

Daytona 100 Race Report 2016 (3rd 100 Miler – first U.S)

Friday 9th December -

After spending 3 days in Orlando, we drove up the coast on the Friday, the day before the race to our new base in Jacksonville. It would be a 2 hours and 45 minute journey up the Interstate and thankfully with no dramas after our tyre blow out earlier in the week. We checked into the race HQ Hotel One Ocean Resort located right on the beach which made it a fantastic location to be able to chill out in and get some fantastic views of the long sandy beach stretching down the coast.

After dropping into Al's Pizza Parlour in Jacksonville for some Carbo loading before making our way to way race registration, where we bumped into a number of major Ultra marathon R.D's – Chris Kostman (Badwater), Bob Becker (Keys 100 Miler) and Dave & Alex Krupski our race R.D's.

Charlie Engle was also at the registration where he was signing copies of his new book "The Running Man" and I took the opportunity for a quick photo for the collection and also purchased a copy of his autobiography.

At 5pm all of the runners and crews were sat in the hotels Conference room ready for the race briefing but some sound issues meant a delay to the start so at this stage Chris Kostman took to the stage to warm up the crowd. It was then time for Dave Krupski to take the stage and play the pre-race video which started with the Top Gun theme music which made the hairs stand up on end. After watching the motivational video Dave took us through the course details and took questions from the runners.

An early night as it was going to be a 4am alarm call and also a long 2 days ahead of me.

Saturday 10th December –

A restless night's sleep with some very strange dreams but now it was time to get up. Normally waking up for marathons I don't tend to think too much about the race ahead but 100 Milers are a different ball game and I was thinking about the day ahead of me. This would be my first solo unsupported 100 Mile race and I was about to go into the unknown. I had planned my drop bags the day before and dropped them in at the race registration the evening before, these would be my lifeline with all of my key requirements in them. I would later find out just how important they would be in the race when one of them went missing (more about that later in the write up).

I had everything laid out ready to put on and after my usual feet taping and putting on my ultra-vest I was ready to go downstairs as the race would be starting right outside the front door. As I entered the hotel foyer other runners and crews were already there and I could sense the nervous energy. I chose to find a quiet corner and do a facebook live video. After some usual shout outs and some useless nervous drivel it was time to venture outside to get my first idea of the morning weather conditions. The first thing that was apparent was the strength of the wind but thankfully not was not cold. Outside I bumped into David Ross and he introduced me to Peter Johnson & Ken Fancett both 100 miler veterans from the UK. After a quick picture together taken by Caroline we were called to the start line ready for our 6am off. I decided to push myself two thirds away back and not get caught up with the fast boys and girls. There were about 120 starters for the 100 Miler and it looked as though everybody was dressed for snow and arctic conditions and there was good old me in my

shorts and sleeveless tee-shirt with just my arm warmers for extra comfort from the early morning chill.

Mile 1 – 16 –

After a rendition of the U.S national anthem we were off..... The course would be a half mile out and back through the dark streets of Jacksonville before passing back passed the start line and then off down the coast for 99 miles towards Daytona beach. The early miles seem to fly by with a tail wind and perfect weather conditions (well for me at least). I attempted to keep the pace down but this seem to be more difficult as I started to pass runner after runner.

As Sun started to come up over the horizon it was clear to me that it was going to be a beautiful day. I ran alongside a female runner and after a quick good morning we naturally started to chat as the miles slipped away. I introduced myself and the young lady runner introduced herself to me as Tara from Pennsylvania but was now living in Florida. Tara talked about this being her second 100 miler as she was coming back from a previous attempt in the 2015 Daytona where the weather had been very hot and humid and she had had to pull out at the 70 mile stage and was now back to finish the job. It was very clear that this year we were very lucky with the weather and temperatures were never going to get to that level, thank god.....

As we entered mile 6 through Ponte Vedra the houses on the beach were huge and were surrounded by a beautiful scenic golf course. At mile 13 Tara stopped to speak to her crew so I decided to run on and now I was back on my own. We turned left on onto the A1a Interstate and it was clear that this road was going to be very straight, for a very long way. The race had now really stretched out and I could only see 1 other runner approx. 400 yards in front of me. Even though this was a major interstate road traffic on this early Saturday morning was fairly light. At this stage there were no snakes or alligators (pretty boring eh Ellen Cotton). Mile 16 the first Aid station and my first check in. I had my empty plastic bag which I filled up with food goodies including peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. I set off pretty quick from aid station 1 walking down the interstate eating my food. My legs were feeling pretty good and I was loving the whole U.S Mile experience.

