

# ULTRAMAN CREW OVERVIEW

An Ultraman event is one of the most gruelling Triathlon challenges that an athlete can ever attempt and complete. The staggering distances will take an athlete to mental, physical and spiritual places that they have never been before and the toll placed on the human body is tested to the extreme. Heat, wind, rain, hills, smoke and waves are just some of the elemental challenges that await every athlete, and any or all of these elements combined can destroy spirit and will if the athlete is not properly prepared. Some of these Athletes do these events on a regular basis all around the world, they are known as professionals, others take on the challenge as a marking point in life, for whatever reason they have decided to take on this challenge they are steadfast and determined to achieve their goals, I like to call them over achievers or missionaries.

One thing that these two groups of athletes have in common is the ability to train and focus longer and harder than any one can possibly imagine. I have talked to athletes and heard speeches about how it has been a two year path they have chosen to prove something to themselves and in many cases to help others by raising money in support of worthy causes. After all of the training and discipline, all of the fundraising, all of the pre-race races, all of the travel and all of the costs, they can be left in a trembling crying heap on the side of the road if they do not have a CREW that knows what they are doing!

Many of these Athletes travel from all over the world to compete in an Ultraman event. Due to high travel costs they are unable to haul their own personal entourage along with them to be their crew, therefore, they are dependent on race directors and organizers to supply a crew for them, and I call these athletes, Orphans. When they arrive at the race site they are given a crew to work with them and be their life-line throughout the event. They must be scared to death of what they may encounter!

This overview is meant to be a guideline for the general operations of an efficient and professional crew. Many Athletes have crews that consist of Husbands, Wives, Brothers, Friends, Neighbours and I have even seen a few old drinking buddies being recruited to look after everything from communications, navigation, traffic control, daily supplies, vehicle reliability and maintenance, first-aid and highway safety just to name a few of the enormous responsibilities involved with crewing an Athlete through an Ultraman event.

When you consider that you will also need a degree in chemical engineering to mix all the correct proportions of Gatorade, Powerade, Cytomax, Protein Shakes, all in the right combination with caloric intake, salt pills, Electrolyte additives in H<sub>2</sub>O and the vast array of endurance products that these athletes need to have at certain times throughout the event, only then can you begin to understand the logistical puzzle that it takes to crew an Athlete to a successful completion of an Ultraman event. Not to mention that you will also need to be able to detect if and when your Athlete needs psychological assistance, we will discuss this and everything else in detail later but you will need to know how to handle a university educated professional with a six figure income and children in college when he throws his water bottle at the van and yells that he hates red Kool-Aid!

Any Orphan Athlete can be placed in the care of any crew that the Race Director deems efficient and they can complete the event safely and on time if communication and unity can be achieved. This communication can be done six months prior to the event or 24 hours prior to the swim gun going off, but the rules need to be laid out between Athlete and Crew in a pre-race crew meeting. This meeting will probably take about two hours and can create a bond of trust that will carry you all safely and successfully throughout the adventure. This is where we will begin.....

# THE CREW MEETING

So, you have either received a call from the Race Director asking if you could Crew an Athlete at the upcoming Ultraman event or you are crewing for your Husband or Wife or friend at the upcoming Ultraman event, whoopee! I'm going to crew in an Ultraman, this is going to be so much fun, all the sun and the beaches, wow, this will be awesome!  
Be careful what you wish for...

When the Race Director calls he is usually relying on the person he has called to be the Crew Captain and it is the responsibility of the Captain to recruit his Co-Captain and assistant. It is also at times up to the Captain to look after acquiring a paddling crew which can also be the land crew, however, paddling is not something that can be taken lightly and should be left to experienced paddlers with a keen knowledge of the waters to be paddled. Someone once said that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, great theory! Unfortunately they never stood at the end of Skaha lake and tried to spot a basketball nine kilometres away and take into account the currents and crosswinds. The idea of borrowing the neighbours canoe and dusting off the old binoculars and doing a few push-ups the week before is probably not what the Athlete wants to see when he has travelled half way around the world to do this event.

