

Holiday Lake 2014- Race Report

Amy Albu

Wow...where do I start? I am completely overwhelmed with emotion having to do with my injury, the fear of running in snow and ice again, and at the thought of what so many sacrificed on Saturday for another runner. I never would have imagined I'd be in this position.

I went back and forth with the idea of leaving Friday night versus early Saturday morning. I was afraid we might hit bad weather so I went ahead and left Friday night. The 12+ inches of snow we had gotten a few days earlier didn't faze me. I had run Hellgate 100k in worse conditions than these, not to mention this was going to be my 14th Holiday Lake finish and this race was known for crappy running conditions. Saturday morning was the usual hustle and bustle of a race morning. I chatted with a few friends, ate a bagel slathered in cream cheese and off we went. I found Sophie Speidel right away and we ran together for a bit until she pulled ahead. I didn't feel like I should push it to try and keep up so early in the race. In just about every race I run I like to hold back in the beginning and save some energy for the second half. Sophie runs a very similar race so I thought she must be feeling pretty good. The conditions were pretty much exactly as I had expected....wet, snowy, and lots of mud. I passed through the first aid station with no problems. As I remember it, this is what transpired next...I was moving along fine, felt great. I approached the stream crossing that was approximately 1 ½ miles from the next aid station. I slipped on a little sheet of ice and my foot awkwardly twisted underneath the weight of my body. I heard a loud snap and looked down to see my right lower leg in a deformed position. I remember saying uh oh, I think I broke my leg. I attempted to put weight on it to test it out, at which point I thought, there is no way...this is definitely broken. Several people were passing by right then, one being Dr. Mike Dunlop. I will never ever in a million years forget this man. Surely this was not a random coincidence, but rather God's hand on the situation. Dr. Dunlop is an ED doctor in Lynchburg whom I met and ran several miles with at Hellgate back in December. God's perfect timing placed him right there with me to oversee the entire situation. He proceeded to splint my leg with some wood and shirts that he used to tie the pieces of wood together. People running by gave the shirts and jackets off their backs to keep me warm. I was completely humbled at the amount of people who stopped to help and offer something. I remember someone pouring Gatorade in my mouth along with ibuprofen. The guys then surrounded me and took turns carrying me to the next aid station. As I remember it, three guys were on either side, and one was carrying my feet. They would rotate out taking turns as I know this was exhausting especially because of the slick conditions. I believe there were at least 10 guys total if not more. They continued to talk and joke with me and in an attempt to keep me calm and they thanked me for not being huge....even though I felt about 400lbs! I remember shrieking out in pain now and then as I felt the bones in my leg shift with any small movement. I kept thinking, these guys must think I'm the biggest baby! I tried to hold back my tears but I was overcome with emotion. I couldn't believe the sacrifice each and every person made. I met someone running his first ultra, I would later know as Kash, who took time to stop and help. He only finished with four minutes to spare because of the time he spent helping me. Grattan Garbee, Mike Mitchell, Mike Dunlop, Sam Price, John Cooper, Kevin Townsend, Brian Robinson, Kelly Golden, Billy Flint, and anyone else I have forgotten...God bless you, you are good men.

Approximately a half of mile or so before the aid station we saw a jeep wrangler coming towards us, thank goodness we had made it. They ever so gracefully placed me in the back of the jeep with John Cooper riding along to keep me company. He did a great job talking with me and helping to keep me warm. Others stuck their head in the jeep, bid me farewell and good luck. I thanked them as I tried not to cry. We arrived back at camp where we saw Dr. Horton and Dr. Wortley. I told Dr. Horton I thought it was pretty bad. The look on his face was one of true concern...something you don't see from him very often, as sympathy is not his most practiced character trait 😊 Dr. Wortley gave me some pain meds and off we went to the hospital. My driver, Melissa Carthew, a Liberty nursing student did a great job talking and praying with me on the hour+ drive to the hospital. What a sweet girl she was, and I have no doubt she will make an excellent nurse one day.

Once we arrived at the UVa emergency department, I saw several familiar faces as I work there in the surgical trauma ICU as a nurse. Just about everyone I came in contact with commented on the crafty splint Dr. Dunlop created. What a story this was...

Sunday morning I went into surgery to repair my fractured tibia, fibula, and ankle. Hardware was placed to stabilize the fractures and facilitate healing. Since this has occurred, I have received numerous text messages, emails and facebook messages of encouragement. I am overwhelmed at the support you all have given me. Your messages of encouragement have kept my spirits up...so thank you all!

This is not where I expected I would be the week after Holiday Lake. If there is any race I would guess I'd get injured in, it would not have been this one. I have no idea why or how this happened. This is undoubtedly going to be a trying three months. Broken bones are painful, surgery is painful and the healing process is slow. However, I have been completely humbled and encouraged by the ultra community. What a reminder of why this is such a great sport. I am always trying to convince friends and family to get involved in ultras...for this exact reason. It is a selfless sport where one experiences feelings of pain, suffering, happiness, friendship and a community of togetherness like no other sporting event can. Today more than ever, I am proud to be part of the ultra community and I cannot wait to come back!

One final note...I want to remind you that Dr. Horton will be undergoing knee replacement surgery in May. This is no simple surgery and he will definitely need our support surrounding him. The days and weeks post op can be painful, difficult, and long. Please remember to keep him in your thoughts and prayers.

Dr. Horton, thank you so much for the support and words of encouragement you have given me. You have lifted my spirits tremendously in this otherwise trying time.

XOXO

Amy Albu