

Toughest Mudder - East

12-hour race (8pm Saturday, May 18 – 8am Sunday, May 19)
Coatesville, PA (outside Philadelphia)

By Whitney Tilson

I ran a 12-hour Tough Mudder race last weekend, from 8pm Saturday to 8am Sunday. (I've done the last three 24-hour World's Toughest Mudders and one 8-hour overnight Tough Mudder race on this same course two years ago, but this was my first 12-hour one.)

Overall, it was a great race. I did 40 miles (8 laps, officially, though I actually put 43.9 miles on my legs according to my Garmin watch), 5-10 more than I expected (Buffett and Munger joke that the key to a happy marriage is having low expectations going in; ditto for me and long races!). The 20 obstacles/lap were fun and I really enjoyed running with four of my buddies, especially Tim Donovan, who was with me every step of the way. Importantly (when you get to be a 52-year-old geezer like me), my body held up remarkably well. At no point was I in any real pain – just a lot of fatigue. I'm sore all over today, but nothing that 800mg of Advil every four hours for another couple of days won't take care of!

I finished 78th of 472 total racers (top 17%) and 4th of 29 men (top 14%) in the 50+ age group. Here are my official stats (which are posted for all racers here: <https://toughestmudder.com/toughest-results#/race/esUXKo/1>):

A summary card for Whitney Tilson's race performance. It includes the bib number 1616, the name WHITNEY TILSON, location NEW YORK NY, age 52, and gender M. The final time is 11:50:40. It also shows the division M50&UP, division place 4 (out of 29), gender place 70 (out of 384), and overall place 78 (out of 472).

Individual Results		Charts		
Location	Time	Pace	cTime	Ranking Overall
# of Laps	8			
Total Miles	40			
Lap 1	54:00 (5mi)	10:48/mile	00:54:00	246/472
Lap 2	1:17:56 (10mi)	15:36/mile	02:13:41	227/472
Lap 3	1:29:34 (15mi)	17:55/mile	03:45:24	167/472
Lap 4	1:41:20 (20mi)	20:16/mile	05:28:00	138/472
Lap 5	1:43:45 (25mi)	20:45/mile	07:15:17	125/472
Lap 6	1:44:41 (30mi)	20:57/mile	09:03:58	109/472
Lap 7	1:25:39 (35mi)	17:08/mile	10:33:44	95/472
Lap 8	1:12:46 (40mi)	14:34/mile	11:50:40	87/472

I wasn't surprised to see that I was in the bottom half of the pack (246 of 472; 52nd percentile) after the first lap – the “sprint lap,” in which all of the obstacles are closed. I'm not a fast runner and I never push it hard in the early going of a long race, as I don't want to get burned out. As you can see, every lap I passed lots of people, as I did at the World's Toughest Mudder last November, when I was 722nd of 1,232 after the sprint lap (bottom 41%), but finished 52nd overall (top 4%) and won the 50+ age group. It's a marathon, not a sprint, you silly jackrabbits!

Here were the top finishers in my age group (all of us got 40 miles):

DIV PL	PLACE	DIV	NAME	TOTAL MILES	TIME
1	31	M 50&UP	Shayne Williams	40	10:45:34
2	57	M 50&UP	Joe Perry	40	11:33:49
3	77	M 50&UP	Jeffrey Hunnewell	40	11:49:31
4	78	M 50&UP	Whitney Tilson	40	11:50:40

I'm a little bummed to learn that I missed 3rd place by only 79 seconds – I made up more than 20 minutes on Jeffrey Hunnewell during the last lap, as I hustled to finish by 8:00am (I finished at 7:50:40, so I had 9 minutes and 20 seconds to spare, or the entire last lap wouldn't have counted).

Here's a picture of me with my buddies before the race – we shared a pit (tent) area and ran some laps together (all 12 hours with Tim):



From left to right: me, Tom Millerick, Doug Hughes, Mike Trbovic and Tim Donovan

Here's the start of the race (I'm on the far left; it almost looks like I'm in the lead – LOL!):



Here we are at one of the first obstacles, Pitfall, where you have to wade through a muddy pit with a very uneven bottom (kudos to Tim for the great idea of holding hands so you don't fall on your face, as I'm almost doing here):





Shortly thereafter was the infamous Mud Mile, six deep, muddy, water-filled trenches:



The last obstacle was the even-more-infamous Electroshock Therapy, which gives you a massive jolt if you're not careful (one time I barreled through it and got knocked flat on my face!):



