

Running for Time

When everyone finishes together—sort of.

BY PHIL McCARTHY

Imagine an ultra with no cutoffs, no sweep vehicle, and no DNFs! This is what you get with fixed-time ultras. According to *runningintheusa.com*, there are 190 fixed-time races in the United States in 2015, so they are out there, and they are worth a look for those unfamiliar with them. This article might serve as an introduction to this type of race for some of you; others already familiar will, I hope, still find some good information here.

I've fielded lots of questions in person about this, and of my 90 or so ultras, 44 of them have been fixed-time races from three hours* to six days. I managed to set an American record for 48 hours, at the race Three Days at the Fair in Augusta, New Jersey, in 2011, with 257.34 miles, and I nabbed a couple of 24-hour national championships at the NorthCoast 24-Hour Endurance Run in Cleveland in 2009 and 2011. So as a runner who has been said to “specialize in mind-numbing loops”**, I suppose I'm something close to an expert. So I'll start with the basics. You'll note that I'll use the word “usually” a lot, to comment on what is most common, while acknowledging that there are always exceptions.

Definition and overview

A fixed-time race is one in which competitors accumulate as much distance as possible in a given amount of time, with the winner being the one who has covered the greatest distance. These races are held on short loops, usually either a road loop or on a track but sometimes on trails as well. The object is to run the loop as many times as possible in the given amount of time. Participants may run, walk, eat, and sleep and in many cases are even allowed to leave the race venue entirely and return to continue for more mileage. Runners can do whatever they want during the race, but only completed loops will count toward their total distance. If they decide to quit the race before time is up, they still receive credit for the distance they covered, hence no DNFs!

*No, I didn't run an ultradistance in three hours but am just including it for reference.

**From some website I remember reading a few years back.

A great many members of the general public, a great many experienced runners, even a great many experienced ultrarunners, and perhaps a great many of you readers are confounded and perplexed by the concept, by the desire and attraction of running in circles for hours or days upon end with only a rough estimate or a vague idea of how far you're going to run, running basically what can feel like an infinite distance, until the time is up. Those of us who have experience with these races are asked similar questions by friends, family, and colleagues. I personally had one coworker, after telling him I was planning to run a 48-hour race, say to me in a totally straight and serious voice, "You're insane." So I hope to debunk the insane perception while answering some of these questions.

Accomplished ultrarunner Traci Falbo says, "Of course I get the standard silly questions . . . what do you eat? What do you drink? How do you go to the bathroom? Do you sleep? Do you run the whole time?" I will stand in for Traci to try to answer these questions, which I don't think are silly at all.

Food and drink

Food and drink are very individual to the runner, and most races have aid stations with most of what you'll need, but you can bring along your own preferred food and drink as well. The nice thing is that you pass by the aid station and your own supplies often, so you don't have to carry food with you or worry how far it is until you can get food. Races of six or 12 hours can be approached very similarly to a marathon, 50K, or 50-mile race, with probably a mixture of water and sports drinks complemented by fruit, gels, protein/energy bars, and maybe some sweets like cookies or M&Ms. Twenty-four-hour races can be fueled similarly to



◀ A well-stocked aid station is key for a successful fixed-time race.

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a 100-mile race by adding in soup/broth, cut boiled potatoes (my favorite, dipped in salt), and more solid foods such as pizza, burgers, sandwiches, noodles/rice, or whatever the race organizers have available. Forty-eight- and 72-hour races might add more food options like quesadillas, burritos, or grilled cheese, all of which I've eaten and have hit the spot. In a six-day race you're often talking about full meals three times a day, which can include salad and dessert in addition to the above items. Although I have sat down to eat for one reason or another, I've never eaten anything that I couldn't at least walk with while I ate, including salad, scrambled eggs, and a bowl of noodles, and it's certainly possible to run while eating a burger or slice of pizza.

Some additional foods that I've brought to 24-hour or multiday races that I've found have helped me are chocolate milk, yogurt, applesauce, bread with butter and honey, and chocolate-covered pretzels. If it works well for your stomach and you can bring it to a race in a bag or a cooler, go for it!

Bathrooms

Bathroom stops are usually very convenient in fixed-time races, as there will in all probability be a bathroom facility or porta-potty on the course that you pass very often. Most races do have strict rules prohibiting use of improvised facilities, so it's best to go where you're supposed to go. While some trail runners, particularly men, are sometimes known to continue running while taking care of business on a remote trail, on a short loop course this is considered quite a breach of etiquette, at least.

Sleep

Sleep is also individual to the runner and depends on the length of the race. It is probably not necessary in a six-hour race. It probably is necessary in a six-day race. Anything in between may depend. A competitive runner will probably not sleep during a 24-hour race, but a lot of runners do, some for a short nap, some for several hours. It depends on the runner's goals and how he or she is feeling at that time. Forty-eight-hour races require sleep for just about everyone, although it's possible to go without. I set the American record for 48 hours at Three Days at the Fair in New Jersey in 2011, 257.34 miles, on no sleep, although I did lie down for a few minutes three or four times during the race to get off my feet and shut down my brain, but without sleeping. Seventy-two hours or longer does require sleep, but how much depends on the individual. Some work better taking more frequent short naps; others prefer longer periods of uninterrupted sleep. My own experience in six-day races is to try to average about three hours a night in the middle of the night, trying to go without a daytime nap. But in multadays, it can be surprisingly difficult to actually fall asleep, and you might be lying in a sleeping bag or on an air mattress, in pain, cold, with your mind racing a mile a

► A catnap can be necessary in longer races.

minute with thoughts that can't be grasped, for three hours. It's all part of the fun! For facilities, some multiday races provide large tents where you can lay a sleeping bag, or they might have cots, but they will at least have space on the grounds for you to pitch your own tent. In 24-hour races, you would have to bring your own tent if you so choose.



Courtesy of the NorthCoast 24-Hour Endurance Run

Running and walking

How much a “runner” runs during a fixed-time race again is up to the individual and depends on the length of the race and the runner's goals and condition during the course of the race. Certainly some people walk the entire time, whether racewalking or using a common stride, and some can put up good mileage. “Centurion” is a title given to a racewalker who walks 100 miles in a 24-hour race, and I've seen several athletes achieve this.

The nature of fixed-time races lends itself well to runners who are less experienced, less trained, or perhaps older or coming off an injury, because they can feel comfortable walking or sitting when they want to or need to without worrying about making a cutoff or being required to complete a certain distance during the race or being stranded out in the middle of the wilderness.

