

# Runners Come From Far and Wide for the OLD DOMINION 100

by Pat Botts, O.D. President



Serge England-Arbona en route to victory in his first 100-mile. Photo by Scott Owens.

Fairgrounds. Right on Court Street, Cross Main Street, left on Commerce Street, right on Massachusetts Heights, and straight on Ox Road to the County Fair Grounds. Before every race, before every runner is given a number, one of the last things you do is sign your name and print your name on a release and waiver right under the last six lines which are triple bold and say in part; *I have received, read, and understood the performance rules and instruction booklet and agree to abide by them.* We've been doing this longer than anyone else in the game today. Cross-country endurance running is a multidiscipline sport with a few, necessary rules. Competitors are held responsible for their own sportsmanship as well as that of their crew.

#### *Serge England-Arbona adds:*

On a muggy, foggy morning 120 runners, 14 women among us, start The Old Dominion 100 Mile at 4:00 a.m. Just a few of us have flashlights. At sunrise I reach the first trail with another runner coached by Lisa Smith Batchen and her husband, Jay. Darin Worts and I have planned to run the first 50 miles together. We start passing people slowly, in eighth and ninth place overall after 20 miles. We eventually return to the dirt roads, trying to keep a slow but steady pace, trying not to get lost, and keeping a close eye on the ribbons, when we finally reach the first crew station and with its amazing organization. Right before the aid station, one of the crew members asks us what we need to eat and drink, transmitting this

information by walkie-talkies to coach Lisa and Jay and the rest of the crew, so we can fly by the aids station with almost no stopping.

During the next 15 miles of hard and painful trails we are in fifth and sixth place, respectively. Then in my "daredevil, billy goat fashion," I go on my own to catch up with the fourth-place Mike Wardian (a 2:30 marathoner, the elite of Lisa Smith's team). After passing him on a downhill, my adrenalin goes sky-high; I am now second overall at the 40-mile aid station. After a quick stop, my body begins to break down, with cramps, diarrhea, and six painful stops to the bathroom. I make it to mile 50, where I refill completely with sports drinks, bananas, electrolytes, Snickers, and oranges. Upon learning that I am 12 minutes behind the lead I decide it's going to be now or never to start speeding up.

At mile 55, my world is fired up and my mental state is charged up to maximum after taking the lead. Twenty miles later, after holding a hard and fast pace, I have a 10-minute lead, but my legs are dead and my body is trashed. At this point I say I'm ready to give up, but I am feeling so happy that I have been leading this awesome race, my first 100-miler.

For the last few hours, the coach Lisa has been yelling at me, "Just get through those two big mountains!" and gives me some Advil, salt, and three bottles of water. Extremely heavy, I feel like a mule carrying too much weight. I will be doing this

section alone, while others have a pacer. After an incredible two-and-a-half hours through those two mountains (13 miles), I'm still leading the race by three minutes. My coach refuses to give me my flashlight, telling me I *have* to finish with the sunlight! At mile 91, Lisa tells me that I only have a lead of a few minutes. I want to cry!

The last nine miles on a concrete road, I am constantly turning my head, checking behind me, like Linda Blair in *The Exorcist*. I keep on pushing my body way over the limit. At this point I cannot eat or drink anything; my breathing is like that of a panting dog! The fairgrounds are right ahead; looking quickly behind, and with nobody in sight, out-of-the-blue comes some energy from somewhere. I can't fathom it, but an excitement bursts through me. I throw my bottle and fanny pack on the ground. In a blasting the last mile in eight minutes, beating the sunlight, I finish in one of the five best-finish times in the history of this race, 14 minutes ahead of the second finisher. I have been "tricked" by my coach for the last 15 miles pressing me to break 17 hours. It works, as I run 16:54. This Old Dominion 100 Mile cross-country one-day running race was the ultimate sports experience for me, and winning was an unexpected dream!