

HEARTLAND 100

WHAT YOU LEARN AT THE FINISH

by Kristi Mayo

Almost everything you need to know about an ultra can be learned by observing the finish line. Who finishes, how fast, and how do they look when they finally stop? Their salty faces and blood-shot eyes tell the story. Who greets them, embraces them, cheers them to the last step of their journey? The gathering of loved ones, strangers, and unexpected angels sets the tone for this tale.

The finish line for Heartland 100 Spirit of the Prairie is situated as close to the heart of the Heartland as one can get. Each year, on the second weekend of October, the population of Cassoday, Kansas (Prairie Chicken Capital of the World) more than doubles with the addition of 150 would-be 50- and 100-milers, as well as their handlers, race staff, and volunteers. In 14 years,

the race has earned a reputation for its hospitality, ultra-experienced aid station volunteers, and a razor-sharp focus on seeing the runners succeed.

All of these characteristics, aided by improbable weather, came together to ensure a 75-percent finish rate at the 2013 event. Participants enjoyed mild temperatures with highs in the 70s and lows in the mid 40s, clear skies, and – most remarkably – light winds that prove so rare on the exposed prairie.

As the second sunrise cast an orange light across the finish line, co-Race Director Kyle Amos tirelessly greeted each runner across the finish line, distributed buckles and finisher's sweatshirts, and ensured that freshly finished participants had an ample offering of hot coffee, soup, and chili.

Meanwhile, Richard Stigall, 45, walked up to the finish line area, his hands plunged into the pocket of a hooded sweatshirt, braced against the chilly morning air. He marveled out loud at how many people there were still waiting at the finish line. This had been his first 100-mile race, he explained... and then modestly added that he won earlier that morning, with a time of 17:55. As he clapped and encouraged runners coming to the finish line hours after his own finish, Stigall recounted how he and his pacer took and maintained the lead with their headlamps switched off, utilizing only moonlight to navigate the gravel course. "They came in stealth," said Amos of Stigall and his pacer. "We almost missed them finishing."

The course conditions proved favorable for other first-time 100-milers. Second-place male Kenn Moon performed well in his first hundred, crossing the line less than six minutes off the lead. The race was a first-time distance for the top three female finishers, as well: Amy Ewing, 44, cruised in at 18:19, setting a new women's course record by 20 minutes. Candi Paulin and Kodi Panzer, both 32, were second and third in 21:55 and 22:33, respectively.

The sun pushed higher and the breeze quickened as the group at the finish line continued to grow. Co-Race Director Tony Clark finally found his way to the start/finish after spending the day and night stocking aid stations and encouraging runners along the out-and-back course. Crew, pacers, volunteers, and finishers shared stories from the last 30 hours. Among those stories was the all-out sprint to the finish by first-place 50-mile runner Alex Beecher, 25, who achieved his goal of a sub-eight-hour finish in 7:59:59. And then there were the veteran runners who claimed their 11th finishes (Vincent Swendsen and Louise Mason) and ninth finishes (Kevin Guest and Yen Nguyen) at the Heartland 100. Their return trips to the finish line also say a lot about this ultra and its ability to form friendships, build traditions, and challenge runners year after year. ■



Kodi Panzer, who took third in the 100, and Dustin Birdsong greet the first sunrise