For those who want to run as much as possible and minimize walking, I've found that it's best to take a disciplined approach. For example, in my best 24-hour race at the World Championships in Drummondville, Quebec, in 2007, I used a short but fairly steep hill on the 1.3-mile loop for my walking break every lap after the first couple of hours. I picked the same point to start walking up the hill and the same point to start running again every lap, which came to about a 30-second walk break. When you're working hard, it gives you a chance to catch your breath and stretch your legs a little, and walking before you get tired helps you get accustomed to walking fast with a good stride, which is then easier to keep later in the race when you're very tired. Walking that uphill gave me the added mental benefit of looking forward to the hill rather than dreading it every lap.

The longer the race, the more walking you'll have to do and the more breaks you'll have to take. I believe that keeping some sort of plan in mind is important

not only for your best physical performance but also for your best mental condition since it can help you give order and structure to what can be very long hours.

Lap counting

These days, most races are chip timed, with each lap counted electronically. Some smaller races might be manually counted, and I myself have served as a lap counter at a number of races. A good, experienced race director can have a good system in place to make manual counting accurate, efficient, and relatively stress free for all involved. In my own opinion, I believe manual counting should always be in place at least as a backup, since electronic timing can be prone to errors and malfunction.

Many races, certainly national-championship races or other high-profile events, will have some sort of display to show runners how far they've run or to show the leaders and their mileage.

As my editorial rant for the day, I will say this is an area that race directors, particularly for competitive 24-hour races, need to improve on. In many races I've run with electronic timing, the electronic display was difficult or impossible to read without coming to a complete stop. Many of the electronic displays work sporadically. And if they work, they might not provide competitive runners with the information they need—for example, the top 10 runners and their mileages. For these RDs always looking for the best electronic system and display method, I have a cheap and easy solution: a dry-erase board, updated with the top 10 men and women every hour. I've seen it used at a couple of races, and it works perfectly!

History of fixed-time races

Fixed-time races have a long and fascinating history, with roots back into the 1760s in England, and they begin with walking. Starting in the 1760s, Foster Powell achieved a career as a pedestrian, a professional long-distance walker, becoming one of the earliest athletes of any sport for which there are reliable records. He began his career with a record-breaking 50-mile walk in 1764. In 1773 he walked from London to York and back, about 396 miles, in 138 hours—just under six days. He also completed a record 112 miles in 24 hours in 1787. But it was the challenges to his London-York-London record by subsequent pedestrians that eventually gave rise to the six-day race, the longest allowable athletic activity without violating the Sunday religious observation requirements.

Indeed, it was the six-day race that became the premier sporting event in England and the East Coast of the United States beginning in the 1870s. Its popularity took off when Edward Payson Weston, who had gained fame by attempting to walk the 453 miles from Boston to Washington in time to attend Abraham Lincoln's

1861 inauguration, made several attempts to walk 500 miles in six days, which was thought an impossibility. He succeeded in doing so in December 1874.

There followed a series of highly competitive contests between Weston and the likes of Irishman Daniel O’Leary and British athletes Charles Rowell and Henry Brown. The Astley Belt Race was an annual event that was touted as the long-distance championship of the world, with paid admission for spectators and prize money exceeding \$20,000! By now, they were declared “go as you please” races, meaning that running was allowed as well as walking. There were also highly promoted professional six-day races held in Madison Square Garden (the original one), also with paying spectators (in a very smoky arena), high wagers, and large prize money.

Women also took part in six-day professional pedestrianism in the 1870s and 1880s. The era began with a contest in Chicago in 1876 in which May Marshall defeated Bertha von Hillern and then was defeated by Bertha in a rematch. After that, Bertha developed a professional career performing solo. May went on to win \$30,000 in prize money over the next five years. Other superstars of the time included sisters Alice and Sadie Donley, Ada Anderson, and Fannie Edwards. Exilda La Chapelle gained fame for walking 3,000 quarter miles in 3,000 quarter hours in 1879, and in 1878 she was the first woman to walk 100 miles in 24 hours, still a benchmark for walkers of either sex.

Men’s six-day records continued to improve, with American Pat Fitzgerald running 610 miles in 1884, James Albert running 621.75 in 1888, and the British superstar George Littlewood running 623.75 miles later that year, a record that held until modern times.

By the late 1880s, the popularity of pedestrianism had waned with the rising popularity of cycling races. In the ensuing decades, fixed-time races of any length were uncommon and not highly contested. As modern ultrarunning as a sport took shape in the 1950s and 1960s, fixed-time races, particularly those of 24 hours or less, began to show competitive spirit. The first modern competitive 24-hour race could be said to be the Motspur Park 24-Hour Race in England in 1953, in which South African runner Wally Hayward ran a record 159 miles, beating Charles Rowell’s 150-mile split in a six-day race in 1882. By 1980, interest in 48-hour, six-day, and other multiday races rose again, and the popularity of fixed-time races continues to rise to this day.

Courses

Courses for fixed-time races are usually designed to help runners cover as many miles as possible, rather than to provide challenging terrain. To that end, most courses are relatively flat road loops of roughly one mile, well lit at night, although these elements can certainly vary. There is a start line, where the race starts and



Courtesy of Around the Lake 24-Hour

▲ Excitement at the start of the Around the Lake 24-Hour in Wakefield, Massachusetts.

where loops are counted, and an aid station near the start area. Runners can usually then put their food, clothes, and belongings in the vicinity of the start line as well.

On the short side, there are a number of races held on a 400-meter track, or sometimes on a shorter indoor track. For track ultras, the participants usually change direction every four or six hours to prevent too much stress on one side of the body when making the turns.

On the long side, the FANS 24-hour race in Minneapolis is a 2.1-mile loop, and the loop for the Around the Lake 24-Hour in Wakefield, Massachusetts, is just over 5K. But the longest course that I'm aware of is the Back on My Feet Lone Ranger 24-Hour Race, held on an 8.4-mile loop course on a bike path on both sides of the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia.

Fixed-time races are not necessarily known for beautiful scenery, but most races are held within parks, sometimes in very attractive settings. The Hinson Lake 24-Hour Classic takes place on a roughly 1.5-mile course of hard-packed dirt and the occasional wooden footbridge that winds through a forested park and encircles Hinson Lake in Rockingham, North Carolina. The NorthCoast 24-Hour Endurance Run in Cleveland, which hosted the USA Track and Field 24-hour National Championships from 2009 to 2012 and from 2014 to the present, provides a wide-open view of Lake Erie and the downtown Cleveland skyline a few miles away.

There are some trail races, including the Hinson Lake 24-Hour Classic in Rockingham, North Carolina, mentioned above, and the Double Dirty Dozen in Oklahoma City. The Hinson Lake course is a flat, smooth, hard-packed dirt

surface, which is conducive to high mileage. Double Dirty Dozen is a rougher, more technical trail.

