

Mt. Taylor 50k 2017

Yá'át'ééh ,

Shí éí Jason Yazzie yinishyé. Tódích'í'nií nishí. Tótsohnii báshíshchiin. My grandparents are from Newcomb, NM and my father's parents are from somewhere near Keams Canyon, AZ. My family and I now live in Albuquerque, NM.



I would have liked to say that I trained my hardest before the race. I am going to have to say that “I trained the best that I could,” having a family and an eight to five job doesn't really give any one enough time to train. I have to get short runs in the early morning, sometimes at four am you will find me running in the NE Heights of Albuquerque. Weekends are for Long runs with my son, who himself is training for a marathon this December. Believe me when I say that my family is not a burden, in fact they are the reason I run (plus running keeps me sane). My wife and I have work the kids have school, clubs, dance class, play dates etc., and then the schools themselves have activities, PTA meetings, dinners and lunches. I have to include the spice to our family unit, our four legged friend Rivers, and I have to add that a dog is nothing like a human child. This is my life and running takes up a small portion of it, and I am happy with that.

Leaving work at noon on the Friday before the race gave me enough time to prepare the family for the trip to Grants, NM. I had to write a checklist of items and actions that I needed to bring or do. The past two nights I checked my AK Vest and my drop bag constantly. And I checked it again just to be safe. One thing that I did not have time to buy was food. Being on a time crunch I had to go to a running shop that

I do not usually go to but they had Tailwind and Honey Stinger Waffles. After everything was packed I began to look at my pick up list; son, daughter then wife, or was it daughter, wife then son?

Everyone was picked up. We hit the freeway right at five pm, traffic was not as bad as I thought, but not fast by any means. Driving for eighty two miles allowed me to calm my busy brain from the hour before. Reaching Grants and checking into our hotel was quick and eventless. Big thanks to the Knights of Columbus for allowing the 50k briefing and pasta dinner to be held at their facilities in Grants. The briefing was great, I never been to one before I usually have to miss them because of work or family. I don't think the weather and bear announcements made my family feel any better about me running thirty miles. I met some great people after the meeting; I was able to ask for a ride to the start line. After leaving the briefing my family and I decided to have dinner at the truck stop. After dinner we went back to our room and just in case I had to make sure my gear was where it needed to be. Now it was time to sleep, or in actuality I was constantly checking the time while in bed.

Finally getting out of bed at four am I decided to double check my gear again. I was ready in a few minutes; my family had bought me some breakfast; cereal and a banana. I went down stairs to the hotel lobby to meet my fellow carpoolers. During the ride to the start line we had some nice conversation. Arriving at the start line with time to spare unlike the previous year when I only had 7 minutes to warmup. The temperature in the truck said forty seven degrees; it was cold enough that I put my first jacket on. Then I began to stretch.

The race began, I felt comfortable near the back of the pack. Through the first few miles I was happy that the roads were not bad and that there was a little fog but nothing to worry about. Getting to the top of La Mosca Peak was great; going down was a bit slippery though. On the way to the Ridgeline Aid Station the road was getting sticky. At the clearing around mile eight there was mud and mud. Last year this is where I sprain my ankle. I ran this very carefully through the rocky muddy conditions. As the director said last night "there will be mud, snow and rain but you are a special breed." So I was prepared to run in some uncomfortable conditions.

A "special breed," that stuck in my mind throughout the race. What a crazy breed we must be to pay to run thirty plus miles, and want to do it again, if not adding more miles to our races. I am not running from anything anymore, instead I am trying to push myself to a point I have not found yet. That point could be fifty miles, a sixty kilometer run or a hundred miler.

"Being comfortable with being uncomfortable," that almost could summarize Ultra Marathoners. When I reached mile nine or ten it began raining. I was thinking this isn't bad some mud and snow..... Then the hail started. Now I thought to myself holy crap, there were some runners that stopped to get their jackets; I decided to not get my jacket because it was wet from the rain and sweat. The only major discomfort I felt was the hail hitting my ears so I tucked my ears under my hat and kept running (jogging).

I will always remember this race because it was my first time running over twenty six miles. I remember in 2016 when I heard the music, laughter and cow bells of the Spud Patch Aid station, that strange feeling of happiness hit me in waves as I trotted down the hill. That same feeling from the 2016 race hit

me again. The volunteers were and are awesome; the sun actually flooded the valley just as I arrived. Some of the volunteers jokingly said “We’ve been waiting for you, you brought the sun.” I grabbed some potatoes dipped in salt, refilled my fluids then I was off again.

After stopping at the aid station it is hard to get back in your rhythm. Especially when you hit the CDT, that first climb on the trail can knock you on your butt if you are not prepared for it. By now the weather was clearing up considering I was back at nine thousand feet above sea level.

I was keeping up with my nutrition pretty good, consuming forty milligrams of carbohydrates per hour. My water was holding out pretty good. Physically I could feel my legs wanting to cramp but I was able to adjust my fuel intake accordingly. This was the first race that I ran with my new Ultimate Direction vest and it worked great, no complaints.

