

2014 Icarus Florida UltraFest – Race Report by Alyson Venti

The 2014 Icarus Florida UltraFest was my first attempt at a 24hour race (and this is my first attempt at writing a race report so apologies in advance!) I must admit, the idea to run around in a 1km circle for 24 hours seemed kind of crazy (and by kind of, I mean wicked crazy), but I wanted a shot at qualifying for the national team so I figure I had to bite the bullet and try. Icarus promised to be flat, with great Florida running weather, and hosted by the most knowledgeable and dedicated ultra-couple out there: Andrei and Claire Nana; it seemed like a great opportunity.

DII computers has helped sponsor my 2014 race schedule and I was fortunate to have Tom Drummond, the president of DII computers and ultra-marathon runner himself, fly in from PA to help crew. Not only did Tom prove to be a significant help throughout the entire race, but his presence gave Teddy a chance to take some race pics! (check them out at: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/4kba2h37atvegeu/AABE49pTAuJ2b9eb1P7L46wra?dl=0>)

On to the race. I was really nervous going into it. My goal was to qualify for the national team and I knew that was going to be tough, especially considering I had never run a 24hour race before. I also knew Lara Zoeller would provide some tough competition. Consequently, I may have gone out a little to fast....



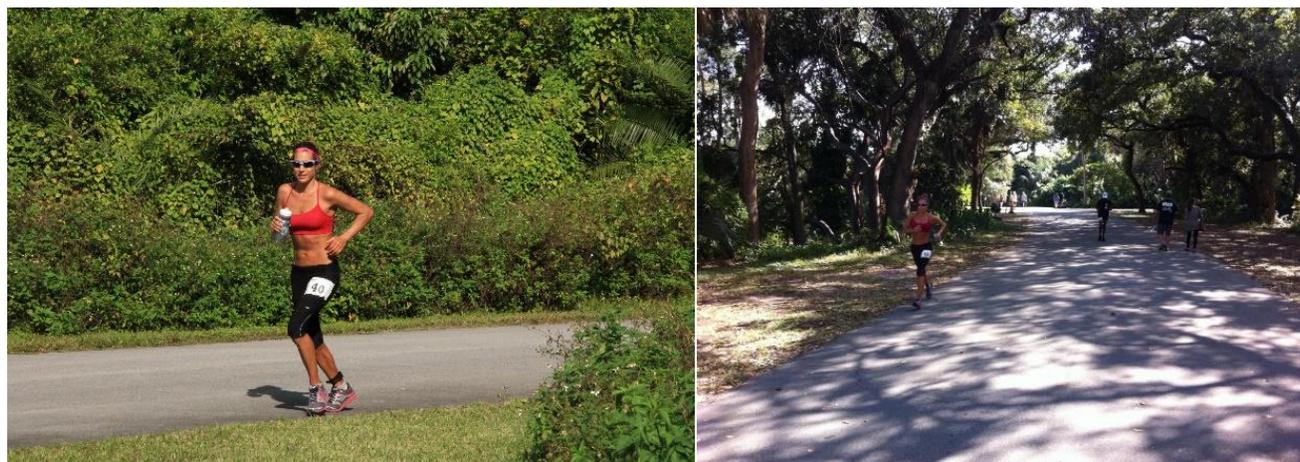
Which start looks out of place?

I ran way too fast for the first 4 hours or so. At one point I told Teddy “she’s gaining on me” Teddy replied “You only have 23hours and 31 minutes to make up for it”. Point taken.

I finally settled into a more reasonable pace and just tried to focus on each lap. The course was beautiful! A 1km loop through Snyder Park, Ft. Lauderdale. With such a short loop runners were soon lapping each other which provided an awesome opportunity to cheer and support one another out there.