Benefits and challenges

Fixed-time ultras hold special benefits as well as challenges for a runner. As a big benefit, you pass by the aid station and your own stuff every mile (roughly), and if you have crew, they'll see you every mile as well, so you always know that help is just around the corner. And your own stuff can usually include, in 24-hour races or longer, a tent to take a nap in if you so choose. You can run when you want to run, walk when you want to walk, rest when you need to rest, and never worry about cutoffs or mileage minimums. You have only your own goals to worry about. This can be a special benefit for first-time ultrarunners, older runners, or others who generally aren't concerned with putting up high mileage. And with all of the runners' belongings usually on one part of the course, it can be like a little city, especially in a 24-hour or multiday race, with runners and crew becoming neighbors, even sharing supplies and helping each other.

Another big benefit is that the runners see each other frequently throughout the race as they are passing or being passed by other runners. The slower runners and the more competitive runners can cheer each other on for the entire time. Those running miles apart might find themselves temporarily at the same speed and able to have a nice chat for a lap or two or more, or share a few words at the aid station. This is one of the most enjoyable aspects, as it allows runners to get to know each other as the race progresses, and in the big picture it can go a long way toward building community among runners.

The mental game

For a competitive runner (referring to anyone putting in a serious effort to run as many miles as possible, regardless of speed or place), the mental game is, in my opinion, what really sets a fixed-time ultra apart from fixed-distance, even a short-loop fixed-distance race. I've seen and heard the *b* word ("boring") used a lot to describe these races, usually by those who have never run one. I don't find them boring at all. (In my opinion, there are no boring races, only boring runners.) I prefer to think of them as races without distractions. Distractions such as course markings to follow, challenging or unexpected terrain, and the necessity for headlamps are removed, and all that's left is the act of running, allowing the runner to focus on the fundamentals of stride/technique, hydration/nutrition, clothing, weather (as in almost all ultras), and pace.

The challenge of this is that the runner does have to focus. I believe it does take a certain type of person, a certain mind-set, to succeed and thrive in fixed-time ultras. Many top-level, world-class 100K runners or 100-milers have tried

and failed at a 24-hour, for example. But with proper mental discipline and proper strategy, it's possible to exceed expectations and put up impressive numbers.

Finishing

Some of you might be wondering, "How does a runner finish? Where does a runner finish?" The answer can vary from race to race and depends partially on the length of time of the race.

For races shorter than 24 hours, runners are sometimes diverted onto a shorter loop, perhaps roughly a quarter mile, as the end of the race approaches. In some cases, the short loop might be marked every 100 meters or so, and the runners would be credited according to the last mark they passed before the horn sounded. Or the full course might be marked so.

In a 24-hour race, runners are often given a small block of wood or some other sort of marker with their number on it near the end of the race. When the final horn sounds, the runners stop and drop their marker wherever they are on the course, and the distance of the partial loop they covered is measured after the race by race officials.

Track races and multiday races usually count only full laps, as do some 24-hour races. That might leave runners with a few minutes left on the clock, but it also provides them with another of the great experiences in the world of ultrarunning. The runners, crews, and spectators gather at the finish line and cheer for each of the runners, one by one, as they come in while the clock ticks down. This shared experience, this shared finish, especially after sharing each other's 48 hours, 72 hours, or six days of ups and downs and pain and joy, is one of the greatest moments a group of ultrarunners can share together.

Types of races

Twelve hours or less

Most fixed-time races are either a fraction or a multiple of 24 hours. One-hour track races have historical roots, but as they fall short of the marathon-and-beyond distance, I won't spend time to discuss those. Likewise, three-hour races are sometimes held, sometimes in conjunction with longer-time races, but I'll start on the short side with the six-hour race.

In many cases, six-hour races are held in conjunction with a 24-hour or longer race, but there are a number of dedicated six-hour races, especially in the New York City area (there were four on the calendar in 2014), and they can be a great introduction to fixed-time races or for anyone who just doesn't want to be out there too long. It's also a chance for faster runners to test their ultra speed. Some might not reach the marathon distance, while others could come close to or exceed 50 miles. But everyone is on the course together and finishes at the same time, still

with enough energy to enjoy some postrace eating, drinking, and socializing. In my opinion, the post-six-hour parties are among the best in the ultrarunning world.

The 12-hour race is similar in feel and setup to the six-hour race, can also take place within normal waking hours, and can also be a great community-building event. But it is more a test of endurance. You might review the November/December 2014 issue of *Marathon & Beyond* for my experiences in a 12-hour race that has been held in New York City. Again, it can be good for beginners, or for slower runners and walkers. It can also be good for those aiming to hit the 100K mark, or even for those like Zach Bitter and Jon Olsen to hit the 100-mile mark! Olsen set an American record for 100 miles on a track at the Sri Chinmoy Self-Transcendence 24-Hour Race in Ottawa in 2013 with a time of 11:59:28. Bitter topped that just a few months later at the Desert Solstice Invitational on a track in Phoenix with a time of 11:47:21 en route to a 12-hour world record distance of 101.66 miles. Fixed-time races shorter than 24 hours don't usually get a lot of national attention, but Bitter's astonishing record-breaking run certainly did!

Occasionally you might see an eight-hour or nine-hour race, or some other time between six and 24 hours (and I have run an eight-hour race), but six and 12 hours are the most common races shorter than 24 hours.

Featured race: GLIRC Six-Hour 60th-Birthday Run This race is held in Sunken Meadow State Park, Long Island, New York, in mid-October and is put on by the Greater Long Island Running Club. It originated in 2000 to celebrate the 60th birthday of GLIRC's long-standing member Mike Polyanski and has been held every year since. There is special recognition for runners who turn 60 in that calendar year, with special awards for the 60-year-old male and female winners. It's a great tribute to those who inspire us younger folks.

The course is a 2.1-mile combination of road and trail. After a brief grassy downhill at the start, you run for about a half mile on a sidewalk/paved park path, across a wooden footbridge, and along the edge of a parking lot before hitting the trails. The trail portions wind through a beautiful forested park as autumn colors are glowing, and although the course is not technical, the hills, mud, and sand can become a challenge after a few hours. At one point on your way around, you will meet runners coming back toward the start, which can give you a chance to cheer on your colleagues face to face, give a high five, or get a view of where the competition is. Weather can be raw sometimes, but it's extremely well organized and is usually the last race of the year in the New York Ultrarunning Grand Prix, so the mood is festive, and the postrace party with 6-foot subs, pasta salad, birthday cake, and a variety of beverages is tough to beat.

Twenty-four hours

The 24-hour race is in many ways the king of fixed-time ultras, and in my own opinion, it's the king of all ultras. The number of races on the calendar each year

is hard to track as its popularity increases and new races pop up. I have found as many as 37 24-hour races on the US calendar for 2015, and there are many international races as well. Like 100-mile races, the popularity of and participation in 24-hour races have exploded in recent years, and records have been shattered along with it. In the United States, 24-hour races usually start on a Saturday morning and finish the same time Sunday morning. In Europe, they are more likely to start at noon or in the afternoon. Included among the many 24-hour races on the calendar are an annual national-championship race sanctioned by USA Track & Field (USATF) and the biennial world championship sanctioned by the International Association of Ultrarunning (IAU), under the auspices of the International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF).

