

# Spotlight...

## That laurel wreath looks good on you, Anna

Anna Thornhill lay relaxed on a stretcher at Shea Stadium. Her husband, Simon Nuchtern, was holding her raised feet and legs as she recounted her thoughts and experiences after one of the most extraordinary and yet most exhausting adventures she had ever gone through. Although she was weary and uncertain how her muscles were going to react, Anna lay there with a smile on her face and a laurel wreath on her head. She had just finished first woman in the USA 100-Mile Championship this past weekend.

"It was very grueling," she said. "I have immense respect for someone like Donna Hudson. It's beyond me how she could run 15 hours (when Donna won the race in 1983 in 15:13 for a then world's fastest 100-miler by a woman) in a race that took me 18 hours. But it is a very satisfying experience because you go through every gamut of emotion.

"People talk about hitting the wall. There's no comparison between a marathon and a 100-miler (Anna, 43, has a marathon PR of 2:58). In a 100-miler," she continued "you have 20 to 30 walls to break through. And each time you know they'll come up again. About 85-90 miles is one of the toughest walls. You're so close and yet you're also at your most exhausted. The battle goes on."

Anna characterized the 100-miler as "a character builder... and test of discipline." She smiled a tired smile: "You realize you're in pretty good shape. You start to communicate with your body. You have better respect for it... I did this race two years ago but had a bladder problem. I realized it could happen again. My legs are strong. I have endurance. But my bladder is my achilles heel under mental and physical stress. So I didn't eat anything but ice cream two days before the race. I didn't want any pressure on the bladder.

"So I was surprised when at 80 miles I had a tremendous amount of diarrhea. I thought there was nothing in me. But the bladder held up." As Simon eased her legs down, Anna recounted: "As I went along in the 100-miler I was thanking my body for holding me up — my feet, my legs, etc. I had some stomach cramps, possibly from the lemon and water drink I was taking — but yogurt was particularly good for that."

Asked if things got so bad at any point that she had considered stopping, Anna frowned, shook her head slightly and said: "At 40 miles there was a particularly bad wall. I decided I would quit. I told myself: 'Who needs this? It's too hard, too painful.' I told Simon I was going to quit. I was at about a nine-minute pace. He said: 'Why don't you slow down?' I did and I never felt like quitting again.

"But there were other wars. Should you walk? Should you slow down? I tried to sort out the problems of my life. I tried to meditate. These sound like ideal things to do. But I was too busy monitoring my body. Too concerned with whether I would make a second loop around or not. Simon was my inspiration so I dedicated the run to our lives together. I dedicated 11 loops to each of my 11 cats. I thought of a friend, Ann Bar-Tour, who survived cancer. She's come from lying in bed to walking around after the doctors told her husband, Ammons, to make funeral arrangements for her. I dedicated a few loops to her.

When I was feeling OK I even dedicated a loop to you, Eddie, for persuading me to run the race. But when I was feeling bad I wasn't dedicating anything to you," Anna said with a wry grin.

Asked now that she had completed this extraordinary adventure if she planned to try another ultra, Anna answered: "No." Then she paused and said: "I feel like people who finish their first marathon and say never again (A lot of them, though, eventually do many more marathons). I will digest this one first."

Then with a mischievous grin, Anna added: "One thing I know. I'll walk around my neighborhood with this laurel wreath on my head and carrying this beautiful trophy." She explained: "The people in the neighborhood (south Village) are very supportive of my running. But they expect me to beat Grete Waitz all the time. You should win, they tell me! Coming in second or third or winning an age-group isn't enough for them. This victory will make them very proud."

Anna said she appreciated all the encouragement and cheers of the spectators and her fellow runners along the way even though she didn't acknowledge them. "I do hear and appreciate people cheering me on. It's not something I



Anna Thornhill shows the form that led to victory.

ignore. But my style is that I don't want to be distracted. I don't want to be taken off stride or concentration. But I do genuinely appreciate my fellow runners' support.

Anna uncharacteristically, as she heard the bell signaling her final one-mile loop, waved to the crowd, smiled and did a little skip. "On that final loop I ran to all the people in the parking lot who had sponges and water and thanked them all. I thanked the scorers. I was sad that I didn't have enough confidence to buy champagne to pour into my bucket (the winner's trophy) for the scorers.

Asked what running plans she has for this week, Anna replied "I want to see what kind of shape I'm in first."

Paradoxically she did heavy speedwork the week before the 100-miler. "My mileage dropped from about 100 to 120 down to about 80. I was busy with my plants."

Anna and Simon have their own house in the Village where she has about 350 plants. All of them were indoors. "I had to cart the plants outside and install them on the terrace. They have to be inspected, cleaned, trimmed, re-potted, positioned and tied up against the weather. I start doing this in June. In October they come back in. Simon mentions to me: 'You always start this during heavy marathon periods! But that happens to be the season they have to be moved.'

Some, she added: "Are 18 feet tall and weigh 150 pounds. The reason I have knees that have become strong is from lifting them around. I've never had any problem with my knees. A lot of women runners do."

Then, with a smile, she said: "I'm very satisfied with the race. But I want to get home. I want to feed my cats. And I want to stop smelling, too.

Stop smelling, Anna? You came out of this one smelling like a rose. Congratulations.

—Eddie Coyle