

2014 Icarus Florida UltraFest – Race Report by Carey Clarkson

Icarus Florida UltraFest-Race report from a volunteer's perspective

Amazing, Inspirational, Emotional, Tiring, are just a few of the adjectives used to describe my first experience at a 6 day ultra event.

When I first heard that Andrei and Claire Nana were putting together this event I jumped at the chance to volunteer. It just so happened to coincide with my having a month off of work and so the timing could not have been better. I could not wait to do all that I could to help so many truly awe inspiring runners reach that final countdown on day 6.

Prior to this race I had volunteered at many races over the past two years honing my skills by channeling Susan Anger. My first time "crewing" was several years ago at AO with Tammie Wanning. I was completely useless and didn't have a clue what to do. From that point forward I kept going to events watching and learning from all the volunteers but especially Susan Anger and Elizabeth Stupi. Their dedication, efficiency, professionalism at their aide stations taught me a lot. I would also read their after race reports talking about the aide stations, what worked, what didn't, etc. Without them I could not have been as productive as I was at the Icarus event.

I will also say that without the help of others such as Alex, Una, Jodi, and Claire, things would not have run as smoothly as they did. We all worked together like a well oiled machine. They watched the aide station for me so that I could get a few hours sleep or to go and do the laundry for the runners. I in turn ran the aide station through the night. I quickly found out that the middle of the night, usually around 3 ish in the morning, was a very busy time at the aide station.

Michael Gillan and I would get very busy taking care of injuries and/or blisters around mid morning. Runners wanting coffee, a hot breakfast, and just constant encouragement around this time. I realized quickly that it was so important to keep the energy up at 3 a.m. as it was at 3 p.m., even more so. Runners coming through very fatigued, practically sleep running, needed that energy to help get them through till day light. A couple runners, Michele being one, came close to breaking down. I sometimes wondered if he would make it to the end. I kept encouraging Michele, working on his feet, giving him hugs, using our translation apps on our phones to communicate so that I could give him words of encouragement. I found out that Michele does these events to honor his mother who passed away giving birth to his youngest sibling. His winning the coveted 3rd place position was a tribute to his mother, to all of his family who have supported Michele in his running endeavors. Michele became very close to my heart and I know we will forever be friends.

We had runners from across the globe. Some who spoke English and some who didn't. One thing I learned, running has its' own universal language. There were no language barriers. There were no race, gender barriers. All runners were equal. We quickly went from being strangers to being one big family looking after each other 24/7. Even the runners would look after me, just a volunteer, wanting to ensure I slept, that I ate, that I took care of myself while they were continually running into day 3, then 4, then 5, etc. I was flabbergasted!

The final day of the race was so emotional. Having the other runners show up for their 24, 12, 6, or 3 hour run gave new energy to the event and to the runners who were plowing through their last day on the track. The mood was electric, the runners inspired by each other, everyone encouraging each other. It was amazing. That final hour and half was full of hugs, high fives, tears of joy, tears of pain, tears of just knowing that the race was over! There were pats on the back as the runners passed each other. That last hour was more a celebration than anything else. The race was coming to a close. Records had been broken. The race was a success. We had all made new friends who were now more family than friend. After being with each other for 6 days straight it was almost time to say goodbye. As tired as we all were, goodbye was very hard. A part of me didn't want to leave but I had my other family to get back to.

This 6 day event is one that I will never ever forget. I have learned so much. Been inspired in ways that words can not describe. Met some of the world's best runners and definitely honed my skills as a volunteer. We helped each other, we taught each other, we celebrated together. I feel like my life has more direction now and I would not have missed it for the world. To say I am looking forward to next year is putting it mildly!!