



Special Edition Funny Running Stories



news from the Tallman Track Club



"Where the road goes on forever and the party never ends."

Volume 1, Issue 5

-- Robert Earl Keen

Summer 2006

The 'Ultra'-Mate Experience

Ron Plantz's version

That's what friends are for?

By Ron Plantz

Shawn Chillag is not my real friend; real friends come to your aid regardless of circumstances.

Shawn and I were into "ultras" in the late '90s. I've never understood exactly how it happened. We were two of many who Dave Fields roped into it. He convinced several that ultras are the "man's race." Even Cousin Fred fell under Dave and Billy Chandler's spell and believed promises of what a grandiose experience they were. "Complete an ultra and you'll laugh at the pansies who run marathons," I believe is what they claimed. "You'll find God out there somewhere around the 45-mile mark."

We started with baby ultras — the 50-mile variety. We traveled to some place in central Kentucky, Frankfort maybe, and started a race that ended in the outskirts of Louisville. The race organizers had set up a wonderful buffet the night before the race. I should point out that "race" may not be the way everyone describes an ultra. Cousin

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Ron Plantz

Shawn Chillag's version

You're on your own buddy

By Shawn Chillag

It all started with Dave Fields (and under the influence of the once weekly South Carolina tradition of an appropriately prepared martini or two).

Dave was a veteran ultra runner who had participated in the Wheeling to Charleston 176-mile trek. Dave had already lured in Billy Chandler, who was a young, speedy Clendenindite. No one should do ultras until they have lost footspeed, or they never had it in the first place. Ron Plantz and I started at about age 42, long after we lost the footspeed we never had in the first place.

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Shawn Chillag

Editor's Note: Ask and ye shall provide. Our request for funny running stories from Tallman Track Club members produced some gems. Above are Ron Plantz and Shawn Chillag's accounts of a very humorous "ultra" experience. Inside you also will find funny stories described by runners W.K. Munsey, Winston Gregory and Rob McCracken.

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Fred maintains this is not a race. Fred says, “This is not a race. It is an event for a bunch of weirdos looking for an excuse to get away from their wives for a couple days. And they don’t like to golf or fish. And they are too ugly to be having an affair.”

But the buffet was nice. Shawn and I met Dave and Billy and a few other Elk River types they called their support team. They forgot to tell Shawn and me to bring a support team. Dave knew everyone there. He pointed out this one guy who ranked very high in the ultra fraternity. He had been featured in a recent issue of the “Ultra.” These guys even have their own magazine. I can’t remember his name, but I’ll refer to him as the Cookie Monster for reasons I’ll explain later.

Dave and Billy thought it was time to share their race strategy with a couple rookies. Dave had trained Billy well, and they shared the same approach to the race. Go out steady and at about 35 miles “drop the hammer.” Shawn and I were a little skeptical. We developed our own strategy. Go

out slow for 20, run the next 20 slower and survive the really slow final 10. And most importantly, since no one told us to bring a support team, stay side by side and be each other’s support.

Race morning arrived, and we moved to the starting line. Well, there really wasn’t a starting line. There was just this area in the parking lot of the host hotel where everyone gathered to wait for the starting gun. I can’t remember all the faces. I’m not even sure how many people started.

It was 5 a.m. and still quite dark, but not so dark that I lost sight of Shawn. We were a team; we would start and finish this thing together.

We waited for the gun to fire. There was no gun. At some time after 5 a.m., this guy simply yells, “Take off.” I wasn’t sure what that meant, but we did notice everyone left the area, so we left with them. I wasn’t sure where Dave and Billy were. But with Shawn and I not fully understanding the start command, I knew they were somewhere in front of us.

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Plantz and I came under the spell of the Clendenin guru of ultra and decided we would try the Kentucky 50. Leonard Hager, the model of sanity, had already sworn off ultras having run the Kentucky 50 when it went from Louisville to Lexington. Common sense prevailed (common sense and ultras?) and the 1990 race was not on a major thoroughfare but on country roads about Louisville in December with cows, angry dogs and train tracks (there the trouble began). I remember that Billy, Dave, Ron and I stayed at the host hotel with a lot of crushed velvet, bad food and feeling it was better suited to hosting a bowling tournament than a footrace.

