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Bay to Breakers: some weirdness by the bay

If you asked any of the 100,000-plus runners in Sunday's Bay to Breakers race in San Francisco who won the event they participated in, only about half would be able to tell you that Ed Eyestone crossed the tape first in 34:32.5.

Why, do you ask?

Because nobody cared.

This seven-mile course, which weaves around the downtown skyscrapers and up to Golden Gate Park, attracts few serious runners.

I happened to be in the Bay area this weekend, and I was so amazed by this sporting spectacle, I immediately filed this report when I got back.

You had to be there.

Upon reaching the Polo Fields to pick up my friends at the finish line, the site before my eyes was reminiscent of the Woodstock concert. Multitudes of people (an estimated crowd of 200,000 spectators alone) were scurrying about like a colony of ants.

Some were already beginning to indulge in alcohol, even though it was still 10 a.m. Others were laughing it up or trying to stay warm on a foggy and brutally cold San Francisco morning.

The runners (maybe walkers is a more appropriate word) that were still streaming across the finish line were a sight to behold and the best free entertainment around.

Get a load of some of these personalities to be found at the race:

•a man, naked with the exception of a cardboard box wrapped around his middle, labeled SPAM.

•scores of people who appeared as though they had forgotten to change their clothes after prom night.

•a giant banana.

•12 people (that I counted) who donned gorilla suits.

•a ballerina.

•a fruit basket representing Fruit of the Loom underwear.

A road race quickly becomes quite an amazing spectacle when the majority of entrants include college students (rumored to be 12 percent of the field by the race brochure) and misplaced Yuppies looking for an excuse to party.

The San Fransisco Examiner, the daily newspaper that has sponsored the race for every one of its 75 years, is to be applauded for its efforts. The run had only 1,000 entrants in 1974 and 75,000 last year.

From the Sidelines

by Joe Arndt & Dennis Fernandes

If we could only come up with enough of those crazies for next month's Butte to Butte race in Eugene . . .

□ □ □

Friendships are common in sports, but when losing becomes habit, those ties are often tested. On the other hand, there are teams that just won't let a loss — or a number of losses — bother them. The intramural softball team I was on was one such example.

I've always placed a lot of emphasis on winning and have been known to be a bit too competitive. But this team taught me that losses can still be fun — even when you can almost predict when it's going to be one of those long days.

Monday was a long day.

Led by player-coach Mark Brenner, our team, Hard Bats & Softballs, just completed a season of ups and downs. And like each intramural playoff team that doesn't win the championship, the season ends with a defeat.

"We'll just go out and see what we can do," Brenner said, attempting to catch a pre-game toss with a glove that always seemed too small.

Ugh. I hated it when he said that. It meant he didn't think we had a chance.

"Brenner," I said, disgruntled. "Would you shut up. We can win. Just play hard and quit being so damn negative."

"OK, OK. We'll go out and win it," Brenner replied, attempting to amend. I think he knew it irritated me when he said things like that.

See, I thought we could win; I like to win. Brenner, on the other hand, is out for fun; I'm out for fun, too; but fun comes a lot easier when we win.

We lost to SAE II. Don't ask me the score (they blew us out.) The SAE's pounded the ball like we'd done all season, while we failed to get enough hits and misplayed too many balls. At times, it was hilarious; sometimes, it was frustrating.

When it was over, we joked that we really didn't lose, we just ran out of time. We reenacted plays where we errored, trying to come up with explanations. And we kept asking Brenner when he was going to buy the beer.

As the team was leaving, Greg was being asked when he was leaving for his free agent tryout in San Diego. Brian was talking about a paper he'd just finished writing. Howard said something about another Phillies baseball jersey he'd bought. John asked me about some girl in our American Studies class.

As I sat on the grass changing my shoes, noticing how the clouds had rolled in ending a week-long stretch of sunshine, I just kind of soaked up the friendships. No matter how bad we'd lost this season, as soon as the games had ended, anything derogatory said on the field was erased.

I'd never had so much fun on a losing team.

Some tips for people who want to enter the world of backpacking

By Mike Ostrom
Of the Emerald

Do you need to get away from it all? Are you seeking adventure? If so, backpacking may be the sport for you.

Some of the reasons people don't go backpacking are because they feel it's too expensive, difficult or discomfortable, says Bill Hazen, a program assistant for the University Outdoor Program in the EMU. However, most people who try backpacking seem to enjoy it, he says.

The popularity of backpacking has risen rapidly in the past half-century. From 1940 to 1975, there was a $400-million increase in the sales of backpacks alone.

Here are some tips to help you join the craze.

Skill

Backpacking requires very little skill. Knowing how to walk is basically the only prerequisite, and for the determined backpacker, that isn't even a necessity.

