

# OAK OPENINGS STAMPED BEE READY

by Ray Schneider

For the last three years the Oak Openings Stampede has been a 25K race, taking place within Oak Openings Preserve in Swanton, Ohio. However, this year Race Director Randy Ruch also included a 50K option, which 27 runners took the opportunity to complete.

It was while picking up my race bib that I noticed the finisher's medal. It was one of the most unique medals I have seen. Made out of real wood, it featured the race logo on one side and the trail marker we would be following on the reverse. I wanted to earn one – I just had to complete the race. Last-minute race updates contained usual race info including the warning, “in the past years, one or two people have run into an angry bee and have been stung.” I didn't think much of it at the time.

The course included two 25-km loops around the beautiful Oak Openings Preserve. With 135 runners competing in the 25K, the 27 attempting 31 miles had plenty of company at the start of the race. The first miles featured a couple of narrow bridges that slowed the pace. Everyone was settling in about mile three when we heard people screaming and having fun. We heard wrong. At mile four, the runners ahead were swatting something and then I was stung by four or five angry bees, maybe the same ones Randy noted in the updates. The lead runners stepped on a hive in the ground and many runners were bitten. Fortunately, there was an aid station one mile ahead. It was staffed by a local high school cross-country team who had first aid kits, including bee sting relief. Although many runners encountered bees they worked together to make sure everyone was safe and resumed running.

After getting stung, I wondered how it would impact my run. Other than a minor nuisance, I was ready to continue to pursue that medal. There were well-stocked aid stations about every three to four miles, which made the time seem to fly by. Between miles seven and 12 I felt like I

was running in paradise. The trail was tree-covered with no wind. The temperature was right around 70 degrees the entire race. Although there were other runners around, everyone was quiet and enjoying the soft trail.

When we looped back to the start/finish area, the 25K runners were done and the 50K participants began their second loop. I was uplifted by the encouragement given by the volunteers and runners who had finished the 25K. Several runners were nursing bee stings and we wondered what we would do when we got back to the place of the first attack. The four miles went by fast as all the runners could think about was getting stung again. Thankfully, a volunteer had placed caution tape to block the path to the hive and we were re-routed safely around. I had never been so happy to see a sign that said, “Bees! Go around!”

The hills seemed quite a bit steeper the second loop. Plus, I was now running without other runners anywhere around me. Since I am used to running near back of the pack, I was at peace and really enjoying the moment. The aid station near mile 25 provided laughter that was needed at the time. A runner who had completed the 25K was working the aid station (example of why ultrarunners are so great) and his young son said, “Dad, this man is running two loops and you only ran one, does that mean he is twice as good as you?”



Champion Joshua Laughlin with RD Randy Ruch (left) and raffle prize contributor Andrew Given (right)

At mile 27, I hit the point where I just wanted the medal around my neck and needed something to take my mind off running. There, I met up with a couple riding on horseback right as we came to an open area. They rode alongside me for about 200 yards, something that I had never experienced in an ultra before.

Now it was time to finish. I rounded the last corner and although I was one of the last runners to finish, the RD and his volunteers were there to cheer for me as though I was the winner. As they put the medal around my neck, I felt like the winner. The only difference was the winner of the ultra, Joshua Laughlin, finished in 3 hours 18 minutes, almost three hours earlier and he DID NOT get stung.

After the race, runners were talking about how the bees actually took their mind off running and in some ways made the 50K easier. We were also surprised by a post-race email from the RD stating that next year anyone who runs in a bee costume gets a discount on their entry.

I may be a bee! ■

## OAK OPENINGS STAMPEDE 50K

SWANTON, OH | SEPTEMBER 15 | ▲ 1,3

### 50 KM

1. Joshua Laughlin, 27, OH	3:18:13	14. Bob Brashear, 54, KY	5:25:09
2. Marco Capelli, 41, OH	3:26:13	15. Andrew Winckles, 29, OH	5:26:39
3. Pinkus Pilzner, 40, OH	4:07:12	16. Deb Elliott, 41, OH	5:30:51
4. Kevin Troyer, 38, OH	4:09:45	17. Cean Elliott, 40, OH	5:32:08
5. David Emch, 31, OH	4:11:25	18. Bob Krupitzer, 38, OH	5:43:17
6. Ernie Lewis, 48, OH	4:54:52	19. Beth Crosser, 49, OH	5:47:14
7. Tom Krupitzer, 38, OH	4:57:20	20. Kelly Shrader, 33, OH	5:47:15
8. Kristoffer Krupitzer, 34, OH	4:57:21	21. Scott Yaist, 32, OH	5:47:30
9. Natalee Gooden Burkard, 32, OH	5:04:12	22. Susan Thompson, 50, MI	5:47:58
10. John Esson, 42, OH	5:05:31	23. Tim Corbey, 52, OH	5:52:04
11. John Andrew, 52, OH	5:13:00	24. Ray Schneider, 42, OH	5:58:59
12. Julie Theroux, 55, OH	5:14:29	25. Tony Mazur, 59, MI	6:10:46
13. Rob Simon, 53, OH	5:21:07	26. Joe Erard, 57, OH	6:18:59
		27. James Hunt, 51, OH	7:00:27