A national championship 24-hour race sanctioned by USATF, or before 2009 by the American Ultrarunning Association, has been held every year since 1988, with the exceptions of 1992 and 2004. The 2015 national championship will be held at the NorthCoast 24-Hour Endurance Run in Cleveland on September 19-20. It has been the national championship race five of the last six years, and it has provided an excellent course and organization for athletes to achieve their best. Prize money is offered to the winners, and a spot on the US team for the world championships may be awaiting the male and female winners. There are no qualifications to enter this race and registration is open to the public, but the national championship draws the best 24-hour runners from across the United States and Canada and often from other countries as well. This competition brings out the best in these talented athletes, and records have been broken at the national championships.

The runners who have been crowned the most times are Sue Ellen Trapp, with seven championships, and Connie Gardner with four. For the men, John Geesler is the king with three titles.

The state of Ohio has been important to the history of the 24-hour race. The national championships will be held at NorthCoast for a sixth year this fall. From 1993 to 2002, it was held at Olander Park in Sylvania, Ohio, with outstanding performances by top US runners as well as by Yiannis Kouros of Greece/Australia, the world record holder for 24 hours, among other distances, who has run some of his best 24s in Sylvania. There have also been many notable performances by Ohio runners, including Deb Horn, Harvey Lewis, and Mark Godale and Connie Gardner, who have both been American record holders for 24 hours.

Twenty-four-hour races have also had a world championship race held every year since 2003, with the exceptions of 2011 and 2014, and the race is now biennial. They have been held in large and small cities around the world from Korea to Taiwan to the Netherlands to Poland to Canada. The 2015 race was held on April 11 in Torino, Italy. Each country may send as many as six men and six women. For the USA, USATF determines who is selected based on performance in quali-

► Runners of all speeds together on the course at the NorthCoast 24-Hour Endurance Run in Cleveland.



Courtesy of the NorthCoast 24-Hour Endurance Run

fying races during an 18-month period preceding the world championships. The world-championship race is a competition among individuals as well as among countries. Besides individual placement, the top three finishers from each country have their distances added together to determine team placing. Traditionally, the Japanese have been among the top teams in the world, thanks in large part to Ryoichi Sekiya, who won four world championships between 2004 and 2008, as well as Russia, France, and Germany. But the Americans have had great success in recent years. The men's team finished third in 2010 and 2012 and first in 2013, with world championship performances by Mike Morton in 2012 (and an American record of 172.3 miles) and Jon Olsen in 2013. The women finished second in 2009 and first in 2012 with an American-record performance by Connie Gardner of 149.3 miles and first again in 2013 with the top American women finishing 2-3-4, led by an American record of 151.9 miles by Sabrina Little.

A well-organized and well-attended 24-hour race can be an epic experience for everyone involved. You might have the country's top runners with a spot on the national team and possibly a record on the line mixing it up with back-of-the-packers. The event itself has a beautiful dramatic arc, with the excitement of the first few hours eventually settling into a routine with various runners going through various ups and downs through the day. As darkness falls, the runners dig deep into themselves to keep their focus and their pace, reminding themselves of their motivation and trying to constantly renew their determination. As dawn approaches and the race nears its end, the excitement is renewed as sleeping runners come back to the course.

How most runners approach a 24-hour race is different from shorter races. Many runners will sleep during at least part of the night, and some will sleep the whole night and come back in the morning. More walking is usually incorporated into runners' strategies than at shorter races. Runners have to have changes of clothing available to account for changes in temperature and other weather conditions to be expected over the 24 hours, which depends greatly on the location and time of year of the race. If the course is not well lit at night, a headlamp may be needed. Runners might be more inclined to change their nutritional intake, with aid stations often offering a wider variety of food besides drinks, gels, protein bars, fruit, and potatoes, perhaps including "real" food such as burgers, sandwiches, soups, or pizza.

The most-driven runners, however, will continue to run the entire 24 hours with no sleep and with minimal breaks of any sort to change clothes or to attend to blisters or other medical needs, while trying to minimize the amount of walking as well.

Featured race: Hinson Lake 24-Hour Ultra Classic I mentioned this race briefly already. It might not be a typical 24-hour race in some respects, but it was my first 24-hour race, back in 2006, the first year the race was held (it was called an "Ultra Classic" even in its first year), so it served as my introduction and has a special place in my heart.

The race is held in Rockingham, North Carolina, about two hours south of Raleigh on the last weekend of September. It's a small town in the heart of NASCAR country, with the North Carolina Speedway being right on the edge of town. The race definitely has a small-town feel to it, with a ridiculously low entry fee and a no-frills attitude, but it is the largest 24-hour race in the country as far as the number of entrants. It sold out with 400 signed up for the 2015 edition, and it has played host to some big-time performances.

Among the winners at Hinson Lake was Mike Morton, the 1997 Western States champion, who took some 10 years off the ultrarunning scene due to military service as well as to injury and who made his comeback at the 2010 race, winning with 153.89 miles and then topping that in 2011 with 163.9 miles, just a couple of miles short of the American record! As mentioned previously, he did go on to set an American record with a world-championship title run in Poland in 2012. Besides Morton, Richard Riopel and Joe Fejes have both topped 140 miles, and Jonathan Savage has run over 130.

The course is a 1.5-mile loop of clay or hard-packed dirt with a light coating of sand, an excellent surface to run on. It crosses a number of small wooden footbridges and one 300-foot bridge that crosses the lake halfway around. The course is flat except for a short rise to the dam where the start line is located and then down the other side. It runs through the wooded areas of the park and has no electric lighting at night, although the course is marked with glow sticks. Run-

ners are advised to use a headlamp at night. The aid station is well stocked with standard fare including plenty of home-cooked potatoes and soup.

In 2006, the year I ran it, the inaugural race director, Tom Gabell, made a point of running a lap with each of the runners who were still out at night, to chat a little and get to know them. It was a very nice touch. For the finish, runners who wish to run to the finish gun are given a banana with their number on it as their partial-lap marker. That was another nice touch, although I was sorely tempted to eat my marker. The winners received awards, but there was no ceremony or hoopla after the race, which is perfectly fine.

My two main concerns going in, humidity and mosquitoes, proved to be unfounded. There didn't seem to be much of either. Overall, I had an excellent experience at Hinson Lake, and it was a perfect introduction for me to the world of 24-hour races.

