

I realize it's more exciting to hear a race report from the racer than from his crew, but Gi hasn't given us one yet. So here's the race from my perspective....

Hardrock 100 - crew report.

Had a marvelous time in Colorado, spectating and crewing the mad event they call Hardrock 100. I couldn't quite believe it when Gi told me he wanted to run this race. I wondered whether he had forgotten his experience running his first 100 mile race. Did he forget how he couldn't walk normally for weeks, how his legs doubled in size from the swelling?

How he decided then that once was enough? "I remember the pride, not the pain" he answered.

I was unable to jog his memory, so I decided to go along and help out. The course runs just over 100 miles through the San Juan Mountains in SW Colorado, running over ridges and up and down mountains both off and on trail, but just about always off-road. It encompasses 33,000 feet of climb (and descent), and hits a high point atop 14,000 foot Handies Peak. I had hoped to pace Gi for part of the race, but gave up on this idea when I realized just how rugged this course is. After getting mild altitude sickness and really sore legs two days in a row while checking out the course with Gi, I realized I'd be more helpful as crew. And Gi had a fellow ultramarathoner lined up to run the last 50-odd miles with him anyhow.

It was interesting to meet the ultramarathoners who run these things. I was expecting some unusual people. Would they be really skinny.. or excessively muscular? Superhuman somehow? I was surprised to find that they mostly look like regular folks, with a few striking exceptions - the woman just barely 5' tall with legs as thick as tree trunks. And the unbelievably skinny, 6' tall guy who seemed less than 1/2 her width - who ended up winning and setting a new course record. The most indefatigable ultramarathoners show up for this race, known as the most difficult 100-miler in the country; and it also attracts the most optimistic ultrarunners - like Jim from Arkansas, who shows up every year and never yet has made it past the 1/3 mark.

There are aid stations every 8 miles or so along the course, to give the racers food, supplies and medical assistance. As crew, it was my job to drive to many of these aid stations and have everything ready for Gi when he arrived, so he could get through fast and get the right gear. Not too hard, huh? Gi and I sat down the night before the race and planned out about what time he'd be coming through the aid stations - he was hoping to run this in about 40 hours - a respectable time somewhere in the pack. It looked like it would leave me a lot of time to hike around and have some fun.

Finally - race day! Dropped Gi off at the starting line - in the rain - for the 6 am start. Off they went, up the hill and out of sight with Gi in the group of ambitious but sensible runners just behind the leaders. I went back to bed, and eventually meandered up to the first aid station, where Gi had thought he'd run through around 8:30 am. I wandered around, drank some hot chocolate, tried to figure out just what I was supposed to do, hunted around for Gi's stuff... Suddenly, somebody was yelling for me, somebody kind of mad "Geri! Where are you?!" I was astonished to realize it was Gi - and more astonished to realize he was in the lead! Frantically, I got him his pack and his bottles, and he was off again, with another runner on his heels. Everyone wanted to know who that #67 was? The ultramarathon community is small, and everyone recognized the other guys in front. Who was this German, and how did you pronounce his name? The rumors started to fly...

He kept the lead for another 10 (?) miles or so but by the time I saw him next he was in 6th place. This time I was ready! I got there hours early, like all the other crews, and we waited there with binoculars,

eating, drinking, telling stories about the runners, and living it up. Saw the first 5 runners come through, one-by-one, pretty spread out by this time. Then - another head came over the horizon - a bright pink head! With a purple sweatsuit on! How odd. Who the hell was that? And why was he walking so slowly? A hiker, just happened to be on the trail. Then, finally, Gi! He ran into the station where I had all his gear laid out, and food ready to eat. But he didn't want the gear - he was hours ahead of schedule so he didn't need that stuff yet - no his shoes and socks were full of rocks and he wanted me to wash them out. (Got some good pictures of this). A quick wash, a little banana pudding, and he was off again, into a nice little thundershower with a bit of medium-sized hail. Lucky for him I'd picked up a plastic rain bonnet for him just for the race (you know, the ones they sell in CVS for 99 cents?). He said it was just right for that storm.

Didn't see him again until 9:30 that night at around the half-way point. His pacer, Donnie, and I watched the lead runners come through while we waited for him. Donnie was a little worried - would he be able to keep up with this crazy guy? He hadn't expected Gi to be going this fast...He must have been a little nervous - he used the bathroom 4 times in the 1/2 hour just before Gi came in. Gi had dropped back to 7th by this time, still ahead of his expected schedule, but he was looking pretty tired. It worried us that he didn't want to eat - nothing seemed appetizing except orange juice - but there wasn't any. I promised I'd bring some to the next station. Gi told Donnie it was going to be a tough job to bring him to the finish. And off they went in the dark on the steepest climb of the race to run through the night.

And off I went to bed. Got up early the next morning to get to the next aid station (well ok, Gi had told me to sleep through one and hit the next). The runners could take the direct route over the mountains, but restricted as I was to roads, I had to drive far out of the way. On and on...dodging suicidal magpies and chipmunks. Where the hell was that turn anyway...was supposed to be marked! Well, it wasn't. Took quite a while to find it. Finally got there with Gi's sunglasses, among other things, on this blindingly sunny day to find that Gi had just passed through 15 minutes ago. Whoops! Yep, this confirmed my position as absolute worst crew at this race. At least, they reported that he was looking great - very strong.

I decided to head them off at the next station, where crew was not allowed access, and sneak Gi his sunglasses! Around the mountain again, dodging those damn birds, down that muddy, grooved dirt road, over those rocks, up to the next station. There was that friendly botanist I had met the day before manning the aid station - she won't mind if I sneak Gi these glasses...But no, he just passed through 15 minutes ago! Damn, he was too fast for me! But again they reassured me that he looked really strong. So I headed back down towards the finish and staked out "Nute's shoot" - the last water crossing just 3 miles before the end. At least I could get one picture of them before it was all over. Waited on a hill for 1.5 hours, and finally, there they were - Gi and Donnie. Not moving too fast by now, but looking strong and holding 7th place. Got a few shots and cheered them on, and headed down to the finish line. In plenty of time to line up for that last picture - crossing the finish. Got one as he advanced down the road to the line and then...ran out of film! Damn again! Changed the film and joined them at the finish. He finished in 7th place (32 hours 43 minutes) just about 2.5 hours behind the winner. After some celebration, and a rest, Gi remarked "I've been waiting a long time for that orange juice."

P.S. When we got home, we found out that one of the finishers, Joel Zucker, suffered a hemorrhage the day after the race and passed away. Joel had introduced Gi to the Hardrock 100. He will be sadly missed.