

Taking it to EXTREMES

By runs along Union
May 31 in his
of Mullica Hill. He is
to run at least 120
the 24-hour Lone
in Philadelphia.

IEK/Courier-Post



Ultra runners push themselves to go the distance — and then some

By **STEVE WOOD**
Courier-Post Staff

Cherry Hill resident Glenn Lang stretched well for Philadelphia's Stroehmann Back on My Feet Lone Ranger last July, bending both knees, including the one with a torn ligament to touch his toes, including the dislocated one.

Then the 55-year-old pulled himself together and ran 10 continuous laps around the Schuylkill River Loop, or 88.7 miles.

All in a day's workout.

"The doctors say not to do it," Lang says of the 24-hour race, "but it's bucket list."

Still, kicking the bucket may seem less painful than completing an ultramarathon like the Lone Ranger, which tests runners on how many 8.87-mile laps they can run from 10 a.m. July 16 to 10 a.m. July 17.

The trend of running extreme distances has been finding its footing throughout the country.

Nationwide, the number of marathon finishers has risen steadily the past 30 years but race organizers have noticed a recent uptick with more than half a million finishers in 2010 as compared to about 400,000 in 2007, according to the 2010 State of the Sport report by Running USA.

The nonprofit Running USA also reported that 10.3 million people finished road races in the United States in 2009, up from 8 million in 2004.

Lang says his desire to go the distance started small, first with 5K races (5 kilometers or 3.1 miles), then gradually to marathons and now ultramarathons, a term for

MORE INFORMATION

■ Back On My Feet, 1520 Locust St., Suite 804, Philadelphia. (215) 772-1080.

philadelphia.backonmyfeet.org

■ General Podiatric Medicine, Glendora, 518 Black Horse Pike. (856) 939-2411.

any race longer than a traditional marathon (26.2 miles).

Factors like age and declining speed pushed him to compete in longer distances.

"When you're not fast, you go for the longer, slower stuff as you age," says Lang, the oldest runner in last year's Lone Ranger. "The hardest race for me to do was always the 5K because you always had to go full tilt."

But taking it to extremes requires a lot of preparation and common sense.

"What worries me . . . is the folks who aren't educated to run such a distance," says Dr. Michelle Rowen, a podiatrist at General Podiatric Medicine in Glendora.

Rowen, a legendary runner in the '80s for Washington Township High School, emphasizes the need for runners to equip themselves with proper training, diet and gear.

Lang, who has run in 51 marathons, says he feels a unique rush from doing ultra runs.

"It's a totally different kind of nerves versus the smaller distances," he says. "It's one of nervous anticipation. I think of questions

Ultra/Extreme running picks up speed

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like, 'How long is it going to take to run the last few miles?' 'Am I going to keep the pace up?' 'What's going to happen to my body?'"

Lang found out the answer to the last question when three toenails fell off.

Distance can be dangerous, Rowen warns.

"It's almost an obsession or addiction for some," she says. "They're trying to satisfy something rather than looking out for their sodium and electrolyte levels, which is always a concern."

Though she doesn't recommend running for a full day, Rowen says runners are better equipped today than ever to handle such rigors.

"The material, the athletics shoes with the shock absorption and motion control, is much better than what we had," says Rowen, a podiatrist since 1993. "But like anything else, I think things need to be balanced."

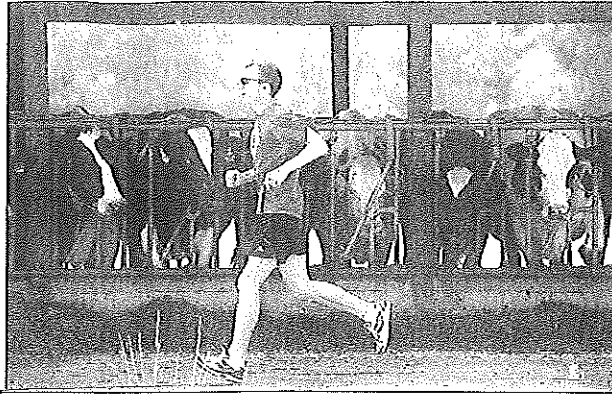
Mullica Hill resident Tim Buzby took his first legitimate break 20 hours, 7 minutes and 101.47 miles into last year's race to tend to some blisters.

