

Testing the Limits – Paul Dewitt Takes Lesson

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“100s are so exciting because you don’t always know if you’re going to finish. Even the best ultra runners have some level of uncertainty of whether they’re going to finish,” he says. “In a 100 miler, you can have a bad spell and then revive and have a great race. There’s no way to go through that until race day.”

But to race at any distance, runners need to know what to expect. Information about his runners, like how much time they can devote to training, any limiting factors like a predisposition or previous injury, and running history are all elements that help Dewitt draft a manageable, effective training plan.

“The preparation is never going to be ideal; things happen. We’re not professional athletes, it’s just a part of our life,” Dewitt says of running. “Just like in business with a project at work, you have to have that period reflection after a race and learn from what you did.”

That’s one reason, Dewitt says, that every runner should maintain a training log – especially when targeting a big race or goal. When success finally arrives, the log helps identify trends, and when a race goes badly, there is evidence from which to learn and improve. Dewitt says a running log provides invaluable information to him as a coach, and to the runner.

Dewitt’s runners range from half-marathoners to 100-milers and he says part of the joy in the sport is finding the distance or the run that motivates each runner. “It’s not for everybody and more isn’t always better,” Dewitt says of ultra running. “In any sport, there are people that want to continue to test their own limits and that’s what it is. I don’t think any kind of running is better – ultras run the gamut from 50K to multi-day races. There’s a multitude of choices.”

Dewitt advises runners to have a purpose for each run, because for each individual, there are paces and distances that are better than others. And stay out of ‘no man’s land’ by making sure there is a distinct difference between hard and easy days.

As for what inspires an experienced ultra-man like Dewitt, he has his favorite race experiences. The first is the San Juan Solstice 50-miler in Lake City, Utah. “To me, it’s the perfect trail race. It’s not overcrowded and it’s beautiful. The loop course is very satisfying and the terrain is amazing,” Dewitt says. “I’ve run it once, but I go every year and help out in some way.”

The other is the Miwok 100K in the Marin County hills of northern California, which runs from the ocean to the redwoods. “They’re both very scenic, and that’s the great thing about trail running: often they’re in places you’d want to vacation.”


If you’ve ever been curious about what it’s like to run for hours and hours and hours, or if you’re scared of what it might be like at one of those crazy ultra events, Dewitt invites you to check it out.

“If you live in an area with ultras or ultra runners, try to help at one of the races as a crew or pacer. You’ll see, it’s not just elite racers; it’s a lot of running, and a different level of intensity from the traditional road race. It is exciting and you might think, ‘I can do this.’ A lot of people I coach don’t have the availability of a local running community. At least in this area, there are tons of people to learn from.”

Dewitt is absolutely one of them.

Stephanie Wurtz has had a longstanding love affair with running for more than 10 years. She runs roads and rails, anything from a 5K to a 50 miler... and maybe beyond! Stephanie is talking with elite athletes and coaches about their view from the front of the pack, and learning plenty of things along the way.






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