The race started early and it was bloody cold — think running 50 miles in long pants and double layer on top. We took off at a leisurely pace and all went well for 12 or 15 miles with the Charleston contingent grouped except for the young and foolish Chandler who was off to win a trophy. My peristaltic colon contractions have always been faster than my feet (I can tell you every pit stop in Kanawha County intended and un) so I had to peel off. Unfortunately, the convenience stop was the start side of railroad tracks. As I was lightening my load, a train came and stopped across

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news from the **Tallman Track Club**

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We actually enjoyed the first 10 miles — nothing too tough about an 8:00 pace on level Kentucky terrain with no one in front of you to chase and no one behind you applying pressure. So the plan to stay together made sense and afforded us some opportunity to enjoy each others company and the countryside. But then something kind of ugly happened and it placed our pre-race strategy at risk. Shawn felt the call. We had cornfields all around us. Shawn peeled off to the right of the road and dropped his drawers.

I told Shawn I'd drop to a 9:00 minute pace and wait for him. I knew he'd do the same for me. I heard a train whistle, and I saw a train. I looked back at Shawn crouched in the cornfield. Then a very ugly dilemma presented itself. If I wait on Shawn, we'd both be caught by the train. We'd both lose precious time to those who understood the start command thing, and we'd both be out of the running for the prize money that went three deep. Not a real dilemma, though. I knew what Shawn would do in the same situation. So I sprinted to the tracks

“I felt a little bad about leaving my friend in the cornfield — but not real bad.”

Ron Plantz

and passed just in front of a slow moving train. Now my only dilemma would be how much of the prize money would I share with Shawn.

I wondered about Dave and Billy as I ran the next 20 miles alone. I felt a little bad about leaving my friend in the cornfield — but not real bad. I mostly wondered about Dave and Billy since they were in front of me. At about 30 miles, I caught Dave. I ran with him for a few miles, but as talkative as Dave is most of the time, I found that at 30 miles into a race he gets a little cranky. He told me I was bothering him and to go on ahead to catch Billy. It hurt my feelings, but then I knew I needed to keep Shawn behind me and I wanted to see Billy “drop the hammer” at 35 miles.

I didn't get to see Billy drop the hammer at 35 miles, but I did see what dropping the hammer at 35 miles can do to you. At 40, I looked up and saw him. I swear it looked like he was walking. He was walking. We all know Billy doesn't say much. He didn't say a word when I went by him, didn't even ask me about my friend Shawn. I wanted to ask him about his support team. Ultra organizers don't waste much money on water stops.

The support team finally made an appearance (funny how it deserted Dave and Billy and moved on to a competitor with a better

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the course when I was ready to commence. I had choices — wait, roll under the stopped train or run around the back end. Of course, Plantz wouldn't have waited on the other side. I chose the latter, estimating that they now had at least a mile advantage. I resolved to run aggressively but under control and see what developed. We were just there for the accomplishment of finishing. Unless there was the opportunity to crush or humiliate a friend or other runner.

I was alone for another 30 miles or so passing a few and taking more pit stops (runners in South Carolina use this term in deference to God Almighty — NASCAR). At about 47 miles, I came upon Plantz at a near walk and another guy ralphing what looked like canned fruit cocktail. Who would eat something like that during a footrace that was that big coming back up? I moved easily past them with no idea how we were doing but happy that this is almost over. The fruit cocktail guy asks Ron if I am on a relay or solo. Ron tells him that I am solo. As I passed this guy, I hear his wife, who has been his crew, tell him that he is starting to look better after this last of several ralphs. I am running for all I am worth, which is not much, and the fruit cocktail guy passes me. We duke it out for what seems like

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chance at placing.) The support crew told me I was running fourth — one spot out of the money. I felt too ashamed to ask about Shawn. Not to worry though, the support team was getting into it and told me not to worry, Shawn was two miles behind me with seven to go. They did tell me Shawn wanted to know where I was and he seemed a bit angry.

With five to go, they suggested I pick it up a bit because Shawn had caught sight of me, and it seemed to have inspired him. They also reported I was gaining on last year's national champion. With a couple of miles to go, I heard Shawn. I know we all have a lot of respect for Dr. Chillag, so I know there is no use telling you what he was screaming at me. You would not believe it any way.

He caught me and did not say a word. I knew if I had any chance at the prize money and beating last year's national champ I'd have to hold on to Shawn. Then we saw him — bent over and puking his guts out.

His favorite race food was cookies, and his wife had brought plenty. Shawn and I went by him, and the support team reminded us both we were racing for third.

