

HIGH COUNTRY RUNNING

The people who help us become more: Part One

BY JAY BOWERS
Special to the Daily Sun

At mile 88 of the Run Rabbit Run 100 in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, I was frustrated.

I had gone into the race with a primary goal of finishing 100 miles, but I also had a stretch goal: finish in under 30 hours and earn the race’s gold buckle.

After more than 26 hours on my feet, I was 16 minutes behind the pace I needed. We’d endured torrential rain, hail and lightning through the night. The trails were muddy, I was cold and wet, and I had already climbed more than 15,000 feet, with plenty of miles still ahead.

I’ll be honest — I thought the sub-30 goal was slipping away. My pacer, fellow Flagstaff runner Adam Stepanovic, apparently wasn’t interested in my assessment. He asked questions. He gave me the data. He did the math. He reminded me of the training I’d done and the fitness I’d built. And when I expressed doubt, he didn’t argue with me or offer some grand motivational speech. He simply reminded me that pain and discomfort weren’t optional at this point. Giving in to them would mostly just prolong them.

Then, as great pacers sometimes do, he set a pace he knew it would take and seemed to assume I would follow.

So I did.



COURTESY

The people beside us

I’ve thought a lot about those final miles since the race.

Running can look like an individual sport. Our names appear on our bibs and beside our finishing times. We run our own miles, experience our own discomfort and ultimately have to put one foot in front of

the other ourselves.

But I’m not sure any of us accomplish much entirely on our own.

Long before I arrived in Steamboat, Laurel Lippard of Paragon Athletics in Flagstaff had been helping me prepare for that moment.

I’ve known Laurel for well over a decade, but this was my

first experience being coached by her. What makes her coaching special is difficult to capture in a training log.

She starts with the person.

She wanted to understand where I was starting, what I wanted to accomplish and why it mattered to me. From there, she built my training incre-

mentally. Each week, after reviewing what I’d done, how it went and the notes I’d sent her, she would build the next week.

There wasn’t one magical workout that prepared me to run 100 miles. Instead, there were months of small stretches beyond what I had done before.

Somehow, Laurel made that process fun. I think that’s partly because it’s obvious that she genuinely enjoys helping athletes discover what they’re capable of.

By race day, I was better prepared than I’d ever been for a 100-miler.

But preparation only gets you to the starting line.

A dream team

From the moment I signed up for Run Rabbit Run, I knew who I hoped would pace me.

Nate Kirkland joined me around mile 44 and stayed through mile 70. Those miles included some of the worst weather of the race — torrential rain, hail, lightning and eventually a lot of mud.

Nate helped me manage all the little things that can become big things in a 100-mile race: nutrition, hydration, electrolytes, pace and mindset.

Despite the conditions, we stayed remarkably close to the plan. At one point, we were nearly half an hour ahead of the 30-hour schedule. By

the time Nate handed pacing duties to Adam at mile 70, the weather, terrain and accumulated fatigue had taken most of that cushion back.

We left that aid station about two minutes behind schedule.

Adam took over from there.

Nate and Adam were my dream team from the moment I entered the race, but not simply because they’re great runners. They’re the kind of people anyone would be fortunate to have in their life — on or off the trail. Each has that certain something that brings out the best in other people. Being around them makes you want to show up a little better yourself.

I don’t think that’s an accident.

(Story continued next week in Part Two).

GRATEFUL TO HAVE CALLED FLAGSTAFF HOME FOR 36 YEARS, JAY BOWERS IS ENDLESSLY FASCINATED BY THE EXTRAORDINARY POTENTIAL IN EACH OF US — AND BY HOW BIG GOALS HAVE A WAY OF REVEALING IT, ESPECIALLY WHEN WE KEEP PUTTING ONE FOOT IN FRONT OF THE OTHER AND HAVE GREAT PEOPLE BESIDE US.

RACHEL SMITH IS A MOM TO TWO WONDERFUL GIRLS, A PROFESSIONAL RUNNER, AND FEELS LUCKY TO CALL FLAGSTAFF “HOME.” SHE IS ALSO THE COORDINATING EDITOR OF THIS COLUMN AND WOULD LOVE FOR YOU TO CONTRIBUTE TO IT BY SENDING YOUR RUNNING-RELATED STORY TO HER AT RACHSCHNEID18@GMAIL.COM.

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