Tom and I ran the entire race together and here's how we finished:



Here's a picture of us after the race (minus Tom, who was already on his way home):



On the way out, I ran into Joe Perry (who finished 2nd in the 50+ age group, 17 minutes ahead of me; he always paints his face for races – a new way each time!) and Maxine Brown:



Funny story about the last lap

After the fourth lap at around 1:30am, Tim and I did some math regarding the rest of the race. By that time, we were walking/speed hiking maybe a third of the course (anything with an upward slope) and *very* slow jogging (it felt like shuffling) the rest. Plus we were taking relaxed 10-minute pit stops after each lap. As a result, lap 4 (including the pit) took 1:41:20, as you can see in the table on page 1.

To be conservative, we assumed that we'd slow down and additional laps would take two hours, which meant our 5th lap would be 1:30-3:30, our 6th lap would finish at 5:30, and our 7th at 7:30am, giving us plenty of cushion before the 8am cutoff – but also no chance at doing an 8th lap.

So we were very relaxed – we knew we could walk the rest of the night and get 35 miles, which we'd be happy with, and had no chance at 40.

Sure enough, our 5th lap was even slower at 1:43:45. When we returned to the pit, we encountered Doug for the first time since the start. He had gone out fast and was 25 minutes ahead of us after the first two laps, but then started to feel sick, which slowed him a lot. He had also finished five laps, and decided to come out with us for lap 6, which was an even slower 1:44:41.

We left for lap 7 at 5:18am. Certain that it would be our last one, we jogged it – the finish line was in sight! – and used our wristband passes to skip three obstacles.

As we were finishing the lap and coming back toward the finish line/pit area, I looked at my watch and was startled to see that it was 6:30am. I exclaimed to Tim and Doug, “You guys, it’s 6:30 – we just did that lap in 1:12! We might have enough time to do an 8th lap!”

None of us could believe that we'd done the lap so quickly. Maybe I'd misremembered and we hadn't started at 5:18?

We skipped the pit area and ran straight across the finish line to the timer's desk and asked what our lap time was. The guy said 1:55. Well, that made more sense! Defeated, we prepared to walk back to the pit and start packing up.

But then I remembered and said, “The 1:55 included our last pit stop, which was a long one. I think if we really push it, we can do it!”

Doug was done at that point, but Tim was game so we took off. I said to him, “What's the worst that can happen? We don't make it and spend an extra hour and a half out here on this beautiful morning, doing what we came to do?”

After more than ten and a half hours, it was *so hard* to start pushing it, running faster and even jogging the uphill. Worse yet, we were hungry because we hadn't stopped at the pit, so we were worried about hitting the wall (bonking). The course ran through the parking lot, so we looked for anyone who might have food for us. At the very last moment, nearly a mile into the course,

we saw a guy and ran toward him (I'm sure with crazed looks in our eyes), saying, "Dude, do you have any Gatorade or food?!"

And then the heavens opened and a light shone down... He said, "This is all I've got" and pulled out a bag of soft chocolate chip cookies. It was a miracle!!! You have never seen two happier guys than Tim and me at that moment...

We each grabbed five, thanked him profusely and stuffed them in our mouths as we kept running.

But I had a problem – my mouth was so dry that I could barely chew them, and the next water station wasn't for half a mile, after two mud obstacles for which I needed both hands, so what to do? I looked for discarded bottles by the side of the course – and found one! Germs be damned, I gratefully washed the last cookies down with the two swigs of water that remained. (Tim didn't stoop to such grossness – somehow he got the cookies down.)

