

Nathaniel's Run 6/12/24-Hour Ultra Marathon 2007

By Kevin Patrick Allen

When I have stress, I turn to running. When I'm top of the world, I like to go for a run. When I'm having trouble getting to sleep, I think of a place I like to run. So when there was a need in my family, it just made sense that running would be the mechanism to help correct the problem. Running is one of my few, albeit it limited, talents. And so I use it to a number of different ends. As they say, "When all you've got is a hammer everything looks like a nail."

The family need regarded Nathaniel Allen who was born with cerebral palsy. He's my brother Mike's son. Our nephew. Mike is one of the most responsible, frugal individuals you'll ever meet. So when Mike mentioned to me over the phone one evening that the financial aspects of Nathaniel's condition were becoming difficult to handle (not to mention the emotional toll) I thought, "He could really use some help...Maybe we could do a run for Nathaniel."

That first year of Nathaniel's Run Ultra Marathon a group of maybe 30 of us circled Heritage Park Lake for 24-hours, earning money per mile via pledges that had been made by family, friends, and co-workers. Thanks to the direction of people like ultramarathon veteran Karl Keltner the event was a success and we raised more than four-thousand-dollars.

Which brings us to the 2007 race. The Kansas City Trail Nerds led by Ben Holmes agreed to lend their support and we moved the event off road to Shawnee Mission Park. We added six and twelve-hour categories, along with a relay. This year's run benefited the Flint Hills Therapeutic Center with only the pledges made to me personally going to Nathaniel. It was important that we help the families of other kids like Nathaniel.

With 6-year-old Nathaniel standing by at the start, we got underway at 6pm Friday, November 16th. The one-point-three mile loop ran along a tree-line by Theatre in the Park, down a slight incline, through a wooded area, past numerous deer, and back to the aid station by the parking lot. The temperature was perfect with high 30's overnight.

There were times that it seemed Paul Schoenlaub and Stuart Johnson were trying to out due each other. Surely the competitive fires don't burn for six hours straight. But, yes, they kept it up with getting in one more lap than Stuart to finish with 41.6 mile to Stuart's 40.3. They congratulated each other and went home to get some rest. We cursed them as they happily walked away.

When 6am neared John King was flying. Determined to get in 60 miles before the clock ticked off the final minute for the 12-hour runners, he came in just below his goal: Finishing with 59.8 miles to Scott Hill's 58.5.

The weather turned unseasonably warm as volunteers offered up pancakes and coffee to the solo and relay runners still traversing the course. Husband and wife Matthew and Ann Watts have traveled from Denver for the event. A lingering injury forced Matthew to call it a day but he kept smiling as he encouraged Ann who led the soloists through most of the event. But one of the most motivational stories would be that of Mark Stovall. Stovall had struggled with thoughts of throwing in the towel due to exhaustion around the 12-hour mark but he kept on. And his "second wind" continued to blow him around the course lap after lap after lap. Steady and strong. Convinced going in that he would have the lowest accumulation of miles, Stovall finished with 91! Good for first place, ahead of Ann and some goofball in racing flats who thought he didn't need to train on the trails...or train much at all for that matter...to do well. What was that guy's name?

The Second Annual Nathaniel's Run Ultramarathon proved again that the running community (and the TRAIL running community in particular) is strong and caring. Some monies are still coming in, but suffice it to say, Nathaniel and his family and the Flint Hills Therapeutic Center are grateful.

We'll be back in '08, for the Third Annual Nathaniel's Run Ultra Marathon.