Celebrity endorsement: Chisholm Deupree Chisholm Deupree is an ultrarunner in Oklahoma City and the founder and race director for 24 The Hard Way and Dirty Double Dozen, two simultaneous 24-hour races in Oklahoma City every October since 2009. 24 The Hard Way takes place on a one-mile paved loop, and the Dirty Double Dozen follows a two-mile trail loop. Both courses share the same aid station. The road version was created with the notion of hosting a national championship, which it did in 2013. "I wanted to elevate the race experience for the US National Championships, by creating an event with great support, great awards, and extreme hospitality," Deupree states.



► The start of 24 The Hard Way in Oklahoma City.

Courtesy of Chisholm Deupree

“It is very simple to produce one event with two courses and two races because of the layout of the aid station and the way that the trails merge at the aid station. Also, there are several areas where runners of both races can look through the trees and see the other racers.”

Twenty-four the Hard Way has gotten most of the attention from athletes across the country, but that doesn't mean Deupree has neglected his trail runners. There are relatively few trail 24-hour races, but Deupree has provided an outstanding, though challenging, experience.

“The DDD [Dirty Double Dozen] is fiercely protected by our trail runners who refuse to race pavement. It accounts for about 25 percent of the total field.” About the trail course, he says, “It is a very difficult trail at two miles, because there are some very technical sections, despite very little altitude change. It is too tough for me to consider running as a 24-hour race.”

Deupree has his own reasons for loving 24-hour races. “For me, the 24-hour race became the most natural transition from running one or two mountain trail races each year. I ran 11 Leadville 100s but found the distance to the mountains and the handicap of living at 1,500 feet above sea level good enough reasons to focus on new events for me.

“I like the road, fixed-time events because the entire field of runners is on the course, monitoring their place, making conversation, and racing,” Deupree said. “As a midpack runner, it's a joy for me to watch the elite field race and to be inspired by the rest of the field as each runner strives to make the most of the hours left.”

Forty-eight hours, 72 hours

Some ultrarunners who have experienced a 24-hour race or two might decide to go a little bit further. A 48- or 72-hour race is an excellent introduction to the world of multiday. I group these two races together because they have a different feel and require a very different approach from a 24-hour, and they are not as extreme as a six-day or longer multiday race, but they are similar to each other.

The 48-hour race or 72-hour can be a next step for a 24-hour runner seeking a longer challenge but without too drastic a change from the 24. A little more rest time can be taken along with more time for eating, and a more relaxed pace can be conducive to more chatting with other runners. In addition, at least some sleep is required for just about everybody, although it's possible to run a 48 without sleep.

Nowadays, the 48- and 72-hour races are pretty much held only in conjunction with other fixed-time races. A race event might include options for a 24-, 48-, and 72-hour race, for example, and possibly a six- or 12-hour as well.

The 72-hour race as a regular event was started at Across the Years, a race held in the Phoenix area since 1983. It started as a 24-hour race that finished on New Year's Day, but organizers eventually added other fixed-time options. A 72-hour race was added in 1989, and it soon became the featured race of the entire



Courtesy of Cory Reese

▲ Across the Years brings out the enthusiasm of its participants.

event, giving respectability to what had previously been seldom run or virtually nonexistent. Still, while 72 hours is not an official distance recognized by USATF or international governing bodies, it has gained respectability and popularity, especially at its two most-recognized events, Across the Years and Three Days at the Fair, a race held in northwestern New Jersey in May.

Featured race: Surgeres 48-Hour Race This stand-alone 48-hour race was an annual invitational held in the little town of Surgeres, in the west of France, every May. Organizers wanted to put together the top runners from around the world, so they invited 12 men and 12 women, based on performance and recommendations from trusted veterans. I was extremely fortunate to have been invited to run the race in May 2008.

The course was a dirt track of 302.8 meters in the municipal stadium. The first contest was held in 1985 and was held every year, with the exception of 1999, until 2010. There would be a festival taking place with the race, and the infield would be home to a rock band playing onstage, an antique car show, sandcastle-building displays, kids' games, and more, as well as the kitchen for the runners. It was quite an event for the town, and there always seemed to be lots of spectators.

The runners were treated like royalty long before they arrived. Race director Michel Landret kept in constant communication before the race, making sure that all arrangements were satisfactory. He also followed up after the race to see

how you were doing. And to this day, Michel sends me Christmas and birthday greetings!

Runners were housed in one of the small family-run hotels in town. (If you're ever in Surgeres, be sure to stop by the Gambetta Hotel, where the owner, Didion, is also an expert chef.) The day before the race there would be a welcoming ceremony and party downtown, where runners and their crew could meet each other, the organizers, and the local press.

One of the great luxuries that I've never seen or heard of anywhere else: during the race, each runner was given a trailer at the side of the track in which to put clothes and belongings and in which the runner and crew could sleep when needed. This was extremely convenient, of course, and especially nice when it rained. The only problem is that it took a lot of willpower to get up and get back outside after a short nap!

Just prior to the start of the race, there was a 48-minute race for the local kids. It was a lot of fun to watch the joy in the kids' faces and voices as they circled while we were making our final preparations. Then each runner would be intro-



© Ted McCarthy

▲ Introduction of the international runners at the start of the Surgeres 48-hour race, in the west of France.

duced by country, with runners holding their nation's flag while their national anthem played.

To further display the attention organizers gave to each individual runner, all lap counting was done manually by volunteers assigned exclusively to one runner. At the center of the straightaway by the start line, there was a long table with 24 volunteers seated there, each assigned to one runner for a two-hour shift, when a new set of volunteers would take over, to avoid fatigue. It was still always a good idea for runners to wave or get the attention of their counter as they passed and to let them know if they were taking a break. It was a very nice, friendly, human touch, when you could bond, in a way, with your counter, especially if the counter took another shift later in the race.

As is the case with most track ultras, the direction changed every six hours. Landret himself would help the runners out by grabbing their hand and pulling them around the turnaround to move in the new direction.

Overall, the race was a beautiful community event, with local citizens watching and cheering and local businesses sponsoring the race and providing trophies for the winners along with gift bags with not just T-shirts but also regionally produced wine and honey.

And just so no one forgets that this was a world-class race, it should be noted that the world's top ultrarunners have all run there, and many of them have broken national or world records for 48 hours. Course records are 473.495K by the great Yiannis Kouros of Greece and Australia in 1996 and 397.103K by Japan's Sumie Inagaki in 2010. Other legendary runners who have had top performances in Surgeres include Martin Fryer of Australia; Ryoichi Sekiya, Masayuki Otaki, and Mami Kudo of Japan; Anatoly Kruglikov of Russia; Gilbert Mainix of France; and Tony Mangan of Ireland. The Americans have done well there also, with Susan Olsen and Pam Reed having great runs there, and in 1997 Roy Pirrung and Sue Ellen Trapp set male and female American records there with over 243 and 234 miles, respectively. As for me, I didn't do too badly in 2008 with over 235 miles.