The Flint Hills of Kansas sprawl out in front of Mark Berry and Bob Murphy

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100 MILES

1. Richard Stigall, 45	17:55:31	24. Zach Jones, 31	23:03:52
2. Kenn Moon, 40	18:01:14	25. David Coats, 52, TX	23:20:17
3. Rodney Kammerdiener, 40, CO	18:18:16	26. Chris Witkowski, 27, WI	23:25:22
4. Amy Ewing, 44, TX	18:19:21	27. Peggy Ward, 49	23:33:05
5. Pete Kostelnick, 26, NE	18:35:44	28. Mark Berry, 54, NE	23:33:43
6. Jess McNeely, 44	18:47:06	29. Bob Murphy, 55, NE	23:33:44
7. Ronald Lapoint, 32	19:24:30	30. John Thoman, 25, OK	23:57:14
8. Michael Miller, 51, AZ	19:37:17	31. Mike Birkenheier, 26, IL	24:31:49
9. Chris Benjamin, 38, MO	19:42:19	32. Rebecca Gartrell, 41, TX	24:31:50
10. George Myers, 42	20:01:55	33. Eric Pence, 47, CO	24:55:22
11. Thomas Stanley, 27	20:06:43	34. Traviss Willcox, 47	25:04:10
12. Jerret Halter, 31, IL	20:16:33	35. Arnold Begay, 50, OK	25:17:32
13. Eric Buckley, 50, MO	20:48:28	36. Dustin Birdsong, 31	25:48:30
14. Gerardo Ramirez, 41, TX	20:53:07	37. Rene Villalobos, 54, TX	25:48:33
15. Thomas Keene, 32, TN	21:33:33	38. Michael Thrasher, 25, GA	25:58:51
16. Eric Skocaj, 27, IL	21:38:47	39. Sergio Madrigal, 63, TX	26:13:43
17. Candi Paulin, 32	21:55:02	40. Darwin Lalonde, 48, ON	26:23:54
18. Jeffrey Kasal, 38, MO	22:14:08	41. Dmitry Rozinsky, 37, TX	26:26:27
19. Kodi Panzer, 32	22:33:56	42. Michael Linkogel, 42, MO	26:27:32
20. Chad Appleton, 32, MO	22:36:51	43. Elden Galano, 55	26:27:34
21. Gregory Dekeyser, 32, IL	22:42:54	44. Steve Baker, 43	26:28:04
22. Dennis Wilson, 55, NE	22:55:24	45. Brian Negrotto, 35, LA	26:30:45
23. Mike Baxter, 58, MO	22:59:32	46. Vincent Swendsen, 51, NC	26:48:11
		47. Francesca Carmichael, 53, WA	26:51:38

48. Gary Fuerst, 61, MO	26:53:40	72. Jake Haugen, 26, MN	29:37:08
49. Gary Eggleston, 49, WA	26:54:08	73. Scott Olitsky, 50	29:38:22
50. Carl Cleveland, 47	26:54:10	74. Larry Kelley, 47, IA	29:43:25
51. Justin Chockley, 30	26:56:56	75. Chris Smith, 32, OK	29:44:41
52. Terry Rider, 58	27:05:09		
53. Caroline Williams, 51, VA	27:11:08		
54. Geoffrey Baker, 55, MD	27:17:03		
55. Jennifer Clinchard, 44, NE	27:33:33		
56. Kathy Hoover, 53, OK	27:38:56		
57. Adam Monaghan, 30	27:48:14		
58. Bill Fairfield, 57, IL	28:10:50		
59. Peter Bennett, 38, TX	28:24:22		
60. Yen Nguyen, 51, TX	28:28:56		
61. Jason Dinkel, 39	28:39:33		
62. Gail Edgar, 54, IL	28:40:55		
63. Dennis Haig, 53	28:47:39		
64. Kevin Guest, 45, MO	28:48:03		
65. Brian Ciolek, 34, MO	28:49:23		
66. Cathy Nevans, 48, TX	28:55:29		
67. Frank Payne, 51, TX	28:55:30		
68. Carson Greenhaw, 29, CO	29:07:57		
69. James Yee, 63, CA	29:21:31		
70. Louise Mason, 60, IL	29:30:54		
71. Joseph Galloway, 56, IA	29:32:31		

50 MILES

1. Alex Beecher, 25	7:59:59
2. Chris Perry, 37	8:48:37
3. Lauren Lie, 28	10:25:44
4. Bobby Trnavsky, 27, MO	10:29:20
5. Kevin Flaspohler, 44, OK	10:50:27
6. John Southard, 64, MO	10:57:12
7. Donald Groom, 49	10:57:13
8. Steve Blanck, 41	11:35:28
9. Joshua Bowen, 25, MO	11:38:23
10. Clinton Burnett, 29	11:53:05
11. Cody Chitwood, 33	12:25:23
12. Krystle Dalke, 31	12:25:25
13. Brian Silcott, 42	12:28:21
14. Ben Stanton, 34, IA	13:38:35
15. Richard Skocaj, 57, IL	13:39:20
16. Patrick Allen, 58	14:04:36
17. Janel Vigil, 39, TX	15:32:51
18. David Brenner, 56, FL	16:39:50