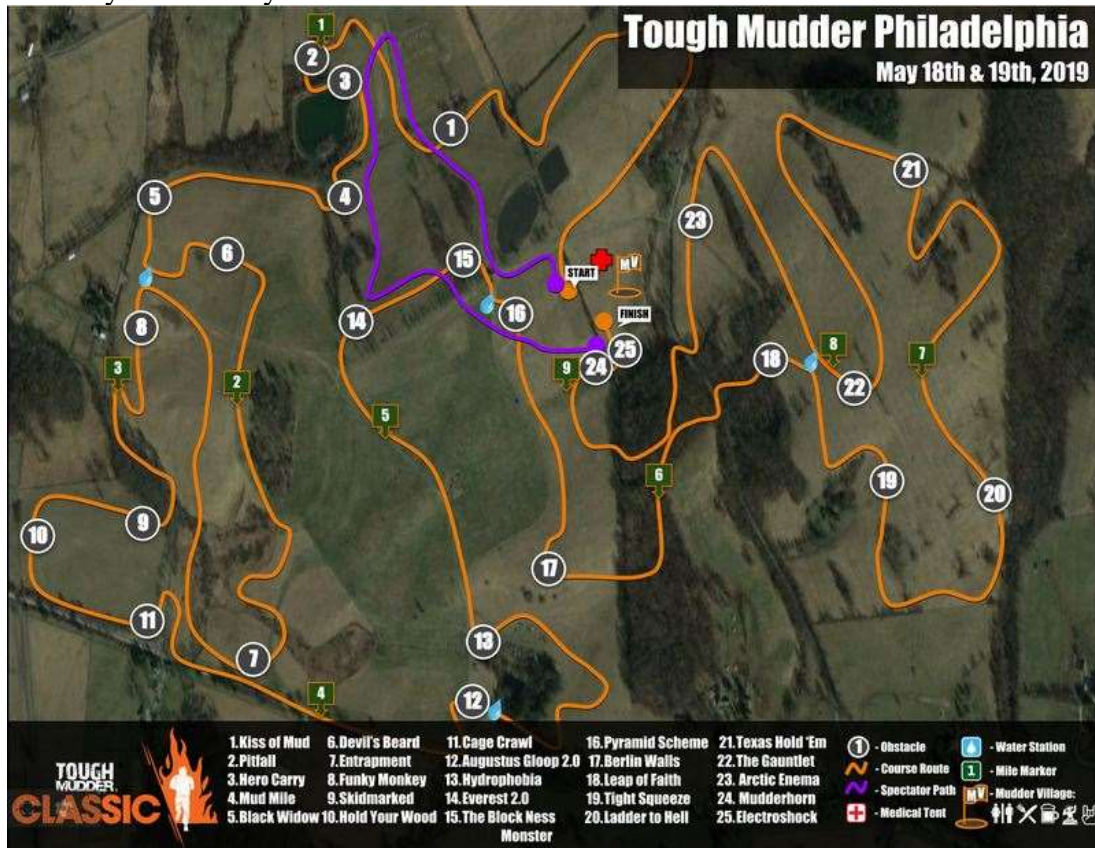
(None of this compares to Mark James' last lap on this very course during the eight-hour race here two years ago. He was scooping used mustard packets off the ground and sucking on them – and finished the last lap with less than 10 *seconds* to spare!)

The cookies were lifesavers. Tim and I cranked through the last lap in 1:12:46 and finished at 11:50:40, with nearly 10 minutes to spare.

