

THREE HILLY MILES

BY BOB WOOTEN



**LOS LOBOS
KANSAS CITY, KS //
FEBRUARY 8**

 **4.2" // 6 HOURS**

**Elevation gain:
750 feet per loop**

The course is a 3-mile loop consisting of mostly rolling, single-track trails in Wyandotte County Lake Park, and includes some difficult descents and hills.

Renita Kallevig runs her second loop on a fast downhill section nicknamed "Speed Demon."  JOHN KNEPPER | MILE 90 PHOTOGRAPHY



My alarm is going off, flashing the title of an old race day from a decade ago. I usually just re-enable it any time I need to get up this early. I curse myself for not packing the car the night before and shovel a chaotic, pre-staged pile of essentials into the car: tablets, clocks, papers, beer kegs, safety pins, firewood, cables and – last thought – duct tape? Came in handy before.

Driving through the icy drizzle, I realize it's been a while since I've been out here. Where the heck am I even going? At least there's no traffic, and by some small miracle, the train crossing opens before I have to stop. A good omen, maybe.

Pulling in, I'm the third person to arrive at the deserted park shelter. A good friend with a smile and a cup of coffee steaming in his hand is the first thing I see. Okay, maybe this will work out after all. The second person is anxious





ABOVE: Timothy Dickerson (center) offers feedback on the course to race directors Bob Wooten (left) and Gilbert Hernandez (right) after finishing second in the 6-hour event. © JOHN KNEPPER | MILE 90 PHOTOGRAPHY

LEFT: Ben Keefe works the Fester's Wander section at Wyandotte County Lake Park, focused on keeping first place. © JOHN KNEPPER | MILE 90 PHOTOGRAPHY

BOTTOM LEFT: Ben Keefe is welcomed into the finish by race director Bob Wooten (author). © JOHN KNEPPER | MILE 90 PHOTOGRAPHY

to do a race-day signup. I wonder how they even learned about our small event.

As people gradually arrive and everything begins to come together, the Kansas February cold is forgotten, and the precipitation ceases. Heck, it's not even that muddy.

The runners seem eager for this one. The shirts and hats are popular, and I get a bit of joy seeing them handed out when the smiles widen into laughs and pride as they hold them up. Why does everyone need more safety pins, though? A mystery to solve for another day.

The race begins, and I settle in for a long day of timing duties. It's a 3 and 6-hour timed event on a 3-mile looped course, but for now, there is a brief reprieve as we await the first return of the runners. Unsurprisingly, the person I suspected is the first back from 3 hilly miles. He has a smile on his face, and I do as

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well. I'm thinking to myself, "I wonder how it is out there?" I haven't been on this route in a while. After quick reflection, I answer my own question: every step is incredible. Every step of the course is its own experience. Easy to forget sometimes during a run, especially a race, but it is amazing what memories can be recalled from something so simple as a 3-mile loop in the woods.

One of the best things about a looped course is that you see every runner, many times over. There's an energy that builds – an unspoken camaraderie, a shared experience.

The day moves forward, and I look around, thankful for everyone here making this happen – every family member that's come out to support their own and those who are done running and just want to enjoy the day with pizza and a beer.

As the laps start adding up, I can see the ultra-feel emerge. The morning's excitement has given way to the afternoon's muted resolve. Each successive lap is now taking its toll, displayed plainly on the faces of the runners still going. The course is doing exactly what we



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LEFT: Christopher Hutchings winds through the 3-mile looped course late in the timed event. ©JOHN KNEPPER | MILE 90 PHOTOGRAPHY

Los Lobos
Kansas City, KS // February 8
 4,2' // 6 HOURS

1	Ben Keefe, 46, MO	36
2	Timothy Dickerson, 34, MO	33
2	Christopher Hutchings, 39, KS	33
4	Damon Mar, 40, KS	30
4	Christian Richardson, 38, KS	30
6	Renita Kallevig, 53, KS	27
6	Jordan Dollar, 30, MO	27
6	Ben Marr, 50, MO	27
6	Craig Hibbets, 43, MO	27
6	Blake Skola, 43, MO	27

*See page 49 for key

designed it to do: simulate mountain training, or as close as we can get in Kansas. At 750 feet of gain per loop, every runner – whether they logged one lap or 11 – now had a new appreciation for the elevation profile printed on the back of their race shirt.

One of the finest moments of the day quietly unfolds before me near the end. The leader, already knowing he has won and doesn't need to run anymore, still has time to go out for another lap. In past years, there have been choruses of, "One more lap!" shouted, but today somehow inspires an understood contemplative tone. His back is turned toward me, and I see him mulling it over, shrugging his shoulders back and forth. He nods to himself, still facing away, and without a word, grabs his poles and flies back out on the course. He returns after one of his fastest laps of the day, with vigor and a charge down the hill to the finish. The day is complete. Those laps can be incredible. ▲



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