Mile 17 – 33 –

As I set off up the A1a interstate I could see Tara back in front of me so I started to slowly run and soon caught up with her again where the conversation carried on. It was not long before we got to the 2nd check point where Badwater R.D Chris Kostman was heading up the Aid station. It was at this stage that we were about to enter the first stage of 3 beach sections. The original 13 mile of beach in this section had had to be reduce to just 5 miles as the recent hurricane Matthew had washed away much of the beach and the sand that had replaced this was too soft to run on. I have to say that I was as nervous about this section but I had nothing to worry about. As we got onto the beach the wind was strong and in our backs (just like being back in Kent doing an SVN event) lol. This was the first timing mat and would be the first chance for Caroline to get an idea of my progress.

The sand was firm and it was a joy to run on. The Sun was pretty high in the sky the Atlantic Ocean was incredible, what a place to be running – this was by far my favourite part of the race on reflection. Our pace as we ran along the beach was probably too fast but we were both feeling good and the miles were flying by. I took some time out to take some video and take some pictures of the beach as I knew that I wanted to have some great memories on my return to the U.K. As we ran along this section of the beach it was clear that hurricane Michael had created huge devastation and there were buildings with the fronts ripped off and unliveable. It was a real wakeup call just how mother-nature is in charge of the planet. 5 miles later we exited the beach and was greeted by Tara

crew. I realised at this point that the sun cream that I put on at the start of the race was now wearing off so I asked the other crews if anybody had any sunblock and a very nice lady suddenly popped up and began spraying with sunblock spray, this showed just how supportive the other crews were especially to unsupported runners in the race.

At Marathon distance we went through in a comfortable 4 hours 15 mins and I was happy with my progress in my 3rd 100 miler and first in the U.S.

At 30 miles we ran over the large Velano Bridge which was the gateway to St Augustine a picturesque town which we knew would be pretty busy with people and tourists. As I came into the 32 mile check point I knew that my first drop bag would be here and it would give me a change my socks after the beach section and grab 2 bottles of fatty Coke. As I entered the Aid station I asked the team where the drop bags and at this point I got a confused look from the guys and it was clear that my bag was not here. This was my first of very few low moments in the race. At this stage I felt angry as I wanted to change my socks and would not be able to. At this point my negative mind took over and suddenly this was the end of the world as I thought this would jeopardise my feet for later in the race. I filled my water bottles and grabbed some food and exited the Aid station in a foul mood.

Mile 32 – 41 –

This section of the race is a bit of a blur but what I do know was it was a section that I just wanted to be over. The Sun was now higher in the sky and day temperatures were starting to rise. At Mile 38 I decided to stop at a fuel station and purchase an ice lolly and a cold drink. My mood now lifted as I realised that no change of socks at mile 32 was not the end of the world and my feet were not in a bad place. There seemed to be more runners around me and we were jostling for positions.

Mile 42 – 52 – Half Way Aid Station –

This is the stage of the 100 miler where I shaped my race overall and as I was feeling good I started to push the pace (this was a big mistake and was to change the overall outcome of my race). The route at this stage continue to have long straight sections where I wouldn't see any other runner and there were many times where I hoped that I was still on the right course. At mile 48 we reached the Marine land Flagler County. There were a series of bridges that we went over with the ocean on both side and the scenery was stunning. As I hit the 50 mile mark I clocked an 8 hour 44 mins which in hindsight was far too fast but I was feeling great and was going with the flow. As I went over the 52 mile mat the clock registered 9 hours 7 mins and I had completed the first half feeling pretty strong.