The course

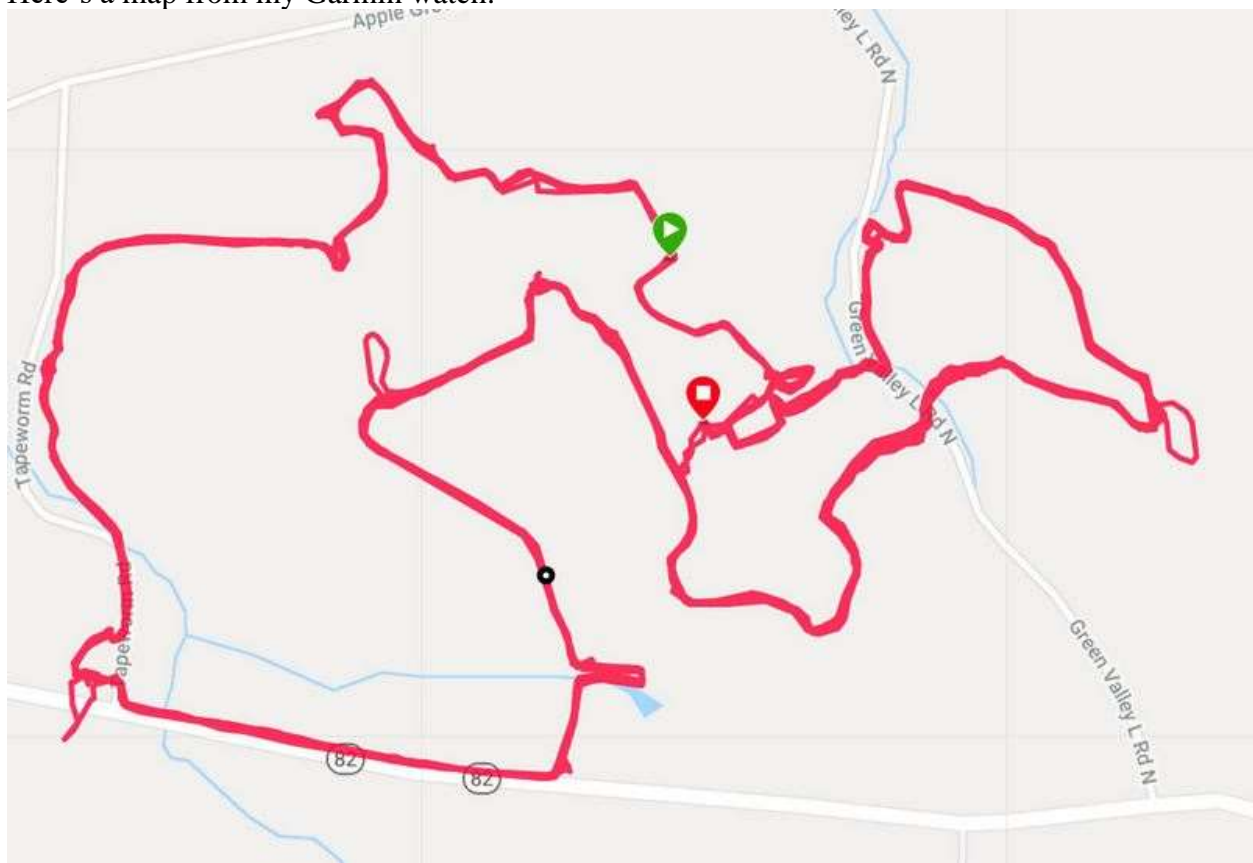
Ryan Meade has posted a wonderful 8-minutes video of all of the obstacles here:
<https://youtu.be/vwOpgnIPsAk>.

Here's a map of the regular 10-mile Tough Mudder course, which ran during the day both Saturday and Sunday:



The following obstacles were not part of the Toughest course – 2, 3, 6, 7, 10, 19, 20 and 21 – which reduced the mileage from 10 to 5.

Here's a map from my Garmin watch:



Note that the finish line (red dot) is different from the starting line (green dot), which I think is most of the reason that the actual mileage I covered was 10% more than the official mileage. The other reasons were very short diversions going into the pit after all but two laps, plus the two penalty loops I did, which you can see in the map above, on the far right (Gauntlet – I misjudged the distance from the 2nd ring to the 3rd and missed the grab – a silly mistake) and middle toward the left (Everest – on the last lap, nobody was at the top and neither Tim nor I can run up it solo; huge thanks to Francis Lackner and Nick Shook, who spent most of the race pulling people up).

This was the easiest OCR course I've ever encountered (I've done about two dozen of them, mostly Tough Mudder and Spartan), for a variety of reasons:

- There wasn't much vertical (maybe 500-600 feet/lap and only one hill of note);
- Very little mud or slipperiness – the bulk of the course was pretty smooth and solid;
- It was positively balmy (my watch said the temperature never dropped below 60 – what a contrast to the WTM last November, when it dropped below 30 most of the night!);
- The penalty loops were laughable, taking at most two minutes (on Gauntlet, Doug did the penalty walk, but was finished by the time Tim and I completed it!);
- The obstacles were pretty standard, but on the easier side (e.g., on Leap of Faith, for example, you barely had to jump to reach the net; at Electroshock Therapy, it was easy to avoid getting shocked); and

- Starting after the fourth lap (mile 20), every racer got an orange wristband upon the completion of each lap (so I got four in total) that allowed you to skip any obstacle. That's pretty generous (some would say lame).

Anyone who thinks that doing World's will just be two laps of this race is going to be in for a *rude* surprise. The WTM last November was *massively* more difficult!

Tricks on staying warm: ski shell and Bleggmits

In any long, overnight race in which you're constantly wet (and getting re-soaked regularly), staying warm is key, both to maintain your core temperature and avoid hypothermia as well as to keep your hands warm so you'll be able to grip well for the majority of obstacles that require it.

