

SEPTEMBER 15, 2001: OLANDER PARK 24 HOUR, SYLVANIA, OHIO

Runners Find Their Pain Bearable

by Dan Saevig, *The Toledo Blade*

For 24 consecutive hours, they circled Sylvania's Olander Park with the understanding that their pain would eventually subside. They ran, knowing the sore feet that puffed up like a Danish fresh from the baker's oven would soon return to normal size. They walked, too, aware that the blisters, which painted the pastry with a reddish, pink frosting, would slowly fade from view. From shortly after noon on Saturday, September 15, until the same time the following day, the 148 men and women participating in the United States Track & Field Association's ninth annual 24-Hour Run national championship mentally prodded their cramped leg and back muscles to keep tracing and retracing steps around the 1.0910-mile oval course.

Tracing and retracing, thinking and rethinking—onward they went. Their pain would disappear. Their pain was temporary. For one full day, they pushed ahead, most wondering when and if the greater hurt—the anguish felt in America's collective heart as a result of the previous Tuesday's terrorist attacks—would ever go away. "We're out here running and we're hurting really bad," said Tara Ott, 20, a junior from Berkey, Ohio, majoring in education at the University of Toledo. "But the pain we're feeling can't be anything like what those families are going through in New York and Washington. I can't comprehend that kind of pain."

The 24-hour run opened with a prayer and a moment of silence in memory of the thousands missing and presumed dead. Participants and their families were brought to tears by ultrarunner Adam Bookspan, who played *The Star Spangled Banner* on the trumpet he normally uses with the Florida Philharmonic Orchestra accompanied by the voice of Fenny



Roberts, an ultrarunner from Salem Oregon. The race route resembled a Fourth of July parade. American flags were everywhere, with friends and family

members waving red, white and blue and shouting words of encouragement to the perspiration-soaked athletes. "What has happened has made everyone pull together and realize what they have," said Ott, her head wrapped in a small flag. What many have is a passionate love for their country and their sport. "Everyone is running harder and stronger because they can," said Pat Ripka who dressed in a patriotic cap and pants to cheer on her husband, Danny. "We're so sad about what has happened. We really are fortunate to live in a free country."

The Ripka's drove 11 hours from Minneapolis to participate in the race. Some 30 other ultrarunners, including a couple who work at the Pentagon, were either unable to participate because of travel restrictions or chose not to because of the attack. "I really didn't know if I was up to doing the race," said Sue Ellen Trapp, 55, who flew in Toledo from Fort Myers, Florida. "But then I heard President Bush say he wanted us to get back to everyday activities to show that we were a unified country. I thought the best way to show support was to run this race." Race director Tom Falvey was overwhelmed by the support of the race and for his country. "One of the runners from New York stopped me while he was running," Falvey said. "He reached into his shorts and gave me five \$20 bills and said, 'This goes to the American Red Cross.' Then he continued running."

When the running stopped and the awards were handed out, Bookspan picked up his instrument and raised it to his lips. Surrounded by his friends in the ultrarunning community, the musician played *Taps*, in memory of those who had lost their lives. One painful race was over. The many tears said the other race had yet to reach its finish line.

Race results appear on page 55.