It is up to the captain to clearly define with the Race Director who will be paddling and if necessary, letting him know that you require someone who can best navigate the waters and obtain their contact numbers and call them so that everyone is clear as to who they are, where you will be meeting them, and when you will be meeting them. Do not leave yourself in a situation that when you arrive and meet your Athlete and he asks in his broken English "who is paddling" and you don't have an answer, this tends to confuse and scare the athlete and your idea of a good first impression sinks faster than a roll of silver dollars.

Okay, so now we have the crew members together. Maybe the paddler or paddlers are living in the city of the event which is likely if they know the waters, and you and the rest of the crew live in another city, this has been the case in most of the events that I have crewed. We have all spoken or e-mailed one another and we are aware of the meeting time and place, perfect, all we need now is our Athlete.

The Athlete will usually arrive in town a few days or a week prior to the event to acclimatize and check out the course. Sometimes they will arrive on the night before the event registration meeting and breakfast. You should have already been in touch with him and know his travel plans. If at all possible, it is best to pick the Athlete up at the airport, this works as a good bonding and trust experience; they then know right from the start that they can trust you and that you care. It also gives the Athlete the impression that you are a local and know your way around, as the old saying goes, never let em' see you sweat. He or she needs to see confidence and leadership in their crew captain.

Let the meeting begin. Now we are in a restaurant or Starbucks or somewhere casual and comfortable and relatively quiet and we are all seated at a table, introductions have been done and it is time to get down to the business at hand. It is up to the Captain to establish the chair at this point and let the Athlete know that he has everything under control. We need to know exactly what the Athlete needs for nourishment and hydration throughout the swim. We need to know water temperature and general flow patterns, this is when the paddler needs to speak up and discuss with the Athlete how he likes to swim with respect to canoe placement in the water to avoid chop and waves etc.

The Athlete needs to be confident and anxious to work with the paddler. A small cooler will be required to be given to the paddler in the morning of the swim. The Athlete will know what he will need for food and hydration onboard and he will instruct the paddler when to stop him for hydration and food (usually every half hour but all Athletes are different). The paddler must make sure that he eats and drinks everything that he said he would at the meeting. What the Athlete eats and drinks now will have a direct impact on his body later in the day. It is up to the paddler to remind the Athlete of nutritional requirements but it is up to the Athlete to eat and drink what is required. It is always a good idea to grab the cooler from the paddler after the Athlete is done with the swim, that way you can gauge what has been consumed and make adjustments if necessary early in the bike.

Now the Athlete knows exactly what will be going on with respect to the swim. The paddler will usually have another discussion with the Athlete at the water just prior to the swim start to discuss strategy from the Athlete and offer his advice as to conditions and signals etc.

Next on the meeting agenda will be to discuss his nutritional requirements for the land events (Bike & Run). The crew will need to know how the Athlete likes to have his Gatorade mixed, single strength or double? Half full or  $\frac{3}{4}$  full bottles? Lots of ice or just a couple of cubes? Do you want a whole PowerBar or do you like it in halves? What type of fruit and how often do you want it. Most of the time they will holler out during the ride what they want on the next handoff, you just need to make sure that you have it available. It is usually the responsibility of the Athlete to bring all the Gatorade and food that they will need, however, if they have flown into town the night before they may just want to hand you a credit card and tell you to look after everything. Knowing how to handle this is what makes a professional crew professional! Just be sure that you take notes at the meeting about what he likes and might like along the way. We will discuss the shopping trip later.

Another topic that we need to discuss is the finances. As mentioned, the Athlete is responsible for all expenses. It needs to be laid out what the Athlete is paying for and what he isn't paying for. This is always a little different depending on the circumstances. Hopefully the accommodations have already been discussed and looked after before the Athlete ever arrives, what needs to be determined now is the Gas costs, food costs, general supplies etc. Most Athletes will not want to be bothered with discussions about expenses or going through receipts during the event, they will either give you a credit card to use or they will arrange to go through the receipts at the end of the event and pay you back. However this is going to be handled needs to be determined so that neither party has any concerns or questions during the event.

