

Section D

Endurance Sports and Other Paths to Work & Health Balance-Tips For Self Care

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AN ULTRAMARATHON PATH TO WELL-BEING—FIND YOUR LEADVILLE

As the Iowa Supreme Court's liaison to the ISBA Well-Being committee, I've admired those who help lawyers deal with stress, addiction, depression and other afflictions. I once saw a T-shirt that proclaimed, "Endurance sports are for addicts who can't handle drugs or alcohol." Endurance events indeed provide a healthy choice for lawyers who like to work hard and play hard.

We should do things that scare us. The Leadville, Colorado 100-mile trail run (LT100 or the "Race Across the Sky") scared me. The event starts and ends in America's highest city (9,500 ft.) and the out-and-back course, mostly on single track Colorado mountain trail, twice summits Hope Pass (12,600 ft.), Sugarloaf pass (11,060 ft.) and never dips below 9,100 feet. Most participants "DNF" (do not finish) the thirty-hour event that begins at four a.m. on an August Saturday and ends by ten a.m. Sunday, after climbing and descending over three *vertical* miles in weather varying from sleet to 95-degree heat. The staged cut-off times allow minimal rest ("beware the chair").

By way of comparison, Ironman (IM) triathlons (2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike, 26.2-mile run) start at seven a.m. and over ninety percent of entrants finish that evening; at Leadville I would be a physical wreck Saturday evening with an all-nighter still ahead over difficult terrain to the finish. As of 2008, I had yet to run beyond 26.2 miles or enter any event that took me over 14 hours to complete. But after six IM's (several with Brother Bob, ISBA president 2011-12, and our younger siblings and my wife Maria, a family law

practitioner and ultramarathoner), IM triathlons simply no longer scared me. The LT100, later featured in Christopher McDougall's epic book *Born to Run*, held a mystique that drew me in.

So that December I attended a motivational talk by John Byrne, a YMCA buddy who had recently earned his LT100 silver buckle (a sub-thirty-hour finish) with ninety seconds to spare followed by an ambulance ride to Denver. He said things like, "my right knee hurt the last sixty miles." Byrne's enthusiasm for challenges proved contagious, so after consulting ultramarathon coaches who reassured me my long-distance cycling experience, aerobic base and familiarity with fueling for multi-hour events (*see* hammernutrition.com) would pay off in the mountains, I joined five fellow Quad Citians to sign up for the 2009 LT100. We trained together for many of the 1,500 miles I ran/walked from January to August, 500 miles fewer than my online coach Scott Weber prescribed (work and family got in the way). Under Weber's guidance, we gradually increased our mileage to include thirty/twenty weekends (thirty miles Saturday, twenty Sunday, Monday rest) and several fifty milers.

Against Weber's advice, in early May I entered a 24-hour run and completed 92 miles at sea level around the North Scott H.S. track. Infections from my untreated blisters promptly required a three-day hospital stay for IV antibiotics and three weeks without running while I recovered from a tendon injury ultimately resolved by cortisone injections. As Will Rogers said, "Good judgment comes from experience; experience comes from bad judgment." My

mistakes vividly imprinted lessons on pacing, hydration, blister care and the relationship between mood and blood sugar. Importantly, I experienced my first all-night effort after going all day. In June, the weekend of my 50th birthday, I attended the LT100 training camp, three days well spent on the toughest parts of the course. After a 300-mile July, the taper began (my second favorite part of training--after sports massages).

I returned to the mountains five days before the event to acclimate (critically important), and was joined by my crew (Maria and Ernie Parr, an IM buddy, and his wife, Nid, a hospice nurse). Their help was indispensable. The race began with 724 runners massed in downtown Leadville, headlamps glowing. Only 274 (thirty-eight percent) would complete the race that year. John DeDonker, a former law partner turned bank president, joined me for the first forty miles. We walked most uphill stretches, ran all downhill legs, and employed a run/walk ten/two minute pattern on level ground. The sun rose as we neared Sugarloaf pass. Our quadriceps took a pounding in a high speed, joyous daylight descent on the steep "Power Line" jumping from rock to rock under electrical transmission towers (as seen from highway 24 this stretch looks like a white slash on the green mountainside). The scenery was gorgeous, and while tedium had been a major issue during training, I happily discovered that I was never bored during the race.

At the mandatory mile fifty weigh-in at Winfield, a ghost town preserved for tourists, I had dropped an alarming ten pounds in the 90-plus degree heat. Now joined by Ernie, my first pacer (runners are permitted one pacer at a time

during the second fifty miles), we ascended Hope Pass and enjoyed soup at its aid station supplied by thirty pack llamas. We jogged briskly down to Twin Lakes as dusk approached. At mile sixty, after the last stream crossing, Nid treated my blisters before I changed into dry shoes. Sadly, four of my fellow Quad Citians including John would fail to make the mile sixty cut-off time and ended their race (he returned a few years later and earned the coveted gold buckle for a sub-twenty-five-hour finish). The remaining runners were dispersed, headlights bobbing on the trail ahead and behind. Solitude turned the struggle inward mentally as physical pain, cramping and vertigo intensified. I passed several participants who were vomiting blood from overdosing on “vitamin I” (Ibuprofen).

I reached mile seventy-four before two a.m., ahead of my pacing plan, surprising my second pacer, Maria. The nighttime climb up Power Line took its toll. I proceeded zombie-like, more staggering than running. The waters of Turquoise Lake turned silver then its namesake color at dawn. In the new day's light, Maria blurted out, “my God, your hands” which had swollen to the size of baseball mitts. At 8:34 am we crossed the finish over a short red carpet, to a smattering of applause. I was elated and exhausted from my 28.5-hour effort. I had regained the ten pounds of water weight and the physician at checkout assured me the swollen hands were “normal” and gave me welcome medical advice: go to bed.

Takeaways: such challenges require and enhance your self-discipline, confidence and resilience. You learn that physical, mental and spiritual health

are profoundly interrelated and that the laws of nature are immutable. You realize that seemingly insurmountable challenges are overcome with teamwork, planning, preparation and perseverance. The resulting mental fortitude remains with you as you confront any manner of work/life challenges. U.S. Congressman Dan Crenshaw, a former Navy Seal, aptly observed:

In difficulty, in adversity, in meaningful suffering—there is transformation. That transformation is one of confidence and mental fortitude, derived from the challenge and hardship we seek out. These challenges are forgotten tools, some of life's finest instructors, wiped away by a society that increasingly values comfort and pleasure over accomplishment and triumph.

Fortitude: American Resilience in the Era of Outrage, Chapter 8, "Do Something Hard" at page 179. I agree, and urge you to find your own Leadville.