Mile 52 Aid Station –

Thankfully my key drop bag was at this aid Station and this I knew would be an important one as I would be changing into my night gear and dry warm top. I decided to get myself changed first to keep myself warm as the daytime sun was now going down and my shirt was soaked with sweat. I knew it was crucial to get this Aid station process 100% right and in my head I had planned it through so as not to waste too much time. After changing I sorted out my Ultra vest and filled it with my head torches and night gear, it was starting to feel heavy and one of the disadvantages of not having a crew to support. I ate 2 pots of jelly and some Pretzels and filled my soft bottles with Coke and my hand bottle with ice water. I knew I wanted to be out the aid station by 3.30pm (9 hrs 30 mins) and the aid station team were now starting to push me out of the aid station as I think they thought I was dawdling but to me I was doing and thinking everything on my own and if I got this

wrong my night section would not be fun. After 23 mins of sorting and eating I stood up and to my horror my legs felt really sore and my I.T Bands were screaming. My routine had gone well but I felt I needed more time but there was always a danger of staying for good. Bob Becker (Race R.D for Keys 100 miler and his team were doing a good job and had provided some nice food to eat.

Mile 53 – 61 –

As I limped out of the Aid Station my legs were just not responding and this was now my second low point of the race. I attempted to run and it felt as though knives were being stabbed into my quads. At this stage of the race I thought I had bugged up the second half and I feared that I would need to walk the last 48 miles!!

At 54 miles my watch battery ran out so I was now relying on my other watch which just had time of day on it and now I was guessing what mileage I would be at. I decided to get my legs going I would run for 5 mins and then walk quickly a minute and attempt to do this until the next Aid station but sadly my legs were too sore and it became run as long as possible and then walk quickly until I mustered up enough energy to run again. The next 9 miles seem to take for ever and the minutes ticked away as I looked for the next Aid station at Varn Park. As I entered Aid station 6 I felt low my legs were burning and one of my Salomon water bottles was now leaking and had already meant that my night top was damp. It is amazing how little things can change your mental state in a 100 miler.

At the Aid station the young lady who looked after me did a fantastic job and got me some noodle soup which tasted awesome and put me in a better place mentally. Race rules meant that we were expected to have lights on the front and the back so I had 2 red flashing lights attached to the back of my Ultra vest which made me flash like a Christmas tree. My head torch was set at semi beam as I knew I could not afford for it to run out even though I was carrying a spare. In my head I didn't want the pressure of having to use it (I am not sure why though). I knew now that I would be 1 bottle down so this left me with one soft bottle in my vest and a hand bottle. I was getting concerned as I thought I might run out of drink as the next aid station was 9 miles away and I had been drinking quite heavily during the race (although hadn't been able to pee which concerned me a little). The last 9 miles had seem to take ages to complete and I knew the next 9 were likely to take longer. I wasn't sure whether there would be any shop or gas stations along the next section so as I headed out into the dark night along the freeway. There were mini cooler boxes every 10 miles between the main Aid stations but I had missed some of these in the first 50 miles and wasn't sure during the night section that I would find them and was scared of being out of fluid (this was me worrying needlessly).

Mile 62 -71 -

Thankfully these 9 miles seem to go by more quickly as my legs seem to be loosening up. The initial rain clouds seem to disperse and the sky was now clear and the moon was shining brightly down on us. I had seem very few runners in the previous 9 miles and I really needed to be able to buddy up but sadly the next 9 miles this was not going to happen. This stretch took us through Flagler beach a built up community along the coast with bars, restaurants and residential. At this stretch I passed a 7-11 convenience store but decided not to go in it (BIG Mistake) as the next store was some miles further down the coast and the shop had a sign in the window – back In 5 minutes !! I moved on and then realised that I had missed my chance to get some food and drink. I was screaming out for an ice coffee and knew I would have to get to the next Aid station.

About 20 minutes prior to the next aid station we moved into a dark quiet section of the route but the sound of the ocean and the bright moon shining down was very spiritual and it was at this time I realised just how lucky I was to be here in Florida attempting my first U.S 100 mile race. As I approached the 70 mile checkpoint this would be the 3rd timing mat and would give Caroline who was waiting back in Jacksonville an idea of where I was and what progress I had made. I went over the 71 mile timing mat in 13 hours 15 mins it had taken me 4 hours to do just under 20 miles and this felt slow!!

I sat down at the Aid station and the chair felt great and I wasn't sure if I would be able to get out of it! I ate some solid food and had 2 cups of warm soup and some sandwiches and crisps. I filled up my plastic bag with bananas and oranges as I knew these would be easy to digest this late in the race.

Thankfully I now need to pee which gave me some satisfaction that my hydration during the race was working.