The aid station was stocked better than a Costco with cold smoothies during the day and hot soup and oatmeal at night. They really had everything you could imagine, and the volunteers were unbelievable, handing out food and chasing off junior ROTC members! (There was a JROTC training camp on Saturday morning and the park was inundated with what seemed like hundreds of high school kids in army fatigues. But this did not intimidate the volunteers; they were the ones giving orders!)



Beautiful course!

I have always found that it is best to run happy. So I have to give a shout out to Eric Spencer who showed up with the most amazing sign ever to put a huge smile on my face!



I knew it would start to get really tough after sunset. Tom and Teddy had a pretty nice set up though and stayed awake all night. Teddy brought along his trusty transistor radio and listened to the evening FSU/UM football game and shouted out score updates to the racers as they went by.



Base camp

The night was wicked tough (yes, wicked), but fortunately I had a visit from Hector Arana and the IRun family somewhere around 11pm. It was really motivating to have them cheer me on. Somewhere around 3 or 4 am, however, I was really hitting a wall. My lap splits were getting slower and slower and I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to reach my goal. Teddy suggested I stop for 20 min. NO! I didn't want to stop! But he convinced me it would be a good investment so I did.

I stopped. Teddy rubbed my legs for a bit, I closed my eyes for 10 min, got some "real food" (no offense GU) and put on my 2XU calf sleeves. Tom told me I had 2.5 hours to run 13 miles to reach 140miles. "I can't F*cking do that", I said "Yes you can", he told me. "No I can't but I can come close". After 20 min I got up and walked off. Was I going to be able to run again, to "find my stride" as I like to call it? I walked for about 200 meters and found Claire Nana walking towards me. "We were worried about you!" she said. I mean, you don't get a better RD than that right?! "I'm ok" I said "Just tired".

After 200 meters I started my shuffle, and by the time I came back around to Teddy and Tom I was running again. I had found my stride. Just a few more hours till sunrise and it would all be fine. The sky started to change color (finally!) and I knew I was close. Just after sunrise Andrei appeared next to me. "If you run 4 more laps you have 140 miles", he said. No way is that going to happen I thought but I'll come close. 4 more laps. One- ok, not bad; two- ok only two more; three- ok I can do another and change. Four! Everyone thought I would stop, but I plowed through the finish line.



Why stop?

All I remember is the clock said XX:5X:XX, a little less than 10 min left, I still had time. "You're going to keep going?" Teddy asked. "Well I'm not going to just stop!" I said.

I had been told I could keep running and Bob Becker would "spot me" (i.e. run behind me and witness my location when the 24hour mark hit and they could then measure the "extra" distance I had run). So I kept going. But where was Bob? Oh well, I'll just put my timing chip down and hopefully they'll believe that I didn't cheat. Or maybe I could just make it to the mid-loop timing mat.... Once I got there Andrei and Bob appeared. "You have a few more minutes" Andrei said. MINUTES, I was expecting SECONDS when is this going to be over. I kept running.



They weren't looking at their watches. Wasn't I getting close? I was getting closer and closer to the finish line. Weren't they going to tell me it was time? I kept going. Finally the finish line was in sight. This time the clock said XX:59:48, the countdown had begun. Mike Melton from MCM timing was there leading the count-down: "8, 7, 6..." I drove for the finish line, crossing the mat right at "1".

It was slightly more dramatic than I meant it to be, but I was just so happy to be done. I really didn't think I could make the 140 mark, good thing Tom and Teddy both thought I could.



Ok I know this pic is blurry and Teddy told me not to include it because of the "poor quality" but I had been looking forward to this moment for 24 hours!



At the awards ceremony every 24hour and 6 day finisher was acknowledged, and we had the pleasure of listening to Jasper Olsen, the Icarus 6 day champion, talk about his run around the world. The experience was pretty unreal. For my first attempt at 24hours I would sum it up as “a good learning experience”.

The hardest part about writing this race report is making sure I include all the names of everyone who put a smile on my face during those 24hours. I'm finding that to be impossible. From the volunteers to the runners to the people who just came to watch, everyone made this event a huge success.