

The Cradle of Liberty Adventure Races – 2 Great Races, 1 Great Cause

Father's Day weekend proved to be an exciting time in and around Philadelphia with the running of the second annual Cradle of Liberty 24 Hour Adventure Race. Proceeds went to the Gift of Life Organ Donor Program. Racers spent one sleepless night to benefit those that wait every night for a life-saving transplant. Volunteers along the race course included some who had received a transplant and were glad to be part of the race. Amongst the racers in the sprint race, was Carl Rohr. Carl received a heart transplant in 1997. He competes regularly in the US Transplant Games but took on the adventure race to further demonstrate that transplants work to restore people to health.

As a semi-urban 85-100 mile race, the Cradle of Liberty 24 Hour Adventure Race proved to be a fast and exciting event that is looking to become a northeast classic. With regional powerhouses competing for entry into the USARA National Championship as well as sponsor money toward their registration, the start of the race was a virtual who's who of adventure racing from this part of the country.

Team Eastern Mountain Sports (Jen Schultis, John Hartley, and Will Hawkins) was the team to beat, coming off of a recent win at the Appalachian Extreme. Team HTHC/Unitron Hearing (Joe Brautigam, Erin Olafsen, and Kristoffer Nielson) was well stacked to take advantage of their world-class orienteering skills. Team ARFE (Chris Rice, David Hulme, and Dianna Ineman) came with solid all around racing skills and knew that they would finish in the top 5 but would need a dose of luck to win. Team Genesis Adventures (Brian Duncanson, Joan Hunter, and Mike Halovatch) and Team GOALS-ARA (Bruce Wong, Kristen Dieffenbach, and Tom Curtis) were both fast teams with a lot of local knowledge.

Surrounded by history, the teams crossed cobblestone streets and stood face to face with some of our country's original adventurers. The first checkpoint, Betsy Ross House, in fact, was manned by none other than Betsy Ross herself. The teams also made their way to the Liberty Bell and the Constitution Center before traveling to the Valley Forge National Historic Park. Nighttime orienteering through fields of wheat to the confused looks of the local inhabitants, a huge deer herd, saw the elite teams working to their strengths.

Team Eastern Mountain Sports and Team HTHC/Unitron Hearing had put a couple hour lead over the rest of the field coming into the dark zone before the river paddling section. While the nighttime gave them time to rest, the temperature dropped significantly. The transition area looked like a giant barbecue with foil wrapped baked potatoes strewn about as teams used their survival blankets to try to preserve body heat.

Just before sunrise, teams prepared to enter the 16 mile paddling section, with its three dam portages that had forced the dark zone. The majority of the section was flat, which required the teams to have to use a lot of power. The final stretch contained a short rapids section that had the river coming over the bow of more than one canoe.

Team ARFE was the first off the water and working hard to cut into the lead established by Team Eastern Mountain Sports and Team HTHC/Unitron Hearing. The transition back to mountain bike was quick and the teams were headed to the first zoo in the country. The speed of the elite teams again required a time credit.

Teams that arrived after security opened the gates had to locate the living emblem of our nation, the Bald Eagle. Teams left the zoo and headed toward the intense mountain biking section of 15 miles of steep inclines, rocky trails, and screaming descents. The trail system in the Wissahickon

Creek Park is as challenging as any the country. To further add to the experience, GOALS ARA partnered with Outward Bound to include a 30 foot rappel in the middle of the park. The trails proved so challenging that the local expertise of Team GOALS ARA enabled them to pass all of the elite teams and cross the finish line before everyone else. The loss of one of their teammates to illness prevented them from taking advantage of this, and the fact that the lead teams had developed such a strong lead.

Look for Team Eastern Mountain Sports (finish time 13:01), Team HTHC/Unitron Hearing (13:28), and Team ARFE (14:51) to be in the thick of the battle for the USARA National Championship.

While the 24 hour race was in progress and the teams were taking to the water, another swarm of adventure athletes was forming. Teams were assembling for the beginning of the Cradle of Liberty Sprint Adventure Race. This six hour race shared much of the same course as the 24 hour race.

Thirty-six teams took to the Schuylkill River at the start of the race. They completed a 5 mile paddling course up and down the river, encircling the Red Bull buoys that served as markers. They then mounted their bikes and headed to the Philadelphia Zoo and Wissahickon Creek Park.

Both groups of racers found inspiration as they encountered each other along the course. The energy of the sprint racers gave a jolt to the teams that had been pushing through the night. Likewise, the sprint racers were excited to see the more experienced racers, with their honed skills and physical abilities.

Outward Bound played a big role in creating the excitement for the sprint racers. They allowed them to use their 200ft zip-line that came off of the tree house/rappel tower. While the lead teams used strategy and only had the required one teammate execute the zip-line, later teams could not pass up the wahoo event and all members of the team took the ride.

Using just topographical maps, the teams located orienteering flags and landmarks during the 5 mile trail run. The hills of the Wissahickon Park were no less daunting on foot as they are on a bike. Teams were happy to remount their bikes and head to the finish line.

The finish line area was the perfect assembly of spectator crowds and racers that could be found. As teams came across the finish there were cheers from the assembled masses. Smiles, hugs, and high-fives were all around.

Carl Rohr's team, Second Chance, finished in 7:12. As his first adventure race, he was just happy to cross the finish line. After the race, he expressed that with some updated gear and some training, he'd do better in his next race. Way to go, Carl!

Top finishing Sprint Race Teams included: Co-ed/3: Team Extreme Golds: 4:06 (Maureen Solomon, Drew Walker, Ernie Neve). Team Extreme I: 4:19 (John Ciganik, Cara Maria Cenera, Andrew Macken). Team Marileslius: 4:56. Co-ed/2: Nerdquist: 4:13, Sutliff Hummer: 4:40. Late Again: 5:01. Male/2: Lolo Buggah's: 3:24, Deep Trouble: 4:56, UQRC: 5:10. Female/3: Team Out of Training: 4:49, MAD: 5:21, Team Practically Queer: 5:41. Female/2: Girls Gone Wild: 4:40. Male/3: Are You There God, its Me Margaret?: 5:18