With three to go, we were racing for fourth. The Cookie Monster had made a miraculous recovery. With two to go, we were racing for third again when he stopped to puke more cookies. But with a mile to go we found out how this guy could win a national title. The Cookie Monster had found another gear. And at the same time I discovered a competitive nature in my friend Shawn that I had not noticed before. He went after him.

I stopped getting reports from members of the support team. They had moved on to Shawn now. To tell you the truth, I'm not sure who took the prize money, but I believe it was Shawn.

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forever (probably 200 yards), and he pulls away.

I am out of the money, and I believe Plantz finishes right behind me. I don't believe Fields and Chandler finish or it was really ugly. The field is strung out over a huge distance.

Plantz and I are in a rush to get back, so we shower in this huge locker room with a concrete floor. It kills bare feet after 50 miles. I get out of the shower first and am partly dressed. Plantz finishes showering, comes out naked and locks up in the shape of an exaggerated question mark. He asks me for assistance because of the cramps. I think about the implication of me assisting him and decide that he is on his own -- not that there is



Now to tell you how I came to learn Shawn wasn't a better friend to me than I was to him. We finished at a school of some sort and went to the shower room. There was a half dozen or so runners showering and all of us were moving slow and stiff — lots of moaning and groaning. Then the strangest thing happened. I was walking from the shower to the bench Shawn and I shared and I dropped my towel. As I reached over to pick it up, my body froze up. I could not straighten up or take a step in any direction.

The longer I stood there, bent over at the waist, the more locked up I became. I looked at Shawn, and he looked at me kind of pitiful like. I said, "Shawn, I can't move. I need you to come lead me to the bench." You know, after all, Shawn is a doctor and surely he'd help someone in this predicament, especially a friend. Shawn Chillag was not my real friend.

anything wrong with that.

We have an uneventful trip back to Charleston. I've learned my lesson, and vow never to do another ultra. I am a man of my word, so I've renewed this vow after each of the four ultras I've done since. Plantz proudly wears the Kentucky Cherokee Road Runners 50 mile bright red lined windbreaker a few times (I still have mine).

He's in a convenience store after filling up one of those gas guzzling cars he favored and a local asks him what kind of car he has. What do you mean? What kind of race car? The 50 miler? He tells him that it was a footrace not a car race.

That's full of Christmas jeer -- not Christmas cheer!

By W.K. Munsey

I'm not sure what year, but I do know it was the Winter Series 5 miler in December.

Shawn Chillag showed up at the race dressed as Santa Claus. He started at the very back of the race when the gun went off. This was back when more than 100 people still participated in a race, despite the fact it was winter.

Shawn worked his way through the crowd and gave a candy cane to everyone he passed and wished them a Merry Christmas. Shawn is weird, and this action was not unusual from a man who has run the Distance Run dressed as Elvis, Superman,



W.K. Munsey

Spiderman, Jack Whittaker and even Monica Lewinsky (Ron Plantz was Bill Clinton that year, but that's a whole different story). I swear, you can check the pictures on the Tallman Track Club site.

Anyway, he worked his way through the crowd spreading good cheer as he went. When he came upon the West Virginia racing legend Carl Hatfield and tried to hand him a candy cane, Carl looked at him and said, "F---k you Santa Claus!" Rumor has it that Carl got coal in his stocking that year.

That's my story and I'm stickin' to it.

The strangest things I've run into while on the run

By Winston Gregory

During the past 25 years more than 700 races, I have had a few things happen at races — maybe not funny, but strange. Below are a few of them.

At a two-mile race in Teays Valley sponsored by a local church back in the mid-80s, the race director asked that we line up in single file at the starting line according to our predicted finishing times. Then each runner was given a finishing stick to carry during the race and it was to be placed on the ground at the finish line in order. Last time for that race.

In the early '80s, there was a 10-K race in Eleanor. The night before the race they marked the course with lime. That night it rained, and no one checked the course that morning. Within the first mile, everyone knew we were lost. After everyone came in, the race director asked who we thought would have won the race. He awarded them with trophies, packed up his car and left.

Members of one of the fraternities at Marshall put on a 5-K race in the early '80s. It was their first and last time. For bibs, they wrote numbers on a sheet of paper from a spiral notebook and gave us straight pins to use. We ended up carrying our bib number. At the end of the race, they announced the winners, but had no awards.



Winston Gregory

Finally, a Barboursville 5-k in the early '90s produced some interesting results. The course was marked wrong, and people were finishing from all directions. After everyone was in, the race director told us that he would go check the course, and we could run it again in about 15 minutes. No one ran!