Celebrity endorsement: Steven Tursi Steven Tursi, of Mahwah, New Jersey, started running in 1996 when he weighed 400 pounds. He finished his first marathon in 2006 and his first ultra in 2008. He first ran more than 100 miles in a single race in the 72-hour race at Across the Years in December 2010 (which I can personally attest was notorious for hurricane-like conditions the first night and subfreezing temperatures the second), hitting the 100-mile mark in 60 hours. In total, he has run 100 miles or more in 10 races, four of which were traditional 100-mile races and six of which were 48- or 72-hour races. In March 2015 he ran his first 100-miler under 24 hours, finishing the Umstead 100 in 23:38.

Tursi has run the 72-hour race at Three Days at the Fair, held in Sussex County, New Jersey in mid-May, every year since 2012, as well as the 48-hour race there in 2011. I asked him about the appeal of the event itself, and he has this to say:

“The RDs do everything right. I love the exact one-mile loop, the proximity of camping/restrooms, the incredible aid station, and the motivation offered by the RDs and volunteers.” He continues, “It’s also great for the family. My wife comes and hangs out with the other runners’ spouses, and my son comes and plays with the other runners’ kids.

“The appeal of fixed-time races in general is the social aspect of it—and three days is particularly appealing because many of the same people come back year after year, and a true kinship has formed among the regulars at this race.”

Aside from the social aspect, Tursi feels there are two great advantages to fixed-time races: short loops and no cutoffs. “Most people scoff at the idea of short loops, until they try it and find that it’s actually wonderful. It’s not for everyone, but I have found most people who try it really enjoy it. Also—and this holds special appeal to big guys like me—the lack of cutoffs. When you have 72 hours, 100 miles becomes much easier. Pretty much any motivated person in decent health can achieve 100 miles when they’re given 72 hours to do it in (I was 325 pounds when I did 106 miles at ATY in 2010—and I got a full night’s sleep every night). I sometimes wonder if faster runners appreciate just how stressful it is to have the burden of 100 miles complicated by the very real threat of missing a cutoff. It is amazingly demoralizing and excludes a lot of people from ultrarunning in general. Fixed-time races are a solution for this.”

The short-loop nature of the race is appealing to Tursi because it gives runners of all speeds an opportunity to run together and share time together. “Last year [at Three Days at the Fair] I was running with Joe Fejes for a few miles. Joe was in the 48; I was in the 72. It was my third day, his second. He had already passed me in mileage. And I got to run with him, in a race, for three or four miles. In what other context would a guy like me get to run in a competitive setting with a guy like Joe? The opposite is also true. I get to run in the same race at the same time and pace with someone who is literally 100 miles behind me. In a traditional fixed-distance race, I wouldn’t even be at the finish line any more when he finished. In 100-mile races, even big ones, toward the end of the race, in the wee hours of the morning, you can literally go hours without seeing anyone. It can get really lonely out there. In fixed-time races, loneliness just doesn’t happen.”

The 72-hour race has special appeal for Tursi over the 48- and 24-hour options that are also offered at Three Days at the Fair and at Across the Years. “The story of a 72-hour runner is far more interesting than that of a 48-hour runner. If you’re there for 48 hours, not only do you miss the richer 72-hour experience, but you also miss a significant part of the story of everyone else in the 72—and along with that story comes the camaraderie. It’s not a question of difficulty. The 72-hour race is not significantly more difficult than the 24; in fact, in many ways 24 is the hardest event. Also, 72 is 50 percent more fun than 48 and 200 percent more fun than 24.”

Celebrity endorsement: Traci Falbo Traci Falbo has been running ultras only since the fall of 2011, but she has racked up quite a list of achievements in that time. She got interested in 24-hour races because she was interested in trying to qualify for the US team at the World Championships. “I was fascinated by running 24 hours and the prospect of representing the USA! I couldn’t imagine a better goal. So I decided to try and make the 2013 team at a race on 12/31/12.” She qualified at that race in December 2012 and went on to place fourth at the World Championships in Steenbergen, Netherlands, in May 2013. She also qualified for the 24-hour World Championships in Torino, Italy, in April 2015 by running a personal-best distance of 147.6 miles at the Desert Solstice 24-Hour Invitational in December 2014.

With her success at 24 hours, Traci set her sights on 48 hours and the American record, which was held by Sue Ellen Trapp at 234.8 miles. Falbo felt that the record could be within reach: “I know that the longer I go, the more competitive that I am. I wanted to try 48 hours. I thought I might be able to do it . . . so I gave it a whirl!” She ran the 48-hour race at Six Days in the Dome, on a 400-meter indoor track in Anchorage, Alaska, in August 2014, and set an American record as well as an indoor world record with a distance of 242.35 miles. In comparison to her prior 24-hour success, she says, “It was better, because I have learned to pace myself better with experience. I had gone out too fast in 2013 at Worlds. I did a better job at the 48-hour with pacing. Forty-eight hours is much harder, as sleep deprivation really played a role for me, where it didn’t at the 24-hour.”

Falbo also set an American women’s-best time on a trail 100-mile race at the Tunnel Hill 100 in November 2014, with a time of 14:45:26. (This record was broken a couple of months later by Nicole Studer at Rocky Raccoon.) I asked her to compare the two types of races—which was harder? For Falbo, fixed-time races are harder. “You can stop whenever you want. A 100-miler isn’t over until you run 100 miles. But a fixed event is over when you decide to stop. So it’s much harder not to slow, walk, or stop because it will end when the clock ends.”

Comparing her feelings about her 100-mile and 48-hour successes, she says, “I was thrilled with holding the 100-mile trail record even though it was only for a couple of months. An American record was only something I had hoped I could one day accomplish. I had it. I earned it. I am proud of that accomplishment. I think the 48-hour was harder and took more mental determination. However, I think the running community appreciated the 100-mile record time more, as I think multiday races are on the fringe of an already semiobscure sport.”

Her advice for fixed-time runners is, “Set a goal. Have a plan. Break the race into accomplishable chunks to be most successful.”

Six days

As we’ve seen, the six-day race has a very rich history going back to the 1870s. That is part of the reason that the race holds a certain mystique to this day and

a certain reverence held even by those who have difficulty comprehending the event and its appeal. Although it has its roots in professional indoor races, the modern six-day is a public participatory event, usually on outdoor road courses. There are still not very many six-day races being staged and not a large number of participants. And it is the longest race for which USA Track & Field certifies official records.

The event that might be considered the flagship six-day race is the Sri Chinmoy Self-Transcendence Six-Day Race, held in Flushing Meadows Corona Park in Queens, New York, every April, in conjunction with a 10-day race that starts four days earlier. The 2015 race featured 18 men and 16 women. The Sri Chinmoy organization has a long history of putting on “self-transcendence” races, particularly multiday races, and 2015 marked the 20th running of the 10-day race and the 18th running of the six-day. It has kept up the tradition, and for many years it was the only six-day race available in the United States.