Sunday 11th December

Mile 71 – Mile 81 –

After exiting the aid station I quite quickly caught up with another runner and his pacer so I thought I would jog along with them for some company but he was struggling and wanted to walk so I decided to push on hoping to catch another runner. About 5 miles further down the street I hit an Oasis – A gas station with a shop. As I hobbled into the store, I headed over to the fridge to get a bottle of ice Coffee and a can of Sprite and a chocolate Snickers bar. The guy on the other side of the counter looked me up and down and smiled and then said where you off to? I told him “Daytona beach” and he replied “gee that’s 30 miles away, where did you start from”? I replied “Jacksonville at 6am this morning”, he stopped what he was doing and in a strong American accent said “Your kidding me” I laughed at him and said “Nope Daytona beach is the Finish line” and with that I bided him a good evening and walked out into the fresh night time.

As I walked across the fore court I saw Tara crew waiting for her so I asked if I could sit on the back of their 4x4 and drink my ice coffee and eat my snickers bar. Both guys were pretty chatty and asked me if there was anything that they could do for me. I said no I was fine although I said my shin felt sore, I had had some painkillers but they didn't seem to be working. I didn't want to take any more so close to the last set that I had taken so I decline when they offered me some more painkillers.

I was amazed just how quickly I was getting cold sitting down here as on the move I had found that I had kept my core temperature and hadn't needed my arm warmers up and was still sweating even this stage of the race. As I was about to get up and leave the shop attendant that I had spoken to earlier came out the entrance with my water wattle in his hand and waved it in my direction, like an idiot I had left it on the counter, school boy error!.

The next few miles seem to drag on as I knew I was near to the next aid station as I entered the outskirts of Daytona Beach. I passed one more runner at about 80 miles and then found the next Aid station in the parking lot right across TGI Fridays. The shin was now painful and I was starting to feel sick and this was probably the 3rd low point of my race. I sat there thinking about the fact that I had broken the back of this race solo and I just had 19 miles to go, surely I had this cracked. I remember looking at my watch thinking and trying to work out what my finish time was likely to be but my brain felt too frazzled at this point so I just decided that I need to complete Goal A and finish this thing and not worry about my finish time or whether I would break 24 hours.

Mile 81 to 93 –

I knew that this was going to be an interesting section of the race as we were about to run straight through the bustling area of Daytona Beach where all of the bars and nightclubs were. I expected to get some abuse from the weekend party goers and that is just what happened.

I crossed the 6 lane road and then was told to stay on the path for the next 8 miles until I got to the beach turn. My legs again felt trashed and very sore and I was in pain with the shin although I found a running style that made it more comfortable but I found I needed to walk more often although I was aware that my walking pace had been strong during the race (something that I had worked on since my last two 100 milers).

As I shuffled into the main bar areas there were lots of drunk young people staggering around and shouting and asking me to come into a bar for a drink. I just kept my head down and kept moving forward. I knew that the beach turning would take us onto the 2nd of three beach sections and this one would be approx. 4 miles hopefully of firm sand.

The road seemed endless and it was now that I fancied some Pizza so I stopped at slice bar for some Pizza and Coke, the girl behind the counter looked me up and down and laughed at my head torch and asked me if I was a miner? I told her what I was doing and her mouth fell open, I won't repeat what she said next but there were quite a lot of swear words used!! She was suitably impressed and called the manager over and explained what I was doing. The guy shook my hand and said have the Pizza and Coke on the house. I thanked him and set off again down the endless street which seemed to be getting quieter so I was obviously moving away from the main central area. I rolled my pizza slice into a burrito and munched on it as I walked down the street with my coke in the other hand and my hand bottle tucked under my arm. The Pizza tasted good and it was at this point that I wished I had got 2 slices.

About a mile from the turning onto the beach I saw Tara's crew again and they informed me that she was close behind and was running well. They asked me if I was ok and I gave them a thumbs up and then shuffled on down the street. Suddenly in front of me another runner and their crew, I slowly passed them with a thumbs up. Minutes later Tara came passed looking strong followed by another female runner and they were soon out of sight. Then another guy appeared and we shuffled along together until we came to the beach turn.

