



Heat, Rain and Miles by Midnight

BY CHRIS WRISTEN

A clear, starlit sky and bright, glowing moon illuminated the path for runners during the final half of the Night Hawk 50K.

The setting was serene during the Lawrence Trail Hawks' inaugural night race on June 13 at Clinton State Park in Lawrence, KS. It stood in stark contrast to weather conditions at the park during the previous two months—conditions that forced the race off of the wooded single-track and onto an alternate course.

A relentless string of thunderstorms for eight of nine weekends leading up to race day resulted in the sixth wettest May for the region since the 1870s. Portions of the trail were completely submerged by water, and a small segment became so saturated that it collapsed into the lake.

In order to avoid damaging the already suffering trail system, co-race directors Mary Ann Frevert and Shari Hicks developed an alternate course. Gone was the original course's single-track with its rocks, roots and quick but rugged climbs. In its place was a less technical but more painful three-loop course consisting of 75% asphalt park road and 25% grassy, hilly, muddy cross-country-style terrain.

"Even though the RDs were forced to use an alternate course, it was still an awesome event," said Tesa Green, who made the Night Hawk her first ultramarathon.

Twenty-eight runners toed the line for the 6 p.m. start. What followed was a sampling of nearly all the weather conditions experienced at the park during the prior two months wedged into an eight-hour block of time: sunny skies and a heat spike, a light rain shower,



TOP: Nii Anyetei Akofio-Sowah takes on one of the hills on the modified paved course. [©Rick Mayo/Mile 90 Photography]

BOTTOM: First-place female Tesa Green runs into the sunset. [©Rick Mayo/Mile 90 Photography]



sun and surging humidity, heavy rainfall and finally a clear, calm, peaceful night.

Menacing gray clouds covered the area all day leading up to the race, but the sky never unleashed a thunderstorm. The clouds cleared, the sun popped out and the temperature rose into the 80s as the runners were sent on their way. The pack spread out quickly along the park road. The leaders darted away as heat radiated off the asphalt for the first six miles, which went up and down hills and wound through three small paved loops. Runners were

climbing prairie-grass-covered Bunker Hill and heading into the windy and sloppy Goodwin Loop—the park's traditional cross-country ski area—when a light drizzle began to fall.

"Thanks to the generous amount of rain we received during the race, it made the Goodwin Loop a bit slick and sloppy," Green said. "By the final loop, the hill that led down to the bridge was pretty slick; I ended up slipping and sliding down the hill on my butt! It was a bit slow going through the rest of that section with all the slick spots."

The runners' mettle had been tested. Now, it was time to hang on and finish. The rain cleared, and the sky transformed into a pink and orange-streaked masterpiece of a sunset before giving way to a clear, starlit sky that allowed runners to navigate the course by moonlight.

It was a serene finish to what had been a challenging race. Ultimately, weather conditions and injury cut six runners' races short. Twenty-two finished.

Lawrence resident James Partridge, racing in his hometown park, claimed the victory in 4:17:09, edging out runner-up Alex Beecher of Lawrence by a 10-minute cushion. Brayden Crowe, running his first ultramarathon, spent the first five miles outside of the top 10 but steadily climbed through the pack and edged out James Yantis for third place by 37 seconds.

Green, a Lawrence resident, was the women's champion in 5:29:53, and Heather Cotten was the second female in 5:52.25.

For a few of the runners, the Night Hawk served as a training run for the Trail Hawks' signature event: September's Hawk Hundred endurance festival. That includes Green, who found the race—even on an alternate course—to be extremely beneficial.

"I was really excited for this race specifically because it gave me a chance to train and run part of the race in the dark," said Green, who will make her first 100-mile attempt at the Hawk Hundred. "I think one of the biggest challenges I will face during the Hawk Hundred is running overnight, sleep-deprived and in the dark. The Night Hawk was an awesome opportunity to get a little glimpse of what is yet to come." 