Hail to the Victors - at 6 a.m.!

By Rob McCracken

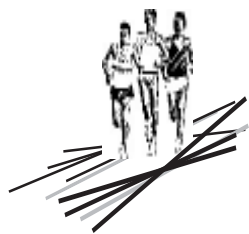
When one is out pounding the pavement in the wee hours of the morning like I normally do, not a whole lot goes on.

But last summer I was running on the road in back of Kmart and Kroger in St. Albans when I noticed a pickup truck coming up very slowly behind me. Just as I started to get very nervous, all of the sudden a blast of music came out loudly from the truck. It was the University of Michigan fight song, "Hail to the Victors," I think it's called.

The truck and the serenade followed me for about one verse of the song, and then the vehicle pulled around me and took off ahead of me. I will have to admit, being serenaded by the University of Michigan marching band at 6 a.m. in the morning is a little bit strange. I waved thanks to them, but didn't have the nerve to tell them that I'm a Buckeye fan.



Rob McCracken



Upcoming Races

Charleston Area Runs

8:30 a.m./ Saturday, June 17, Run for Your Life 5 Miler, Haddad Riverfront Park, Charleston. Contact: Charles Shumaker, 304-348-1240, cshumaker@wvgazette.com

7 p.m., Friday, June 30, Independence Day Celebration 5-K Race, Two Mile Walk, Haddad Riverfront Park, Charleston. Contact: Rachel Pett, 1-304-348-8008, Rachel.pett@cityofcharleston.org.

8 a.m., Saturday, July 1, St. Albans Riverfest 5-K, 1 Mile Walk, St. Albans Loop. Contact: Patrick Quinlan, 304-727-5944, pquinlan@wvadmin.gov

8 a.m., Saturday, July 8, Putnam County Fair 10-K Run and 3 Mile Walk, Roger or Jean Arthur, 304-586-3245, rarthur@liquidtransport.com

6:30 a.m., Saturday, July 8, Rattlesnake Trail 50K Ultra Run, Kanawha State Forest Pool. Dennis Hamrick, 304-344-8342, itsmadr3@netzero.net

8 a.m., Saturday, July 15, Great Teays 5-K, Hurricane Valley Park Wave Pool. Contact: Winston Gregory, 304-757-2967, cocacolawhg@aol.com

8 a.m., Saturday, Aug. 12, Thomas Memorial Hospital 5-K, St. Albans Loop.

Saturday, Aug. 26, Diamond Electric 5-K Run, 5-K Walk, Eleanor Library, behind Eleanor Park. Contact: Marilyn Hall, 304-586-0070, Extension 267, de5K@diaelec.com

Other Races of Interest

Saturday, June 17, Highlands Sky 40 Mile Trail Run, Davis, Canaan Valley State Park, Contact: Dan Lehmann, 304-924-5835, irun@starband.net

9 a.m. Saturday, June 17, Hometown Subaru Mountain Heritage Festival 5-K, Ansted, fire station. Contact: Larry Taylor, 304-574-3378, oldbuzzard01@yahoo.com

8:30 a.m., Saturday, June 17, Greater Clarksburg 10-K, Two Mile Run, Clarksburg. Contact: (304) 624-4100, 10krun@greaterclarksburg10K.org

8 a.m., Saturday, June 24, Bobby Hampton Race for a Cure, 5-K, 11 Mile Run, 5-K Walk, Kid's Race, Scott High School Track, Madison. Contact: Mary Johnson, 304-545-5137, maryjohnson@aol.com

8 a.m., Saturday, July 1, New River Gorge Festival 5-K Run, 5-K Walk, Memorial Building, Maple Avenue, Fayetteville. Contact: Jenni Homan Fenton, 304-574-3477, insure@netphase.com

8 a.m., Saturday, July 1, Summer Motion 10-K, Ashland, Ky. Contact: Amy Skaggs, 1-606-324-3032, aswskaggs@aol.com

8 a.m., Saturday, Aug. 19, Parkersburg News and Sentinel Half Marathon and Two Mile Run, Parkersburg, Contact: Morgan Stanley, 304-485-1891, halfmarathon@newsandsentinel.com

Club Runs

- Tallman Track Club runs begin weekdays at 5 p.m. Meet at the University of Charleston parking lot across from the Pharmacy Building construction.

<http://www.tallmantrackclub.com>