"To practice for long hikes, it's best to start with day hikes, work your way up to weekend trips, then four-day trips and then bingo, you're there," Hazen says. "Also, it's nice to have some knowledge of first aid."

Ethics

"The wilderness ethic is to leave no trace of where you've been," Hazen says. There are many ways to ensure this, he says.

Hazen says some ways to preserve nature are to:

•leave the wood alone, and bring your own stove fires.

•avoid taking shortcuts.

•use existing campsites.

•dispose human waste 6-8 inches in the ground.

•use biodegradable soap.

•wear flat soles around the camp to prevent leaving tracks that cause erosion.

•take out of camp whatever you take in with you.

Gear

Proper clothing is essential to protect yourself from the elements, Hazen says. "Wool clothing is excellent for staying warm, and a 60-percent-cotton/40-percent-nylon jacket makes a good shell that breaks the wind," he says.

Caps are important for protecting your head at higher elevations and for preventing body heat from escaping on cold nights, he says.

Other important gear includes tents, sleeping bags, a stove and food. Also, to protect yourself from the rain, ponchos work well as do most any kind of rain gear. For the thrifty backpacker, however, a simple garbage bag may suffice.

Boots

There are many different styles of boots, which range from lightweight to heavy-duty. One thing to look for when purchasing a boot is whether it has stitching where the sole and leather are connected. Injection molding, which is glue, is not as sturdy as a double stitch, Hazen says.

Hazen says he bought his boots for $70 on sale, and he recommends taking advantage of sales. He says sales on boots often appear toward the beginning of winter.

Proper fitting of a boot is also important, Hazen says. In order to avoid blisters, your heel should come up only one-eighth of an inch when you have your boots on, he says.

If you do get a blister, moleskin works well to cool the hot spot on your foot, Hazen says.

While trying on your boots, you should walk around and kick and twist your foot while someone holds your boot stationary, he says. Because leather will mold to your feet, it's better for boots to fit snugly rather than loosely, he says.

Most stores offer a trial period to test the boots, so if you are not sure if your boots fit properly, you can return them for a refund.

The best way to break-in boots quickly is to pour a few handfuls of hot water into the boots, put on dry socks and walk around in the boots all day, he says. The water softens the leather and allows the boot to stretch to fit your foot, he says.

Packs

As with choosing boots, comfort and quality are important in choosing a backpack. The backpack's stress points, where it is pulled at the most, should be double-stitched, Hazen says.

The shoulder straps should be firm, yet comfortable, he says, and better backpacks have hip belts, reinforced tabs, reinforced string holes and frames made from aircraft aluminum.

There are external and internal frame packs, nylon packs that are coated with a temporary water repellent, large packs and smaller day packs. But whatever you decide to buy, make sure it is comfortable, he says.

The hip belt of your backpack should be fastened around the top of your hips, he says. If it goes down lower, the belt will not fasten tight and will rub against your stomach, he says.

"A good pack will ride above your shoulders, and most of the weight will be on your hips," Hazen says. "Your hips are closer to your center of gravity and can hold more weight than your shoulders."

Big backpacks cost about $140, and backpack covers cost $15-$20. A garbage bag may be substituted for the cover. But if you plan on using garbage bags, bring extras because they tear easily.

Sleeping Bags

The distance between you and the air, or the loft of the bag, is a major factor in a sleeping bag, Hazen says. Summer bags have a 4-inch loft and are good only for temperatures above about 40 degrees, he says. While winter bags have a 10-inch loft and are good from 0 to -30 degrees.

If you want to camp in cold areas, but don't want to buy an extremely thick bag, there are other things you can do to conserve body heat, he says.

One option is to wrap a tarp around your body, which creates a vapor barrier to keep you warmer. But because your sweat is not allowed to escape, you can get a little clammy, he says.

Another option is to place a few blankets or a cushion on the ground. This decreases the amount of heat loss into the ground as well as makes for more comfortable sleeping, Hazen says.

Shelters

Shelters can range from a tarp strung between trees to an expensive heavy-duty tent.

Good tents have rain flys, which decrease the chance of rain seeping into the tent, Hazen says. But tents are coated to keep water out only on the bottom, he says.

"If tents are coated on the top, the tent is not able to breath, and no perspiration can get out," Hazen says.

"Moisture is trapped inside and if you bump the tent in the morning you'll find that the perspiration that condensed on the top of the tent, falls down and gets your bag all wet," he says.

Two-person tents weigh from 3 to 4 pounds, and four-person tents weigh around 6 pounds, he says. Some tents are designed for special conditions such as heavy wind, he says. "Tents are very expensive," Hazen says, "so you should look around quite a bit before you buy one."

A first-aid kit, food and a stove also should be included on a backpacking trip, Hazen says.

The Outdoor Program has a list of equipment recommendations as well as lists for upcoming events and excursions, which should help you get started.

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