The final item on the agenda is to go over meeting places and times. As the captain it is a good idea to always be ready to go 10 minutes earlier than everyone else. Now have some dinner and lighten up the conversation and get to know one another as well as possible. Try to get into the Athletes head and gather some information that can be valuable a couple days down the road; what are his kid's names, dog's name(s), for some reason these Athletes seem to have their own personal kennels back home where they are from! Why does he want so badly to do this event, what was the hardest thing he had ever done to this point. All of this information can be used in some way when he may need coaxing and encouragement 75k into the run, you never know....

Finally, before the meeting ends, in some instances and if you are comfortable with it, try for a little unity by having a team prayer or chant or a good old hip hip hooray. Even a secret handshake that is exclusive to the team, this can then be repeated throughout the weekend to promote camaraderie and the "one for all, and all for one" mentality.

# **REGISTRATION & PRE-RACE MEETING**

This is the first time that all of the Athletes and all of the Crews, race directors, officials and volunteers will gather together. It usually goes like this; you will have three or four groups of Athletes hugging and laughing and carrying on conversations in several different languages. You will also see sign up tables with volunteers handing out paperwork and supplies for each athlete. Mostly though you will see a bunch of people wandering around aimlessly trying to figure out the first thing to do, these are the crew members.

It doesn't take long to figure out that you just follow one of the crews to the waiver table where each crew member needs to sign and turn in a waiver, and then you can grab yourself a cup of coffee, even if you don't drink coffee this helps to make you look busy. After the Athletes and crew members have all signed in and you have received your coolers, vests, flags and race manuals it is time to get down to business. Make sure that you "do not eat" before you come to this meeting, the food is really good and plentiful served buffet style in a really nice conference centre and the tables are big enough for your entire crew and Athlete to be seated comfortably. The Race Director opens the meeting by welcoming everyone and doing a couple of introductions, he then declares the breakfast open and we all dig in, wait till you see how much some of these skinny people can eat!

After breakfast the Race Director again takes the podium and does all the introductions of Athletes, Officials and multiple others. Right from the beginning it is a great meeting, very informative and full of bits of advice that should be noted by all Crew Captains. After breakfast everyone just hangs out for awhile and gets to know one another, it seems a bit intimidating at first but by the time this weekend is over you are going to know many of these people and become much closer to them than you ever imagined and it will bring tears to your eyes when it's time to say goodbye. You will leave this meeting anxiously waiting to get the event underway bright and early on the beach the next morning.

The best way to spend the remainder of the "sign up" day is by getting prepared and relaxing. You now have all of the goods that you will be getting from the Race organizers and can begin to load your vehicle for the event. You will need to unload, re-stock, re-organize and clean the vehicle after each day; you will be amazed at what a mess can evolve over a 12 hour period! It really depends on what arrangements have been made between the Athlete and crew captain as to what vehicle will be used for the race. I have seen cars, jeeps, SUV's, and Mini-vans used over the years but here are some things that you need to keep in mind; make sure that whatever vehicle you are using is reliable, you do not want to be having "car trouble" over the next three days, nor do you want to have "LaBamba" spewing thick black emissions that will hang in the air as the Athletes try to breath when they pass through your cloud of pollution.

During pre-arrangement with the Athlete he will want to know if he needs to rent a vehicle or if you will be supplying one. If it is determined that a rental is required make sure to reserve early (months early) as this is probably one of the toughest places on earth to rent a van the night before the event, there are many tourists and it is a long weekend, be prepared! I have always used a mini-van simply because it is big enough to carry everything in an organized fashion, it has plenty of seats, don't forget, that if for some reason your Athlete needs to get in the vehicle you will need to have a place for him to sit. Also, sliding doors have proven very useful to allow an athlete a place to sit (ledge) and change shoes, massage feet, change clothes or whatever. Most Athletes will not want to sit inside the vehicle to do these things as it can become too damn comfortable of an option in their tired mind to the hot endless trail outside! Go Van!

# THE SHOPPING TRIP

Over the next three days you are going to be doing some shopping and I will try to break down what you will need to keep in mind daily. This is not a complete list, each Athlete will have different requirements of what they may need; rather, this is a guideline to get you to the store.

**DAY 0:** This will be your first trip to the store, the day before the swim. You have already discussed at the crew meeting the other night what your Athlete likes to eat while swimming. If they like fig cookies, gummy-bears, chicken wraps (in small pieces) throughout the swim that is what you get. They will also need six sports bottles of hydration throughout the swim, again, they will tell you if it's water, Gatorade, electrolyte tablets etc. Be sure that the bottles that they supplied or that you will be purchasing don't leak and will fit in the bike carriers down the road.

During the first trip to the store make sure that when you are buying these items that you buy enough fig cookies to last throughout the three days if that is what he likes, as for the chicken wraps, you will need to buy those fresh daily, I have always found that you are better to make your own, that way the Athlete can have exactly what he wants in them, if he likes chicken pieces with salmon flavoured cream cheese that is what he gets instead of Jalapenos, black olives, or onions that the Athlete may not like or may not agree with them. Remember, the Athletes body is being taken to the edge and they need to trust what their training has taught them and new spices or day old wraps should not be on the menu unless they ask for it. You might want to take this opportunity to look around the store for some things that can be used on the bike and run portions of the event. Salty items and sweet items that are in small portions are often appreciated by the Athletes. Tip: go to the Chinese section of the dry goods department and get some little jell-o tubes that can be cut at one end and squeezed into the mouth; they are a big hit on the run! They also have lots of other things in this often neglected section of dry goods.

Other than potato chips and pretzels, everything else should be served cold, as cold as possible! You will be going through about 25 to 30 pounds of ice per day for the next three days and you will need to be re-stocking ice daily, find a supplier! It is easier to find moon rocks on the Saturday night of the long weekend in Penticton than it is to find ice cubes! If at all possible, try to get all your ice early in the morning for the day's event but on the Saturday night you may need to become creative. I have always found that begging at the back door of a hotel or pub will work if one of your crew members can actually muster a tear, worst case, find where the dishwasher is sitting down for a smoke and pay him, this never fails. Remember, ice is a life line, this could be your biggest challenge of the weekend, do whatever it takes, I actually heard of a crew that once went door to door like a bottle drive, hey, it worked!

Another thing you may want to do on your first visit to the grocery store is to get two or three 2 litre bottles of Coca-Cola to keep hidden away in the van for future use. I have seen times on the long weekend where everyplace is out of Coca-Cola. Do not try to substitute with any other cola, shopper's drug mart cola or wal-mart cola are not the same and will be frowned upon when required. No Pepsi Free or Coke Zero will replace the benefits of Coca Cola. I will describe how to use this product later but for now all you need to know is that it must be Coca-Cola! I always recommend having at least 72 bottles of water (3 flats) to start out each day. You will be coming across other Athletes that would appreciate a cool bottle of water to douse themselves along a hot bike trail, they will thank you later! Make sure that you buy stuff for the crew to eat as well, it's some long days out there and there is no opportunity to be stopping for lunch along the course. You always need to remember that you are the life line to your Athlete and you need to be there at all times. Tip: buy a couple of Styrofoam coolers for \$5.00 apiece, they will come in useful! The big cooler you got at the meeting will keep 24 bottles of water cold at all times, don't forget to re-stock the cooler as you use up the water.

# DAY 1 – SWIM / BIKE

Rule # 1 – Never trust a motel alarm clock! You want to avoid getting started on the wrong foot and being rushed or late are not conducive to smooth sailing. Get to your pre-determined meeting spot on time and meet with your paddlers. From here your Athlete can discuss final points including eating/drinking times, waves, currents and communication signals etc. with the paddlers. There are opening ceremonies that are pretty cool and then the event is officially underway as you cheer the competitors into the water.

You will now have anywhere between 2 ½ hours and 6 hours to await your athletes surfacing from the water to go into the bike transition. This is an opportunity to do any last minute checks that need to be done before the bike portion begins, if you need ice, get it now. The transition area will need to be set up for your Athlete and I would recommend that you do this at least one hour prior to when your Athlete thought he might be coming out of the water. I have had athletes before that said they would be 4 hours and they were out in 3 hours and 20 minutes! You don't want them to get out of the water while you are enjoying a late morning Latte at Starbucks!

Make sure that the transition area has everything laid out for easy access. The Athlete will tell you what he wants there but this is your first opportunity to really impress. Make sure that there is a foot wash to get the sand off their feet, a towel to dry off with, sunscreen if they want it, cold water to drink and a snack in case they want to have something in their stomach before they take off. Don't worry if they don't want these things, they probably won't, but they will be impressed and confident that they have a crew with their shit together! Make sure that you get the bike mechanic to check the tire pressure and that it is where the Athlete requested then remember to put the bike in an easy gear to peddle to get started up the hill. Make sure that the helmet, gloves, glasses, shoes and socks and any riding clothes that the Athlete will be wearing are free of entanglements and are neatly laid out on a towel next to the bike.

Once your Athlete approaches the beach area your paddlers will dock a few yards away, be sure that a crew member gets the cooler of nourishments and drinks that you gave them prior to the swim start. The athlete will usually have a few words of appreciation for the paddlers, stay close to your Athlete but don't crowd him, let him go at his own pace to his bike. Once he is there he will get ready for biking, you need to be close by in case he needs something. Sometimes they will have trouble making their hands work because of the cold water and will ask for assistance, some will need the Porta-Potty, make sure you know where it is and that there is an empty one available for your Athlete. Once the Athlete is ready to go wish them luck and let em' go!

Now, this is a very technical part for the crew, you need to be ready to go NOW! Your Athlete will be climbing a hill from the start prior to getting on the road; you all need to be in the van with the cooler, wetsuit and other transition goodies loaded up. In a perfect start you should pass your Athlete as he is about half way up the hill to the road. The Athlete will know which way to go from there but after that it is the sole responsibility of the Crew to be at each and every corner and intersection of the event to tell the Athlete which way to go. I once seen an Athlete run the wrong way for 25 minutes before the crew figured it out, that cost him the race, he still finished, but not first as he would have had the crew done it right!

The race manual is incredibly well done and tells you exactly where the turns are. The one spot that is very tricky is in the first 15 kilometres from the start. An intersection in a small town is active throughout the event, cars are using it and have no idea that a race is coming through. The Athletes are warned of this and they need to proceed through the intersection safely, meaning if the light is red there will be traffic coming from the other direction. What I do is get through the intersection, park the van and when I see my Athlete coming two crew members get out into the

intersection and stop all traffic and I then wave my Athlete through safely. Probably not legal, but it certainly puts a look of confidence on the Athletes face! Now the Athlete has 70 k's to ride hard and warm up before any big hills. Depending on the Athlete, you can hand off food or water bottles at their discretion, just make sure that you try to do it on up hills, just before the crest of the hill, they are really flying at this point and you need to make the handoff when they are at their slowest speed. Again, follow the manual and you will have no problems. I recommend that you offer a hand off about every 10k's at this point, if the Athlete doesn't want anything he will just wave you off and see you up the road.

You will be playing leapfrog with your Athlete for the next 144 kilometres and again all day tomorrow, listen for them to holler what they want next and have it ready down the road. The best way to do the handoffs is as I mentioned, just before the crest of a hill, park the van, always turn on your emergency flashers, open the back door, get the bottle from your crew member (trunk monkey as my son calls them) and then head down the hill about 15 yards and when the Athlete starts to get close to you hold the bottle from the top with your arm extended and start running keeping the bottle as still as possible so that when your Athlete passes you he can easily grab it without having to slow down or stop his cadence. Don't worry, you'll miss a few times but you will get used to it. The Athlete will usually wait to get the new bottle from you before discarding the old one as no Athlete wants to have no liquid on board in case of a miss and no opportunity to hand off again for a while. You will know you have the Athletes confidence when he starts throwing half empty bottles before he gets to you. So for the rest of day one just be careful and stay in touch with your Athlete, be aware of the turns and be a step ahead in the manual, know what's coming next!

## **DANGER ZONES**

As the day wears on, your Athlete is doing fine and you have even become pretty proficient with hand offs and making sure you were at all the corners. Now you are coming towards the end of the day and the finish line looking forward to some celebration. The last 15 kilometres is what I call the danger zone, the area where not only the athlete is looking forward to the finish line but the crew is anxious to give a few high fives and call it a day, however, this is the zone where bad things can happen, missed turns, accidents and any number of other possible pitfalls. It is imperative that the crew be on top of their game throughout this zone and that the Captain even mention that we are in the danger zone and to keep sharp. Even at the finish line accidents can happen and cause injury to Athletes, crew and volunteers. Be careful and stay sharp right to the end. Once you see your Athlete coming to the finish line make sure he has a clear path for stopping and that no-one is standing around where they could be hit, the crew is responsible until your Athlete is over the line and the bike has come to a complete stop. Now you can go for hugs, high fives and pictures, just be sure you are clear of the finish line for the next crew coming in.

**SHOPPING TRIP DAY 1** – Now that the bikes are all in safely it is time to get busy again and re-organize for day 2. It is now Saturday night in Penticton and this is a long weekend, there are all kinds of distractions in town tonight. Your Athlete will probably just want to eat and go to bed. He has enjoyed or suffered through his post day massage and is in need of recovery and sleep. You need to go find some ice and get to the store for whatever it is that you wished you would have had earlier in the day. Once done with this you will need to re-pack the van and clear out the stuff you will no longer need; wetsuit and assorted swim stuff, empty bottles, garbage etc. By the time you get everything organized, had some dinner with the crew it will be time to go to bed and have a good rest before the next big day of biking 273 k's.

As tempting as it may be, try to avoid the hysteria going on all around you during one of the busiest weekends of the year in Penticton. There will be plenty of time for celebration at the end of the event. You need to be rested and sharp at 5:00 AM and the next start line! GOT ICE!

## **DAY 2 – BIKE**

This is what I call the day of no return. You will not be coming back to Penticton tonight; rather, the Athlete and crew will be finishing the bike portion of the event in Princeton and be staying there tonight and starting the run from there in the morning. Be sure to have everything packed that you will need for your stay, toothbrushes, pyjamas, extra clothes etc. Hopefully your ice is all safe in the coolers, you have plenty of water on board, the gas tank is full and you have plenty of food for the next 12 hours. The first 100 kilometres today is on most of the same roads that were biked yesterday so you and your Athlete should be pretty familiar with the corners, intersections and hand off areas. All of the Athletes will be bunched much closer together today since they all started at the same time, as opposed to day one when there was considerable separation coming out of the swim, so be careful not to bunch up with Crew vehicles on the road when you stop for handoffs. You will again be playing leapfrog with your Athlete for the entirety of the day.

Have the Race Manual close at hand and be very aware of the turns and corners upcoming, especially the one that turns left onto the main highway at Twin Lakes Golf Course as the traffic can be heavy and vehicles will be travelling at 100 k per hour. The Athletes are basically blind to the traffic as they approach this intersection and it is imperative that the crew be at the turn to assist their Athlete! Once this turn is made the Athletes will have lots of downhill in front of them, forget about any handoffs for the next 20k as they will be flying! You will still want to stick around and keep them in sight in case they have a flat or need something else; it's never a good idea not to see your Athlete for more than 10 or 12 k at a time.

There is a fruit stand at the bottom of this descent called "Bears Fruit Stand" they are fully equipped with fruit, food, ice, water etc. If you need anything, this may well be your last chance of the day. Once the Athlete has made the turn towards Hedley they will be on the busiest stretch of road of the event, traffic is moving fast, there is lots of it and it is BIG traffic! Lots of semi trucks are on this road and they are moving fast, the shoulder that the Athletes are on is narrow and there is no cheating onto the road by the athletes in this section, they can hear and feel the vehicles as they go by and they will stay as tight to the shoulder as possible through this section. Remember, only the Athletes and Crews are aware that there is a race going on, these other highway vehicles have no idea that we are there until they are right on top of us, BE CAREFUL!!

After this blitz of traffic it gets a lot calmer and the trip is a beautiful one. Stick close to your Athlete and enjoy the scenery. Watch for Deer and other wildlife throughout this and all areas and don't let your guard down in the danger zone. Everyone looks forward to the end of this long ride and you must stay disciplined right through the finish line. Tip: The finish line is off of a downhill, be sure to let a crew member out of the van at the cones which are a slight turn to the right at the middle of the downhill. Having a crew member flag their Athlete and telling them where the turn is will avoid the Athlete screaming by the cones and having to come back up the hill to make the correct turn, it's all in the details!

Most of the Athletes will remain at the finish line until all of the bikes have crossed the line. If your Athlete is in early enough this might be a good time to go and get checked into the Motel that you were assigned by the race organizers. You will be able to check in for both the crew room and the Athlete room, get the keys for both rooms and unload any gear necessary for the evening. You can then return to the finish line and re-join your Athlete and give him his room key. Now the Athlete has the option of going directly to the room for a shower and not need to be bothered checking in, or, go directly to the dinner that is supplied by the race organizers. Great pasta, go hungry and enjoy!

**SHOPPING TRIP DAY 2:** Tip: Chevron on the main drag is open 24 hours and has a good supply of groceries and ice; you will need lots of it for tomorrow! Sleep well, one day to go!

## DAY THREE – RUN

Today will be a much slower pace for the crew, however, this is the day that being prepared and thinking ahead will pay the biggest dividends. The day starts with an awesome breakfast and then everyone heads to the start line, conveniently located about 15 kilometres from town on an old secondary road. This drive to the line is a good opportunity to discuss any last minute details with your Athlete. Once at the start line everyone wishes each other good luck and the run is underway, the Athletes tend to pair up and run together for the first little while. In about two hours you will see the 21 k mark, this is where the strategies begin and the crews need to shine!

One or more of the crew members will need to be an experienced runner and be able to pace your Athlete if they want a pacer, sometimes Athletes will stick together and just want the two of them to run alone, or, they may both want to be paced. As long as the Athlete knows that you are available, they will let you know if they want you running. Always remember to reset the trip odometer of your vehicle at the start line so that you will always know what mileage you are at when the Athlete asks, and they will ask. So, everything seems to be going well and you have passed the 21k marker. Between the 21k mark and the 63 K mark is the area that I like to call the amusement zone. This is a distance equal to a complete marathon of 42 kilometres that can make a world of difference to the Athlete if you can keep them amused. Some crews do everything from setting up mock garage sales of the Athletes gear at the back of the van to running along with brilliant colourful wigs and clown shoes. When the Athlete sees these things it will always bring a smile and an upswing in their mood that can be tedious at best during this portion of the run.

I will always pack a special cooler with items that the Athlete has not seen before and is not expecting, I call this the “Novelty Cooler” and it sets up something like this. Remember the Styrofoam cooler that I told you to pick up because it would come in handy? Well here is what you do with it. Get a block of ice from the Chevron station in Princeton and keep it in the bag it comes in, put this block in the bottom of the cooler and then put your novelty items on top to keep them cold but not wet. Everytime that you leapfrog your Athlete you will go approximately 1.6k’s or one mile, once there you go to the back of your van, open the door and have your own little deli ready to go! Use the cooler lid as a serving tray and have an assortment of choices everytime that the Athlete reaches you.

As an example, you might have a Chocolate bar cut into small pieces, a couple of pieces of seedless watermelon, a handful of trail mix in a little cup and on one corner of the tray a few potato chips. Always be sure to have a fresh batch of Gatorade and a fresh drink of ice cold water along with a cold Gu opened and ready to go if that is what the Athlete wants, he will take it.

Obviously the Athlete is not going to stop and eat it all but he will be amused with the assortment and presentation. Once they grab what they want and continue running you head up the road another mile and do it again, only this time make a quick wrap out of cold steak or chicken and cream cheese and cut it into bite size pieces along with Jell-O shots, a few grapes, gummy bears and apple or orange quarters. Keep doing this about 25 times mixing up and re-using what is available. You can also use some individually wrapped cheese sticks, nugget potatoes cooked tender, not mushy, and served cold, beef jerky chunks and anything else that you think would be amusing and enjoyable. It is amazing how the Athletes enjoy these simple pleasures as the miles tick off. Don't forget to also have a few towels, just the small ones that you can dunk in your cooler and lay over the Athletes shoulders to cool them off as the afternoon sun heats up. Also, Vaseline should be kept handy so that the Athlete can grease up wherever they are chaffing or becoming uncomfortable, you don't want to have to look for things as the Athlete is waiting to go. Irritability will be setting in at this point and the temper is just a small inconvenience away!

After you have passed the half-way point of the run, the 42k mark, you can dig out those 2 bottles of Coca-Cola that you have hidden in the van underneath the barrage of Ultraman paraphernalia and set them near the back door of the van where they will be visible to the Athlete. The Athlete will see them and tell you when they want to start having some. I have always found that it is better for the Athlete to come up with the idea of when to start drinking Coke than it is for the crew member to offer, it won't take long after they see it till they want it. Once this Coke dependency has started it is very unlikely that it will end prior to the finish line!

**DON'T RUN OUT OF COKE!!** Have a "stash" under the seat or in the bottom of a cooler somewhere that you can haul out if necessary, but do not even come close to running out before the finish line. Once an Athlete has started taking coke they will not likely want anything else other than maybe water until the run is over. Coke is best served in a small plastic cup or by filling a 500 ml water bottle about ¼ full and giving it a shake. Some Athletes like their Coke completely flat while others like it half flat, most like it really cold but not with ice.

The Athlete will no longer be amused by wigs, clown shoes, novelty cooler items or dancing elephants, the only thing that will be of amusement now will be the grass chute leading to the finish line! You are now back in the danger zone and really need to keep an eye on your Athlete. This is an area where an Athlete can hit the wall, break down or just plain come unglued. You will need to determine when your Athlete needs to be talked to or encouraged, sometimes they need to be hollered at and congratulated at the same time, if they start crying, you start crying if that's what you think will work to keep them going. Most important at this point is to always be seeing your Athlete, never let them out of your sight. Now, that doesn't mean that they have to see you, sometimes they will run better through this zone if they think you're not watching them, and if you can get them through a few k's like this, all the better, as long as they are closing in on the finish line do whatever it takes!

With less than a kilometre to go there will be a turn where the crew vehicle will have to go one way and the Athlete will go another, this is done so that the crew vehicle can be parked and the crew can then run out to the finishing chute and meet their Athlete and run across the finish line with them, be sure that at this turn one crew member gets out and runs the last few hundred meters with the Athlete, you are still in the danger zone and anything can happen!

Now, get your heartstrings tuned and give yourselves a pat on the back, you finished! Enjoy!  
One thing left to do, Awards Banquet; don't miss it!!