There has been a resurgence of interest in the six-day race in America in recent years. Across the Years added a six-day race to its roster in 2013. And a new fixed-time festival, the Icarus Ultrafest in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, included a six-day race in its inaugural running in November 2014.

In August 2014, Joe Fejes and colleagues staged a six-day race on an indoor domed 400-meter track in Anchorage, Alaska, as a one-time event, a race called Six Days in the Dome. The aim was to gather as many of the best multiday runners from around the world as possible in an attempt to set national or world records on an environmentally controlled, flat surface, one of the few indoor 400-meter tracks in the United States. Many of the world’s top runners did indeed take part, and Fejes himself set an American record for six days with 580.3 miles. At the same event, Traci Falbo set a women’s American record and world indoor record for 48 hours with 242.35 miles.

In other parts of the world, there is the Emu six-day race in Balatonfured, Hungary, and the Adelaide six-day race in South Australia. So overall it’s still a small number of races, but they are gaining popularity and respect.

It’s an enormous jump from a 48- or 72-hour race to the six-day in terms of approach and mind-set. This one you’re in for the long haul. When you arrive at the race venue, get comfortable, this is your home now.

Your approach to performance certainly changes as you move into this length of time. It might be hard for someone who has run more than 150 miles in a 24-hour race to understand how he might have to settle for about 65 miles during one day of the six-day, but it happens, trust me. To put it in perspective, no human being has ever run 100 miles or more during each day of a six-day race. It seems obvious to say, but much more walking takes place in a six-day, and the running that takes place is quite a bit slower and looks to spectators like a slow jog or a painful slog. But there are times when a 13-minute mile feels like

a sprint! Overall, the intensity is much lower than in a 24- or 48-hour race, but mental determination must be much stronger.

Physically, any number of things can happen to the body over six days. Certainly, the joints, the legs, the hips, the back, and even the shoulders and arms all are pushed to the limit and take a great beating and give you the gift of great pain. The feet can turn to hamburger between the blisters and swelling. On the bright side, with this long a race, a runner can take as much time as necessary to tend to these aches, get a massage, soak feet in ice, and do whatever needs to be done without being too concerned with time spent off the course.

The length of the race as well as its accompanying pains definitely affect a runner's sleep patterns. Every runner's approach is different, but in my races I tried to sleep for a few hours each night, late at night. If nothing else, it provided some connection to normal life and normal sleep patterns. But after a couple of nights, sleep can become very difficult, despite the exhaustion. Some nights are spent lying for a few hours in a half-sleep state, with the physical pain always present and the mind unable to shut down. But even if the runner is unable to sleep, managing the time spent horizontal is crucial to a successful and happy six-day event.

Approach to nutrition changes, as you will be more likely to eat more “real food”—that is, food that you might eat even if you weren't running, like hot rice and pasta dishes, salad, eggs, burritos, all types of sandwiches, potatoes, and even sushi. These types of foods might be served by race staff during meal times, but you definitely still have to continue a constant intake of food and fluids in between servings, so gels and protein bars are still a good idea, as well as whatever your own food preferences are that you can bring. As I said earlier, it's all good if you can bring it in a bag or a cooler and it sits well with your stomach. I'm a smaller guy myself, but I've had a voracious appetite in the two six-day races that I've run. You have to eat, eat, eat!

There are also some different logistical factors to a six-day race. It can be difficult for a runner to find someone willing to crew for six days, but many of the top runners do have crew, at least for part of the time. Personal hygiene might not become as problematic as you might think. Race organizers might have showers available, so that is certainly a possibility, and some runners shave as well. Brushing your teeth is definitely a good idea.

Featured race: Sri Chinmoy Self-Transcendence Six-Day and 10-Day Race Sri Chinmoy (1931-2007) was an Indian-born athlete, musician, artist, and spiritual leader who believed in long-distance running as one means of achieving peace and harmony, both individually and as a society. He and those who believed in his message created a number of long-distance races around the world, which are called “Self-Transcendence” races, because they can be a method of truly

transcending yourself and achieving a higher state of thought. Perhaps the highest-profile of these races is the annual six- and 10-day races in Flushing Meadows Corona Park in Queens, New York.

The 10-day starts four days before the six-day, and both races finish together. The race itself certainly has its challenges, but it is a masterpiece of organization and planning, and it provides runners with a truly transcendent experience, aside from whatever athletic goals they have set for themselves.

Normally this area of the park is empty grass and walkways, but race organizers set up a small city to cater to the runners. There are a large tent with a fully functioning kitchen for race cooks, who cook three vegetarian meals every day; a smaller tent with refrigerators, microwaves, a stove, and other small appliances where runners and crew can prepare their own food; a heated medical tent, with a room for massages; large tents with rows of cots for men and women, respectively, to sleep in; rows of porta-potties with a running-water sink; showers; shelters for the lap counters; and “dugouts,” or long sheltered areas directly on the course with tables and chairs for the runners to set their immediate race needs. There is also plenty of space for runners to set up their own tents.

The course has undergone modifications over the years, but it has always been an exact mile. There is no electronic timing, all lap counting is done manually, the mileage total is announced for all runners as they pass the start line, and the large scoreboard with each runner’s name in place order is manually updated on each lap as well. While many races have poor methods of posting current standings, this race stands out as a model of organization.

The meals are prepared by expert cooks who run a vegetarian restaurant in Queens, and the meals are absolutely delicious and not at all what you might think you would ever eat during a race. The medical volunteers, massage volunteers, and other volunteers all provide outstanding service for the athletes. The road course is almost completely flat, but the April weather can be unpredictable, and it can be a problem. In 2013, the year I ran it, the weather stayed thankfully dry, but some years it has been known to rain for days on end. Meadow Lake is right next to the course, which provides a nice backdrop, but the wind coming off the lake can also take its toll on the runners’ energy supplies.

It’s a Sri Chinmoy race, so a majority of the runners are followers of Sri Chinmoy, and they come from all over the world to run here. It is truly an international event. Some participants and spectators find it unusual that the event is clearly a spiritual experience for so many runners, but in my opinion, an event like this is incomplete without the spiritual aspect, and you are truly missing out on something if you don’t see it that way.