"I decided to sit back down in a chair and I couldn't get back up," says Buzby, 44, who, despite ending four hours early, finished ninth out of the field of 208 and among 18 runners who tallied more than 100 miles.

At that debilitating distance, Buzby realized, there is no such thing as a lengthy rest; the body simply shuts down.

But not stopping at all over the course of 24 hours is tough if not impossible for any functioning body.

When hunger strikes, "you grab food and keep running," Lang says. When



JOHN ZIOMEK/Courier-Post

'I decided to sit back down in a chair and I couldn't get back up,' recalls Tim Buzby, 44, of last year's Lone Ranger race. Despite dropping out four hours early, Buzby finished ninth out of 208 runners, and was one of only 18 who ran more than 100 miles.

nature calls, Lang advises you to find a portable toilet and "run in and run out as fast as you can go."

And when night falls, along with your eyelids, you fight back sleep any way possible.

Good thing Lang has a higher tolerance for pain than caffeine. At midnight — 14 hours into last year's race — Lang rewarded himself with a can of cola.

"I had one and my daughter was like, 'Yo Dad, slow down,' " Lang says. "I don't take that stuff, not caffeine, nicotine or aspirin. If I do need it, I know it will work."

Buzby, however, needed more than cola to stave off the effects of sleep deprivation.

"I was more tired than I thought I would be," he says. "My mind was awake but I could tell my body was starting to crave sleep."

There are aid stations every two miles along the course with a variety of refreshments including Gatorade, pizza and running gels. Buzby had an additional one thanks to his wife Veronica and daughter Olivia,

who were awake to dole out Gatorade on each of his 12 laps.

"They may have catnapped every eight miles," he says.

Gatorade alone, however, won't keep runners on their feet for 24 hours.

"There's a lot of precautions we take," says Robert Nonemacker, communications manager for Back On My Feet, a Philadelphia nonprofit that promotes the self-sufficiency of homeless people by emboldening them through running.

Nonemacker says every runner must pass a physical immediately before the race to compete.

"And every two to five laps they get checked by a medical staff," says Nonemacker, who assures there have been no serious health scares in the event's three-year history.

The field capacity of 300 has not been met. A minimum \$500 registration fee can be either paid or fundraised.

For his part, Buzby says he's ready for more.

"I would like to run 120 this year," he says. "I figure

if I could keep going for those four hours, I should be able to achieve it."

Like this year, Buzby did extensive training for the 2010 Lone Ranger, running up to 50 miles a day.

Still, there's no way to truly prepare for such an extreme effort.

"Even with that, I never ran more than six or seven hours in training" he acknowledges. "And I was going nearly four times that long in a race."

Learning from a mistake he made last year, Buzby will wear a larger size sneaker to account for inevitable swelling.

But the Lone Ranger is a sprint compared to the epic "3 Days at the Fair" in Sussex County Fairgrounds.

The mid-May event challenges folks to run loops around its .86 mile course for various intervals and up to 72 hours.

"The format of 3 Days at the Fair is an even smaller loop than 20 in 24, making it an even more mental stress to the runner," emails Jennifer McNulty, spokesperson for NJ Trail Series.

"This can be very challenging for many runners who like distractions."

The top miler overall led the Fair with 300 laps, or 257.3 miles, in the 48-hour race. While a few started Day 3, none finished, McNulty says.

While each ultramarathon differs on the policy of outside runners, the Lone Ranger permits runners to have a pacer — or someone to accompany them — after four laps.

Buzby was paced by his buddy for three middle laps, then finished the Lone Ranger alone.

Reach Steve Wood at (856) 486-2474.