At the beach point there was a mini aid station so I topped up my hand bottle with water and ran onto the beach section, the wind was now fully in our faces although the tide was out which meant there was plenty of firmish sand to run on. I was finding running on the beach tough and the calves were really starting to scream, in front of me I would see the lights of the 2 girls who were now half a mile ahead of me. I felt like I was going backwards but I kept telling myself to keep moving forward and get this beach section done.

After what seemed to be an age we ran under the pier which I went back to see on the Tuesday after the race in the day light to see what the scenery really looked like. The exit to the beach suddenly appeared and within 100 yards we were at the last official Aid station. I felt sick and my shin was really hurting now. After reviewing it looked and felt swollen but I just needed to put this to the back of my mind and get on with it, at this point I needed to have a good talking to myself as I was feeling negative and defeated even though I had less than 7 miles to go.

I sat in the aid station and had some more soup but struggled to stomach it. I decided that I needed to get going as I wanted this race done. I stood up and shuffled out down the street. My legs just didn't want to run and I was forced to walk quickly. I was getting frustrated now and I wanted to finish strongly but the pain in the shin was beating me and I was just happy to be moving forward at this point. At this point we were entered Poncet Inlet and in daylight was very scenic although at 2am in the morning was quiet and dark with just the street lights and the water sprinklers to keep me company. The course now became a bit more-twisty and I had to pay close attention to the signs as I did not want to find myself wondering around lost at this crazy hour of the morning. Suddenly I could see the Poncet light house beaming out its light across the Atlantic Ocean and I knew that the final 2 mile beach section of the course was near. Finally I saw the beach entrance and I looked my watch, could I break 21 hours? It would be close and I would need to get my arse into gear and run the final 2 miles of this 100 miler.

As I entered the beach the strong wind now in my back and the ocean was right there, the sand though felt soft at this point. I could see a red light in the distance and I guessed that this must be the lights of the Finish line. I started to run as hard as I could muster I felt relieved that I had made it solo and I was pleased that there had not been any major points where I had lost it. The more I ran the more I focused on the red light but it felt like it was getting further away, was I imagining this or was I wrong about the Finish line. It was now 2.45am it was me, the beach, the sea and nobody else to guide me in. I looked at my watch I now had less than 8 minutes to get to the finish to break 21 hours. My breathing was fast my legs were screaming but I knew I just needed to finish this last quarter of a mile. Finally the Finish Line was in clear site I could hear the music at the finish and I could see the last of the timing mats. I approached the Finish Line I could hear voices cheering out and then it was done! I glanced at my watch and it said 2.57am I had broken 21 hours and I had achieved a 28 minute P.B over 100 miles. Alex put my medal around my neck and gave me my shiny gold looking buckle. I held my knees for a second I was spent...completely done, a quick photo at the finish and then head for that chair for a well earned sit it down.

The Finish & Soaking up the feelings -

The next 30 mins I slowly got changed into my dry clothes, thankfully my final drop bag was waiting for me at the finish line. I was feeling really sick and started to feel very cold. David Krupski said that he would take me back to the Aid station 9 where I could get some food and stay warm. As I gingerly walked off the beach to David's car, I knew I was going to be sick but knew I couldn't get in David's nice car and do this. I bent over put both fingers down my throat and then suddenly threw up several times. My god that felt better and I was now feeling so much better.

At Aid station 9 the team there were absolutely fantastic, as there was a U.S school where I sat in and slept for 3 hours and they fed me and kept me warm. At 6am I awoke to sunrise the race had been going for 24 hours and there would be runners coming in for the next 6 hours until the 30 hour cut off.

At about 8am Alex drove me back to the Finish Line (via the 7-11 Store) where I got to see the runners coming in across the beach section which was now fully in daylight and the full view of the final 2 miles was clear to see, wow what a final 2 miles we had run. I was a little disappointed that I had not been able to run this section in daylight but these guys now had been out there for 26+ hours.

Final Thoughts –

- Crewing yourself on a 100 miler is not easy as you have to be fully planned and mentally strong especially as you will have nobody to kick you up the arse during the low points.
- I now know I should have run more conservatively in the first half which would have meant less pain in the second half of this race.
- Daytona 100 was a quick course with perfect weather conditions on the day and I hindsight a sub 20 hour was possible but I will take a sub 21 hour and take a 28 minute P.B.
- This race has given me huge confidence for next year's Big Goals – GUCR145 & TR250