Before my own running of the race in 2013, veterans had told me not to worry too much about my mileage goals or trying to set any records. But several people had separately told me that I would eventually “get into the flow.” That sounded

good, even if I wasn't sure what they meant. Many religions use some sort of repetitive chant to put the individual in a peaceful, prayerful state of mind, and I was to find out that repetitive running can have the same effect. After about four and one-half days I had a friend, Otto Lam, arrive to crew for me the rest of the way. He was very excited and enthusiastic to help out, telling me, "Don't worry about me; you just focus!" At that instant I realized that his enthusiasm felt jarring, and "focus" was no longer the right word, and I understood what the others had told me. I was simply moving through this theater of existence, and everything was part of that existence—the timers, the other runners, the food, the dugout; the kids popping wheelies on motorcycles in the parking lot; the highway rushing by one section of the course; the birds picking worms from the ground at dawn; the solo guitarist playing next to the lake under a full moon at 2:00 in the morning. This is where I am, and this is what I'm doing. For me, that's self-transcendence. That's the real beauty of what a six-day race can be and what the Sri Chinmoy six-day/10-day race is.

But that doesn't mean there haven't been some great competitive performances here. In 2009 there was a tough battle between the perennial winner, the great Dipali Cunningham, and the legendary Pam Reed. In the end, Cunningham came out on top with an American record of 513 miles, at age 50, compared with Reed's 490. In 2001, Rimas Jakelaitis ran 901 miles in the 10-day while the one and only Ted Corbitt ran 303 miles in the six-day—at age 82!

Celebrity endorsement: Lynn David Newton Lynn David Newton was a somewhat casual runner until one day in 1998 while living in Phoenix when he heard about a race nearby where people ran for 24, 48, and 72 hours and finished on New Year's Day, and he stopped by to witness it. This race was Across the Years, one of the premier fixed-time race events in the world. Founded in 1983, it has changed location, format, and organizers over the years. It is currently held at the Camelback Ranch in Glendale on a 1.05-mile loop, is organized by brothers Nick and Jamil Coury and family, and includes 24-, 48-, and 72-hour races as well as a six-day race. Newton's first experience witnessing the event got him hooked. "As I watched people running around (and it was one of the most gorgeous days that Arizona has to offer), I was smitten," he says. "I left saying 'I've gotta get me some of that.'" He soon became a regular runner, even running the 72-hour nine straight years. "Obviously my all-time favorite race of any description is Across the Years. It literally changed my life," Newton says. He had also spoken with previous race directors about adding a six-day race and was pleased to see the Courys add that to the event.

Newton has done extensive research on fixed-time races. After moving to Ohio in 2007 he was in on discussions for starting NorthCoast with race director Dan Horvath, and he has seen many of the great runners of our time. "I've never

had a list of favorites. Of course, Yiannis Kouros is king, and Ted Corbitt, whose whole life course as a runner is even more impressive in some ways.”

He does mention, however, that not all of the fastest trail runners succeed in fixed-time events. “One thing I have preached relentlessly is that fixed-time running is a much different animal than point-to-point running. I know there are accomplished trail runners who mistakenly think it’s got to be easy, guys who are used to running 100-mile trail races in 14 to 16 hours and who get to their first 24-hour and go down in flames, if not after the first few hours (usually the case), then after they run 14 to 16 as in a 100-mile race and realize the race is far from over. Then what? They quit.”

For years Newton has promoted road races and fixed-time races when most press attention seemed to be focused on mountain and trail ultras. “For a while I was pretty relentless myself in promoting awareness that there are other forms of ultrarunning besides the mountain trails that are every bit as challenging, meaningful, and interesting as trail running. The tide has changed on that. I used to be able to name all the 24-hour races in the United States. There were only a half dozen or less. The number has proliferated greatly. This is a good thing. There are so many benefits, including to newbies, to running as far as possible in a set time under carefully controlled and relatively safe conditions, where one can be supported, enjoy the social benefits of being out there for a full day, concentrating on just the running itself. And the word is now out about that.”

Other fixed-time events

Ultrarunners are a special breed of people. One of our most pleasant traits, I believe, is our creativity. We aren’t limited to just running either a distance from here to there or even for a nice round number of hours on a loop course. Some individuals have come up with some very creative events that don’t fit neatly into any category.

Solstice run This is not a race but a group event that was organized by Lydia Redding and Julie Rosenfeld on the streets of their Teaneck, New Jersey, neighborhood on December 21 (or the closest Saturday). The concept is to run from sunset to sunrise on the longest night of the year, which lasts about 14 hours and change, with the idea of running to chase the sun and bring it back. There is even a small ceremony at the beginning with a bonfire (in a grill) kept burning throughout the night. It was all in fun, no counting was done or results recorded, but it’s an excellent example of an imaginative fixed-time event. With the hostesses’ recent move to another part of the country, however, it appears that it will have to remain in the memories of those of us who have attended.

Big Backyard Ultra The king of ingeniously creative race directing is undoubtedly Gary Cantrell, aka Lazarus Lake or just Laz. He created the Big Backyard Ultra,

held in October in Bell Buckle, Tennessee, as a combination of a distance and a timed race, or rather neither a distance nor a timed race. The course for the first 12 hours is a 4.16-mile trail loop. All runners have one hour to complete the loop. An hour after the start, the runners are sent off on the loop again to complete it within an hour. Runners may not start the next loop early, and if they fail to start or fail to start on time, they are eliminated. If they fail to finish the loop within an hour, they are eliminated. After 12 hours the course shifts to a road loop for the nighttime, but it's back to the trail after 24 hours. This continues hour after hour until only one person remains who has completed one loop solo and is named the winner. All other runners officially DNF. How long the race lasts, either in time or distance, depends on the determination of the runners. The finisher with the best total so far was Tim Englund with 145.8 miles and 35 hours. In 2014, Johan Steene and Jeremy Ebel pushed each other through 49 hours and more than 204 miles before they mutually decided not to run a 50th lap, as they had other commitments and planes to catch. Thus there was no winner, and all the runners, including Steene and Ebel, DNF'd.

Race for the Ages A new race Laz is putting on in September 2015 in Manchester, Tennessee, is called A Race for the Ages. This one is a more traditional fixed-time event but with a handicap. Each runner runs his or her age in hours, with a minimum of 24 hours, and whoever runs farthest wins. So a 24-year-old man has to run at least as far in 24 hours as a 72-year-old man can run in three days. The idea is to give older runners a chance to win a race outright. It will be very interesting to see how this one plays out!

Final comments

I hope this answers some of the questions that you might have had about fixed-time races. For anyone who has run or is considering running a marathon or an ultra, I strongly recommend these types of races. They are extremely enjoyable social events, and they are perfectly set up to help you achieve your best performance and realize your goals, whatever they might be. There are many, many races to choose from, from relatively short to extremely long. Enjoy your experience; it might open up a new way for you to approach and appreciate your own running and racing.

Postscript

The U.S. women again won gold at the 2015 24-hour World Championships in Torino, Italy, in April 2015, with Katalin Nagy winning the individual championship, Traci Falbo second, and Maggie Guterl fourth. Joe Fejes broke his own six-day American record at the Emu 6-Day Race in Balatonfured, Hungary, in May 2015 with a total of 606.24 miles. 