At last November's WTM, 40% of the people who started the race didn't finish (meaning didn't complete their final lap after 8am, 20 hours into the race) – nearly all of them because they froze in the sub-30-degree night. Here's what I wrote about this topic in my write-up of the race (which is posted here: www.tilsonfunds.com/TilsonWTM18.pdf):

I wasn't immune to the cold, as it sucked my energy and forced me to walk 8 of the 12 laps, but thanks to a thick 5mm wetsuit and gloves, Arcteryx ski jacket/shell and pants, and four layers of headgear, I was able to maintain my core temperature and keep walking (and walking and walking...) (though my fingers and toes got quite chilled at times – two weeks later, my toes are still numb!). I learned my lessons well from last year's WTM when I didn't get my full wetsuit on in time and didn't have a jacket or pants to wear over my wetsuit, so got crushed by the cold around midnight...

... I slow-jogged most of lap 4 as well, nailed every obstacle (the toughest were Funky Monkey and The Gauntlet), and finished at 6pm, in 399th place of 1,129 racers, just as darkness was setting in. I knew it was going to quickly get very cold so I did my longest pit stop of the race, 39 minutes, to get my heavy-duty cold-weather gear on, consisting of a full-length thick wetsuit (5mm body; 4mm arms and legs), Arcteryx ski jacket/shell and mountaineering pants (waterproof and, more importantly, windproof), an extra layer on my head (the hood of the jacket), and 3mm neoprene gloves. The key difference with last year for me was adding the jacket and pants – in cold weather, a wetsuit isn't enough, as it's designed for underwater, not to block cold air/wind, which is what my jacket and pants did. (I saw a lot of folks with just wetsuits or adding only a cheapo \$15 Walmart windbreaker – and they paid a big price I suspect.)

You can see most of what I'm wearing in this picture:



I really want to emphasize this part: “in cold weather, a wetsuit isn’t enough, as it’s designed for underwater, not to block cold air/wind.” A high-quality windproof shell jacket is *critical*!

At the race last weekend, I never needed to change even once. Look at what I’m wearing in the first picture above: nothing but a thin top, shorts and tights. After the 2nd lap, I put on my Arcteryx ski jacket shell and after the 3rd lap I grabbed my swim cap (everyone has the [blueseventy](#) one) and Bleggmits. That was it – no heavy wetsuit or anything! It’s key to stay light, and I did.

Speaking of Bleggmits (<https://www.bleggmit.com.au/>), I got them last month, have done two races with them (the Spartan Beast last month and this one), and am now a *huge* fan. They keep my hands warm, mostly mud-free, and protect them from getting chafed. An absolute must-have for all but the shortest and warmest races!

The winners (and others of note)

The overall winner was Johan Ingemarsson, who did 11 laps (55 miles) in 10 hours and 46 minutes (he had plenty of time for another one, but I assume he stopped because the 2nd place guy, Mark Gaudet, was 17 minutes behind him and likely didn't have time to do a 12th lap to pass him). Ingemarsson flew in from Norway and has three obstacle course (OCR) race wins in the last three weeks!

The women's winner was my friend Erin Rost, with whom I ran a couple of miles on the last lap of the WTM last November (my 12th and her 15th, to finish in 2nd place at her first Tough Mudder race!). Here's a picture of us before the race:



Erin finished 9 laps (45 miles) in 10:53 for 12th place overall, beating the #2 woman by 62 minutes. She's a beast!

The #3 woman (22nd overall) was Bella Crane, who finished her 9th lap with only 2:51 to spare. Quite a combo with her brother Cason Crane, who won the sprint lap in a blazing 33:58 and finished 10th overall with 50 miles. Fun fact: Cason is the first LGBT person to do the Seven Summits (climb the highest peaks in all seven continents – the most epic of which, of course, is Mt. Everest). Here's a picture of Cason, Bella and my friend Fran McGill (who did nine laps and finished 18th overall):



A shout-out to Tex Ritter, whom I had the pleasure of meeting for the first time (briefly) in the middle of the race. At age 62, he was by far the oldest racer (followed by a 59-year-old guy and a 58-year-old woman), yet he still did 30 miles, finishing 159th overall and 14th in the 50+ (and 1st in the 60+)!

Finally, mad props to Diana Codispoti, who last November was the first person with dwarfism (she's 4' 5") to compete in the World's Toughest Mudder. I've never met her, but saw her in the starting area and on the course a couple of times last weekend.

Here's a great article about her, [World's Toughest Mudder Race draws small entrant with big heart](#), and below are pics of a team of Mudders helping her get up Everest at the WTM – that's Joel Forsyth reaching down from the top:

