

**Big Butt 50K**  
**July 22, 2006**  
**“A Newbie’s Perspective”**

I participated in the Big Butt 50K on July 22, 2006. This was my first “official” ultra as I had ran further than the traditional marathon distance previously but only on training runs. This would be my first “taste” of an ultramarathon and hopefully would serve as a springboard of sorts for future races. My previous running experience included several marathons and I initially approached this race as a “marathon plus 5 miles”. However, as my training progressed I realized I should be more methodical with regard to hydration, run/walk strategy, etc. Particularly if I had an interest any running longer distance races. I was confident that I was well trained for the race and my only real concern was the heat (after all this was South Carolina in July).

I rose at 4:00 a.m. on race day to begin my preparations for the race. Since I live in Charlotte, I wanted to leave by 5:00 a.m. so that I could arrive at the start (RD Claude Sinclair’s house) by 5:30 a.m. As I looked out the window and saw the sheets of rain and rolling thunder that persisted, I shrugged my shoulders. All of my previous marathons have had terrible weather with the exception of Myrtle Beach this past February, which started out with rain but cleared by the start. This must be a pattern as this is just what happened for Big Butt. In addition, the temperature was much cooler than in previous years although the humidity was still high. As we lined up, I heeded the advice of a veteran of the race and plugged my ears for the powder musket start. However, Claude departed from the tradition and simply shouted GO! and off we went.

My plan was to try and run a 10 minute mile pace, which would allow me to finish in just over 5 hours. I knew this might be a bit aggressive but as long as I finished strong and felt good I would be pleased. I wasn’t too worried about a time since this being my first 50K, as long as I finished was guaranteed a PR. I started out running with Tyler Peek from Durham. I recognized his name from other ultra race reports around NC that I had read about. Tyler mentioned that he had taken a hiatus from running a few years back and had not run this race in a while. However, since he was experienced I figured it would serve me well to run with him some. The race was going great as I felt really good and the humidity was not impacting me as much as I expected. I knew that this would likely change so I stuck with the plan to hold back as much as I could. We encountered several aid stations and got water or Gatorade as needed. The aid stations were great as there was never more than 3 miles between the “roving” stations. Had the heat been worse, this would have been especially beneficial. Even without the heat, the frequent stations seemed to make the miles go by more quickly. I stayed with Tyler until about mile 7 or so when I stopped to refill my water bottles and empty my bladder. I met Eliza Weston at this station, who was another name that I recalled seeing on past race results/reports around NC and SC.

I continued to feel good and pressed on. At mile 11, I saw Leon Harmon who I knew previously through a recent financing we worked on together. The humidity stayed high but the sun still remained behind the clouds and I was about 3 minutes ahead of schedule. As I reached the next aid station at mile 13, the volunteer informed me that it would be a loop and I would see him again at mile 20. I decided to slow my pace a little to build some reserves. A small pack of runners including Bill Keane and Andrea Stewart caught up with me around mile 15 and I ran with them for the next couple of miles. My strategy was to run halfway up the hills and walk the rest and resume running the flats and downhills. I was happy with my hydration level and had consistently been taking 1GU and 2 shot bloks each half hour along with electrolyte tablets each hour. Around mile 17 I settled in to running alone again, but noticed that my stomach was starting to turn a bit. By the next aid station, I was having some problems in that I had no appetite. This had never happened to me before and I expected this was due to eating too many sweet tasting foods (i.e., gels) and not enough salty stuff. I was not eating pretzels, etc. since I was using the sodium tablets. At the aid station, the volunteer suggested some Coke, so I drank it and grabbed a cup to

go and continued on. My stomach problems would continue off and on until around mile 25. At mile 23, I got some more Coke and some goldfish from Leon Harmon. This started to settle my stomach and I was able to pick my pace up some but still had to walk a good bit. Around mile 24, Mark Long caught up with me. I mentioned it was my first ultra and explained the stomach problem. He slowed and walked with me a bit to talk me through my tough spot. He offered some peanut butter crackers and reminded me that there were only 7 miles to go. As he started running again, I began my run/walk combination and started to feel better. At the 26.2 mark the aid station volunteer said I looked strong coming up the hill and this further boosted my confidence. At his point I knew I would finish strong although I would not hit the 10 minute pace average. My legs were surprisingly strong and I still felt well hydrated. As I approached the final aid station at mile 28, I got stung by some sort of fly on my finger. It wasn't a big deal but the swelling caused my finger to rub against a seam on my water bottle sleeve. I got some ibuprofen from the volunteer and topped off my water bottles for the last time and headed out. I knew if I ran strong, I could still finish under 5:40. At mile 29, I saw a familiar vehicle coming towards me and sure enough it was my family driving out to see how far I was from the finish. I got an instant lift and told my wife to have my daughter Ella (age 3) ready to cross the finish line with me (my younger daughter Olivia was too little and my older daughter Caroline was home sick). Around mile 30 I noticed that another runner was coming up about 200 yards behind me. His yellow shirt was easy for me to see and I resolved that I was not going to let him pass me so I pushed harder. I continued to look behind and although he was gaining on me, I was close enough to the finish that I knew he would not catch me.

As I turned into Claude's driveway, my daughter was a little scared (no doubt due to my appearance) so I pressed on and finished in 5:34:30.

After the race I collected my finisher's plaque, rinsed off and changed clothes and socialized for a while. I thanked Mark Long, Tyler Peek and others for their support and encouragement and talked with some veterans about other races and distances I should try. Two things were very clear: 1) I found myself "addicted" to this stuff and looked forward to future races and 2) the people I met are some of the most down to earth folks I have encountered.

This race is very low key and well organized. I would say that it is a great race for a first ultra but definitely prepare for heat as my conditions were atypical. I feel fortunate that I didn't have to battle the heat this year but will have to eventually as I will definitely be back!

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