

*A series
profiling
your fellow
Routematchers.*

by Laura Lee Huttenbach



Matt Yourd

Deployment Manager

Not long after Matt Yourd moved to Atlanta from Pittsburgh in 2010, a friend told him to read a new book, *Born to Run*, by Christopher McDougall. *Born to Run* is about a man called Caballo Blanco who treks to the Copper Canyons in northwest Mexico and seeks wisdom from the Tarahumara, a community of indigenous people whose innate long-distance running ability is the main subject of the book. “I immediately fell in love with the book,” recalls Matt. “When I put it down, I messaged my friend back and said, ‘We need to run an ultramarathon’—a footrace longer than a traditional marathon’s 26.2 miles. In December 2013, Matt and his friend signed up for Pine Mountain Trail Race, which winds through the woods of F. D. Roosevelt State Park, two hours south of Atlanta. >

Q&A with Matt Yourd

Q: How far is the Pine Mountain race?

A. It's about a forty-miler.

Q. I love how you're just like, "Yeah, it's a forty-miler."

A. [Laughs] I had that same reaction to one called the Georgia Death Race. It's 76 miles. I was just talking to a guy that ran it, and I was like, "How do you do that?" He said, "Well, you just do a forty-miler and keep doing that for another thirty-six miles."

Q. Take me through Pine Mountain.

A. You get down there the night before. You eat your pasta dinner. You wake up real early. My biggest thing with races is going to the bathroom before the race. I don't know what it is, but it's a panic thing—like, *I have to go now, or something bad is going to happen*. They fire the gun at about seven. There's maybe 150 people. You wear a headlamp for the first couple miles, because it's December and still a little dark. You run on the road a bit until you hit the trailhead. Within twenty minutes, everybody's separated and spread out. You're on the trails for seven hours. Just you and your thoughts.

Q. You didn't run with your friend?

A. My buddy was faster than me. We're both competitive people, and he wanted to do the best time he could, and I physically couldn't keep up with him. Plus a lot of it is single-track trails, so there's not really room to run next to someone. But we were fortunate. We have a group of friends that came to cheer us on. And there are aid stations every four or five miles. They'd give us an "Attaboy!" and they have candy or burritos—that kind of stuff. Every five miles, you have to refuel. I try to eat a half-banana and peanut butter and jelly.



Q. What's the most challenging part of these races?

A. The mental part is the most challenging. When you get started, and you're like, Okay, I have seven hours to go. That's the hardest part. You gotta get out of that mindset of counting down where you're at and just try to enjoy being in that atmosphere and that environment. And yeah, it's hard to enjoy it when you're in mile thirty-five and hurting.

Q. How does that skill apply in other areas of your life?

A. I think a lot of times at work, you have to take a step back and look at the bigger picture and not every single little detail. It helps my mindset and it's relaxing, knowing that there's going to be problems, but we'll deal with them and keep pushing through.

Q. How many races have you done?

A. Three ultramarathons and a good amount of other trail races. I think I've done ten road marathons at this point. My favorite is the Pittsburgh Marathon. It actually runs in my family, no pun intended. My dad is an avid runner. He's sixty-two and still runs a marathon a year. I think he's done over fifty at this point. To this day, he logs more miles than me per week.



Q. Have you always been into sports?

A. My whole life. Watching and participating. I spent the first twenty-five years of my life in Pittsburgh, and there's a weird sense of community and pride in the city that I think manifests itself in the different sports teams there. The Steelers have one of the strongest fan bases in all of sports.

Q. What relaxes you after a long day of work?

A. My two dogs, Frankie and Agnes. They go crazy when I get home. No matter how many times that happens, they go absolutely nuts. That's always the best part of my day. I play with them, then I head out for a run before my wife Meredith and I cook dinner together.

Q. What kind of dogs are Frankie and Agnes?

A. Labradoodles. Meredith and I both grew up with labs, but they shed everywhere, so we decided on labradoodles, which are hypoallergenic. We got Agnes first. She's five and a half. Then we figured she was depressed and needed a friend, so we got Frankie, but I think that depressed her more. When you've had a dog for three years and you bring a puppy in the house, it doesn't go over so well. They love each other now, but it started off rocky.

Q. What's your favorite smell?

A. Campfire.

Q. What's your favorite beer?

A. There's a stout called Prairie Bomb. It's almost thirteen percent [alcohol content], which is more than wine. I'm more into the stouts and porters—heavier, darker beer.

Q. What are your favorite podcasts and shows?

A. I listen to a film podcast called The Film Vault. And some true crime podcasts like Serial and S-Town. I like the Netflix shows: House of Cards, Orange Is the New Black. And I get roped into watching some of the reality TV, like The Bachelor and The Bachelorette.

Q. What three people would you invite to a dream dinner party?

A. Sidney Crosby. Barack Obama. Christopher McDougall.

Q. What have you learned from playing sports?

A. You learn that you need a team. It teaches discipline and humility. My best memory from all of my different sports ventures was when my high school basketball team won the state finals in 2004. I didn't even play in the game, but it was the best experience to travel with all my friends and be there to cheer them on. I'd practiced with them and played my role. You're still a part of the team even if you don't get in the game.



Writer Laura Lee Huttenbach is the author of "The Boy is Gone" and "Running with Raven" (Kensington Press, May 2017). Her website is www.LLHuttenbach.com.