Night Hawk 50k

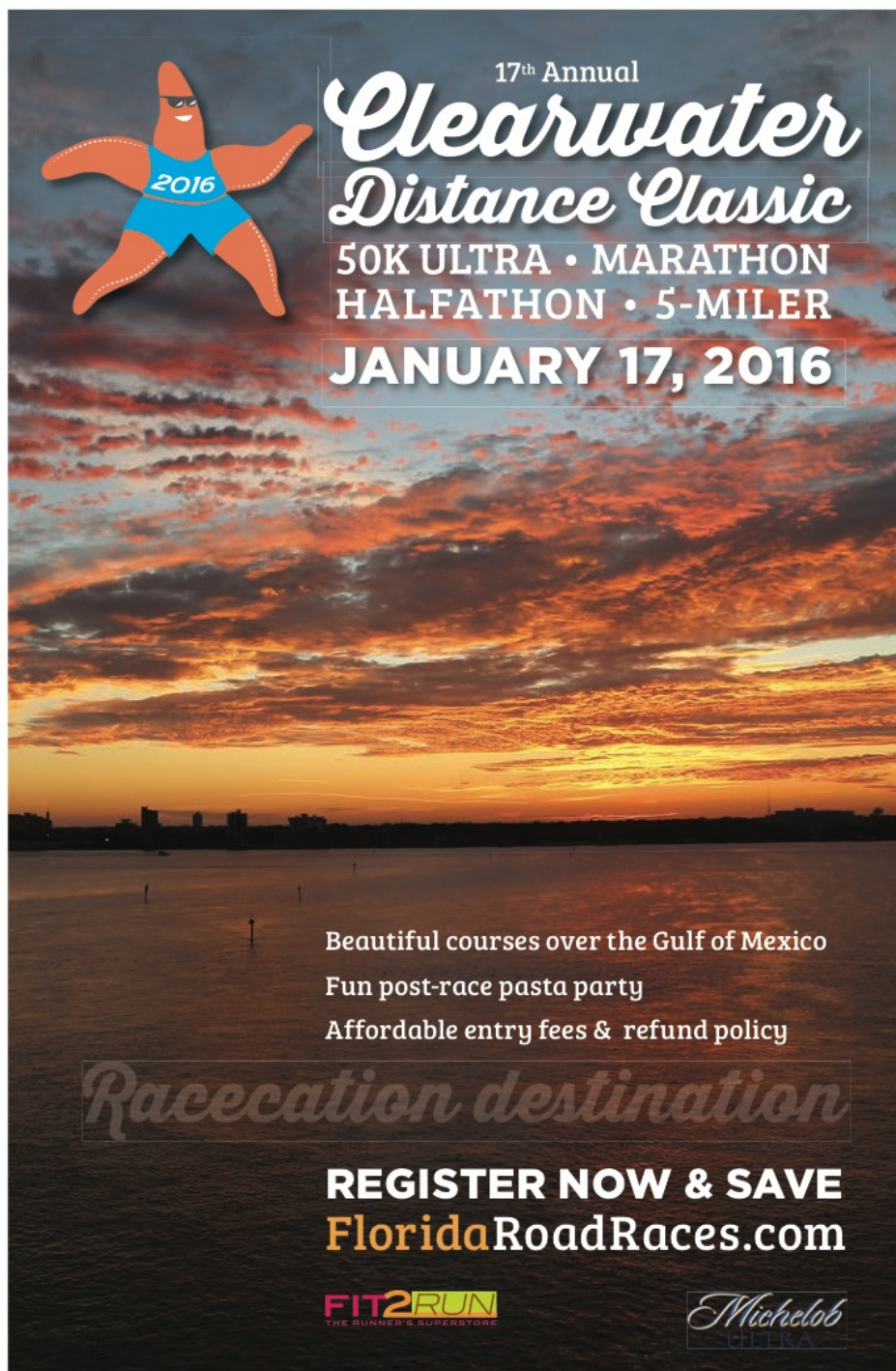
Lawrence, KS // June 13

 2,3* // 50k

Elevation gain: Regular course – 1,845 feet; Alternate course – 1,588 feet | This 50K course consists of mostly rugged trails running through the beautiful trees, out on the white trail to Land's End (~6 1/2 miles) and returning to the start/finish line on the blue trail (~3 1/2 miles). This is a 3 loop race with each loop being 10.3 miles.

1	James Partridge, 29, KS	4:17:09
2	Alex Beecher, 27, KS	4:27:50
3	Brayden Crowe, 26, KS	5:25:25
4	James Yantis, 28, KS	5:26:02
5	Tesa Green, 43, KS	5:29:53
6	Bill Loats, 49, KS	5:46:50
7	Nii Anyetei Akofio-Sowah, 35, MO	5:52:01
8	Heather Cotten, 40, KS	5:52:25
9	Nick Combs, 32, KS	6:06:21
10	Chris Wristen, 35, KS	6:09:01
11	Matt Quijas, 30, KS	6:18:05
12	Michael Miley, 50, KS	6:28:05
13	Aaron Davenport, 35, KS	6:39:10
14	Jay Mooney, 39, KS	6:44:01
15	Dennis Cannell, 56, MO	6:49:34
16	Paul Endacott, 50, KS	6:59:24
17	Chad Harper, 38, KS	6:59:47
18	Henry Yount, 54, KS	6:59:48
19	Brandy Holey, 36, MO	7:01:25
20	Chandy Davidson, 38, MO	7:01:25
21	Robert Hall, 58, KS	7:01:26
22	Libby Eddings, 36, KS	7:35:12

* See page 34 for key





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