

## 2016 Spartathlon Report – Russell Gardham

THESE RAMBLINGS DONT GO INTO THE DEPTH THAT I RELAYED ON MY WIFE ZOE TO GET ME TO THE FINISH. ID HAVE DNFd WITHOUT HER SUPPORT.

Only attempt to read if drunk

I don't write blogs.

I entered Spartathlon 2016 and found myself as 6th reserve. Week after week I checked. Each week I'd moved up, but never got to the top. Technically, I never did get to the top. I'm told I was number 26, a clerical mix up. But I got in!

That I thought would be the closest I'd get to completing the historical race. I'd enter, but I'd definitely DNF. That in my opinion was what would happen, I needed to get things into perspective.

My feet were in horrendous condition before the event. I'd not hit the 50 mile cut off in respect to Spartathlon in any of the 3x 100 miles, I'd done in 2016. In fact, I'd RTCd in the T100 at 70 miles, telling people I was looking after my feet. Really!!

Thinking you're going to DNF and actually DNFin are 2 different things. No one told my mind, which wasn't listening to what my brain told it. Things such as:

- A. You're not ready
- B. You're feet are knackered
- C. You're training was inadequate

Well brain, you can sod off, I do have my heart telling me I can do it even if you're not listening.

Fast forward to race day. I'd do everything correct, other than put 15 dropbags together with nothing that I'd trained with. I also was wearing trainers that had 15 miles on the clock, along with 4 Garmins and my wives (Eoz) regular watch.

I was as close to you can be to preparing everything wrong. To top it off my wife dyed my desert cap a ghastly sickly green.

The race is 36 hours long and I'd need every minute of all 36 hours. 24 of those are in ridiculous temperatures. I'm from up north where we only get sun if you travel south. I definitely didn't prepare for the heat.

So what can I do that might help in this years Spartathlon? I can walk and if I'm truthful , it's my number 1 strength.

Having spent 10 years in the armed forces, I was taught to move quick for long periods of time.

The support out on the course from all nationalities was truly staggering.

Anyway, as disjointed as my thoughts are here branches itself out into my run. I knew I'd struggle from the word get go. I knew I'd be near the back pretty soon just as soon as the sun zapped my energy. I had a brilliant plan and tell everyone I'm on a run/walk strategy which wasn't entirely false as that's how I set off for the first 2/3 hours.

Unlike the rest of the team I didn't really chat to many others as I literally was near

the back and had no one to chat to.

Look away now if you hate puke. I started at mile 15.7(I checked my watch when I first puked) and finished puking at around 145 miles. That's 5 marathons of puke. But, if you are sick, then keep topping up with more food.

I arrived at mile 50 with about 3/4 minutes under the cutoff and was told by a Marshall that if I ran, at the time I was walking, he'd let me continue. That made me run in and become a F1 driver in the pit lanes where I was cooled down and fed by Zoe and watered by Jeff.

I set off like I was in a 400 metre race and was soon building a buffer for the first time in the entire event.

I'd been telling people that I'm good during the night. Well we were soon to find that out if only I'd manage not to be timed out in that first 12 hours.

True to my word, unsure how I did it, by the end of the night I think I had around a 55 minute cushion. Now here's a thing that rescued my race, between the hours of 7-9am on the 2nd day, the unusually high temperatures were replaced by a hanging mist, which allowed me to get some extra fast walking miles.

The beginning of that 2nd day of heat already saw at least 3 runners already finished. The winner had averaged 8m36s for every mile. I'm going to try that approach next year, meaning I won't have to run a 2nd day of blistering heat.

My legs weren't suffering on the uphill or downhills, quads seemed fine throughout. What was an issue was the blisters I purchased in the NDW100 and I still hadn't sorted. I thought it'd be good to set off with wet trainers. Well there had to look good so I cleaned them.

The last marathon and an half was a bit of a blur. An uphill blur. The first time I realised I might actually finish was at CP72 with a little over 10k to go. Zoe gave me a massive boost by telling me the next 5k are all downhill I managed to run as soon as I stopped crying about hurting the blisters, which were self inflicted.

With 5k left, I had 80 mins to complete and told myself to walk it in, I was in no rush now I knew I'd make it.

I hope I'm not belittling anyone else's attempt to finish, but like I said at the beginning in my head I didn't have any hope of finishing. Because of this reason I didn't apply much pressure to myself. Don't get me wrong, I wanted to finish and was constantly aware of each and every cut off.

I remember thinking at the end, every finisher, every participant, every crew member and volunteer had ran Spartathlon 2016. It's as much effort for everyone. In fact, the crews job doesn't stop at the finish. Zoe had to force me to shower. She had to feed me. Collect my things, take me to breakfast. My race ended when I kissed the bronzed feet. Zoe and crew went on for much longer.

I enjoyed every mile of the race, and always had smile on my face, apart from with a half marathon to go when I shouted at Russ and Zoe that I had 14.6 miles left.

Thanks to Darren, James, Russ, Russ, Sarah an [Eoz Rusk](#).