

## Van Halen and the Heimlich maneuver: Jackson Brill's Dirty 30 Race Report

I somehow slept well the night before an important race! That rarely happens. I usually toss-and-turn, asking myself how I manage to pass out near instantaneously every night of the year, except when I want to run as fast as I can the upcoming morning. I always conclude that the reason I fall asleep so easily most of the time is because I do not think about trying to fall asleep; I just let it happen. So then I think, "Stop thinking!" After that does not work, I think if I am thinking about not thinking or if I am truly not thinking about not thinking, because, I think, the latter is what I want. Anyway, after a few hours of trying not to think about not thinking, eventually I manage to fall into a fitful sleep before my alarm wakes me up far too early in the morning. But none of that happened the night before Dirty 30! Maybe I am just worse at thinking now that I have been in college for a while (which perhaps is an accurate portrayal of the education system in this country), but I slept more peacefully and deeply the night before an "A" race than I have in years.

After a morning of Neil Young (Canadian Adam Campbell was carpooling with us), knock-off pop tarts, fruit snacks, way too many trips to the porter-potty (probably from the knock-off pop tarts and fruit snacks), and telling someone I was not an alcoholic, the race was underway! I found myself a few seconds behind the lead pack of six guys at the start of the first climb two miles in. I managed to bridge the gap quickly once we started climbing, and had to explain to Chris Mocko why I had ghosted him when he texted me earlier in the week, had some other guy tell me how he had stalked me on Strava and Instagram, and asked current leader Brian Condon if he could please slow the pace down just a little bit. After cresting the hill four miles in at the back of the lead pack (severely out of breath from all the conversations I had been having), I took the lead on the technical descent into Aid 1, because running downhill slowly offends my sensibilities.

Coming out of Aid 1, where I stopped to fill up a bottle with Coke, I found myself in fourth place with the leaders about 20 seconds ahead. I caught Brian around a mile later and ran alongside him for a bit. Since I run with Brian occasionally in Boulder with the Rocky Mountain Runners, the vibe was friendly between us; it felt like we were working together at that (early) point in the race, which certainly made the exertion level feel easier. He was moving a touch slower than my legs wanted to go, so I bid him adieu and bridged the gap up to the two leaders: my Salomon teammate Brett Hales and the social-media-stalker-guy, both of whom have more of a track/road background than myself, as it turns out. We ran along mostly in silence for the next few miles, with me taking the lead on the short, techy, descents while they kept the pace honest on the flatter and buffed out sections. At mile eleven, both Brett and the stalker pulled away from me on a gradual descent into Aid #2 and I lost sight of them among the hordes of early starters we were passing. As I was pouting soon after the aid station, wishing I too had the ability to run a 4-min mile\*, something amazing happened: I caught back up! Thank goodness that steep uphill power-hiking is the opposite extreme of hamstering around a track at Mach-1 on the spectrum of fast pedestrianism.

\*(disclaimer: I do not know Brett and stalker's PRs; implying they have broken 4:00 for a mile was done for dramatic purposes to help the reader appreciate how much they would smoke me in a short distance track/road race).

Back with the leaders, I was licking my chops for the next section: a 2 mile technical descent to Aid Station #3 at mile 17. As soon as the grade of the trail started tipping down, I opened up my wings and did my best Cordis Hall impression (<https://www.strava.com/athletes/3364767/segments/leader>), jitterbugging my legs over and

through the innumerable rocks in the path faster than Eddie Van Halen can play notes on the guitar. Coming out of Aid 3, my aggressive descent had paid off; I had a two minute lead as I started the longest climb of the course, and I was determined to not relinquish it. However, despite running strongly, the run up and then eventually down to Aid 4 (mile 25) was a drag. I think being over halfway done but still too far away to feel the pull of the finish line contributed to this low point of the race, not to mention that this stretch mostly ascends, putting me at odds with my BFF, gravity. Luckily, Aid 4 had a crew of the Rocky Mountain Runners (the most fantastic and wonderful running group in the history of ever) volunteering, who filled up both my bottles, dumped gloriously frigid water on my head, and provided me with infinite stoke all within the span of a few seconds. The best NASCAR pit crews should take notes on RMR's aid station ability; it is simply a work of art.

Windy Peak. Everyone I talked about Dirty 30 with prior to the race warned me about this climb. The way it was described by prior runners could have been taken right out of a Stephen King novel. It was a difficult climb, but I was not questioning my will to live by the top or checking my GPS watch every few seconds dumbfounded by the lack of progress I was making (I actually was not wearing a GPS watch so it would have been hard to do this regardless). In fact, it was enjoyable. The variable nature of this stretch, switching back and forth from running to hiking, sun to shade, rock to dirt, while exhausting the last few reserves of my uphill ability, had me smiling internally (although from the outside it probably looked as if I was choking and in desperate need of the procedure formerly known as the "Heimlich maneuver").

The rest of the race passed in a blur. I bombed down Windy with a comfortable lead (the out-and-back section to the summit is very helpful when trying to gauge the distance you have on the field), sang along with The Who at the final aid station, and zoomed into the finish line, conjuring up a sprint that would have made my high school coaches proud (or angered them since I would perpetually get out-kicked in nearly every race back then).

4 hours and 35 minutes and 52 seconds is 16,552 seconds. It is also 993,120 jiffies (an actual unit of measurement that is  $1/60^{\text{th}}$  of a second; you have been using it wrong this whole time) but that is not the point. The point is, 16,552 seconds is a long time for things to go wrong, especially when attempting to run at maximum velocity over rocky terrain against swift competition. The fact that everything went absolutely perfectly (with a cherry on top) for the entire length of the race is a bit mind-blowing. I care a lot about running (a shrink would probably say too much), so to have a "perfect day", when it mattered most, is extremely gratifying. The satisfaction I feel from running to my absolute limit at Dirty 30 is one of the coolest emotions I have ever experienced and I do not take the day I had lightly. Thanks Dirty 30 for putting on an awesome race; I feel honored to be the 2018 Men's Champion!



