards into the lead.

12:10 p.m.

Dan is running strong and appears to have recovered from his struggle through miles 20 to 30. He is widening the gap. It is likely the worst he'll finish is third as no other runner is within sight of the top two.

12:54 p.m.

Dan is now well into the lead, with five miles to go. A race organizer shouts encouragement and tells Dan he has the race won.

1:03 p.m.

Dan continues to run smoothly, showing few effects from over six hours of continuous running.

1:14 p.m.

Sarah thinks her father is being bothered by an old leg injury, but Dan has not slowed down and continues to hold the lead. Peitzman is no longer in sight.

1:30 p.m.

Dan is down to the last mile. He is congratulated by sole spectator on the race course as he enters Bismarck.

1:36 p.m.

Dan crosses the finish line, completing the course in six hours and 36 seconds, about one hour off the course record. A roll of toilet paper is used instead of a ribbon to signify the finish. Dan is tired, and collapses to the ground. After a few minutes he is back on his feet, and is ready to congratulate Peitzman who finishes in six hours and 46 minutes. The third place runner comes in 25 minutes later.

3:30 p.m.

Dan accepts three trophies at a post-race gathering. He receives trophies for being first in the ultra-marathon, first in the team competition for the ultra, and for having the third best time for the marathon distance. Post-race talk is about other ultras, 100-kilometre runs, and 24-hour endurance runs that the runners have completed in or will be entering in the future.