Now to Rock Tank Shelter Aid Station, maybe a mile out from the Aid Station I could smell the Barb-q. Slowly I could hear people sounds from the Aid Station. The station was great, another big thanks to the volunteers, I was able to get my bag right away and sit down. After running sixteen miles and sitting for the first time is hard, I could have sat and ate and taken a nap. Quickly I stood up to prepare myself for the back half of the course. After adjusting my gear, making sure I checked out of the Aid Station and a quick potty break I was off again.

Running this part of the race gave me time to reflect on the next big challenge of running (ha, I met hiking) up three miles with two thousand feet of gain. I don’t really like eating on any ascents especially above nine thousand feet. So while on the CDT trail I made sure to fuel up and make sure I was physically okay. I laughed out loud when I saw the Willy Coyote sign, although I could not set the peak like I did last year. The Gooseberry Aid Station came quicker than I thought. The 193 was nice and easy, some mud but nothing to worry about. Reaching the Gooseberry Aid Station was well stocked with food and drinks. I had my water bottles refilled, took a few salt tablets for the 3.4 mile hike.

The Gooseberry Trail was great I think everyone loves the false summit that seems to go on and on. At this point on the trail is when I start to reflect on the training I did to prepare for this run. I would like to think that I did everything I could to prepare for this day but this is the point that I start to think otherwise. Doubt in my mind could determine whether or not I will complete the race. There have been points that I rationalized reasons to quit but I always try to switch gears and move on. Being new to the sport I have been training for this very instance. Long runs are much more than being physically able to complete a particular distance, there is the mental part of running that needs to be trained as well.

Fog, anyone who watches scary movies would have seen this part of the course as eerie. I thought the blanket of the fog was comforting in a way that made me focus on the task at hand. I arrived at the summit a little surprised because I thought there was more mountain to hike. I met the photographer and exchanged some friendly words. After catching my breath I started the descent down the peak.

Snow, if I have not mentioned it before; I have ran in snow, rain, wind/dust, cold and mud, but all of them at the same time, no. During the ascent it was windy and wet, during the descent it was snowy and wet I still haven’t decided which was better. I was being very careful not to lose my footing

completely, sliding however was inevitable. I did fall on my butt a few times which I guess was good because it cleaned off the mud from earlier in the race.

The Caldera Aid Station was great I had made it to mile twenty five. I would have to admit that last year I toyed with the idea to drop from the race at this point. This time I had trained enough to know that I would make it to the end. So I ate some salt, potato, avocado and pickles but not in that order. I remember that in 2016 the thousand foot climb out of the Caldera had almost finished me. This time I felt prepared. In 2016 I also remember that my feet hurt when I jogged down the jeep trail which made the six miles even worse. Now I was in good spirits and felt way better than in 2016.

At this point I should mention that throughout the course I made frequent stop to reflect on the beauty of what was around me. Stopping and admiring the aspen trees and thinking of an article I read about how the aspen trees are actually a colony and that the root is considered one large organism. When looking at the mountain itself, a volcano, a uranium mine and one of the four sacred mountains of my people I could only imagine what it would look like hundred if not thousands of years from now. During these times of reflection I am reminded how much beauty this world holds. It is easy to forget during the day to day grind but this is a huge reason why I run.

I figured that I better finish my food before the climb to the Caldera Aid Station. I had made the mistake of eating when climbing one and I will not do that again. Just before the ascent I saw a familiar face; it was Dennis the driver that gave me a ride. I began my climb up the mountain side, I was sure that Dennis would pass me. I like to think that I could be a competitive person but there is no one that I would like to beat more than that little voice inside my head. There were three people that passed me on this particular part of the trail. By this point I was on auto pilot thinking "one foot in front of the other," over and over.



Finishing the Caldera loop was great from this point there was just over two miles to go. I passed the aid station without stopping for I had enough water and was sure that I did not need any more food for the last leg of the trip. There is only one part of the last two miles that I was concerned about. I've heard people call it "Heartbreak Hill." It is a tough hill, pretty steep. Last year my knee gave out on me and I rolled down a small portion of it. Gingerly I trotted down the hill and am reminded on how the hill must have gotten its name. It is all downhill from here, in a good way.

During the last two miles I wondered if I could add twenty more miles..... I have this goal to be able to complete a hundred miler before I turn forty. Any time I mention this to people I get funny comments like "I don't even run a mile," "I don't even drive a hundred miles," or you are just plain "crazy." I'd like to think this is my mid-life crisis, you know some people buy a sports car, find a new career, or get divorces. For me this is a way to push myself physically and mentally. I want to know or feel every step of this journey. A hundred miles is a far, there will be a lot of time to think and plan before I can reach that distance.

I would like to thank Ken Gordon and Margaret Gordon and to all the volunteers that helped bring this race to life. This being my first Ultra Marathon will always have a special place in my heart.

Hágoónee'

See you on the trail,

Jason Yazzie

