



## Tahoe Relay 2011

Story by Rob Main

The 47<sup>th</sup> annual DeCelle Memorial Lake Tahoe Relay saw three Empire Runner teams compete in the challenging 71 mile journey around the lake. My team was Team Bubba, a 50+ male team; another team was Shelli Main's Team Skirt, a 40+ female team; and the third ER team was Lucky Guys, a mixed open team. This year there were 116 seven-person teams with runners ranging from teenagers to 70+. The weather broke only days before the event and while we ran in near perfect conditions, the surrounding mountains were covered in snow and there were many snow banks in the shade at lake level reminding us of how recently it was still winter-like in this area.

Representing Team Bubba, in order of appearance, was Brendon Hutchinson, Stephen Starkweather, myself, Dale Peterson, Jerry Lyman, Larry Meredith and Chris Rostel. Hutch ran the first leg of 9.6 miles which starts at the intersection of Highways 89 and 50 in South Shore and proceeds counter-clockwise to Zephyr Cove.

Like other long relay races, the Tahoe Relay is put on successfully with no support of any kind even though competitors run on busy roads, often with minimal or no shoulder and without traffic control. The final race instructions given to the 116 leg 1 runners and others who gathered in the small parking area behind a laundry mat at 7am in 40F conditions included "we have no aid stations so provide your own water, and watch out for open potholes in leg 1". I nearly had a firsthand experience with a foot deep, foot square, open, unmarked pot hole in the parking area before the race. So with those final instructions, Hutch was off. At 67 Hutch was the senior member of our 50+ team; he ran a strong leg and yielded only a few seconds to our prime competitor. And most importantly, he did not locate any open pot holes. Our prime competitor was a team from Davis, GVH-2 (Golden Valley Harriers). In addition to two 50+ teams they had 5 other teams in various age groups.

Starky took over at Zephyr Cove and embarked on the 8.2 mile journey that would net 800 ft in elevation. While Leg 2 is the shortest of the 7 legs, it has the greatest climb on the entire course. And while the views are beautiful on the way up to Spooner Summit, most runners focus on the long, steady climb, the pounding of their heart and their strong deep breaths of the thin, oxygen-deprived air. Stephen was enlisted to run only two days before the event, due to an injury to our previously committed leg 2 runner. Coincidentally, that is exactly how I came to run my first Tahoe Relay two



Dale Peterson finds a downhill on Leg 4

# The Empire Runner

years ago – I also filled in for an injured leg 2 runner; and Shelli's team lost their leg 2 runner and only found a replacement 15 minutes before they left town the day before the race. Hmm... could it be the curse of the leg 2 hill?



**Rob Main working his way up Spooner.**

Stephen handed off to me just below the summit and allowed me to start my journey that would cover 10.3 miles and finish near Incline Village at lake level. We found out later in the day, during leg 7, that the team we were chasing, GVH-2, had two runners drop out days before the race and wound-up having two of the GVH-1 runners run a second leg for GVH-2. So, on 14 minutes rest the GVH-1 runner who just completed the 8.2 mile climb to the summit (with the 7<sup>th</sup> fastest time of the day!) started leg 3 for GVH-2, 2:12 ahead of me. I narrowed the gap to just over a minute before fortunes



changed and I started to succumb to fatigue. I am sure there were beautiful views on my leg too, however after the 5-mile mark I was more focused on getting to the transition at Lakeshore Drive than the snow capped mountains and clear emerald/blue waters of the Nevada shoreline. After my leg, Hutch, Stephen and I carried through with our plan to cool off at perhaps the best beach at Lake Tahoe, Sand Harbor Beach. While paying to get into the beach area, the Nevada State Park Ranger informed us that the water was a bone chilling 45F. Within minutes we discovered he was right. A quick scan of the beach revealed a number of people enjoying the sun, playing beach games, and stand-up paddle boarders, but no one was in the water. It was a commensurately short, refreshing dip.



**Team Bubba 2011: Chris Rostel, Larry Meredith, Jerry Lyman, Dale Peterson, Rob Main, Stephen Starkweather Brendon Hutchinson.**

# The Empire Runner

Dale started with a 5:18 deficit and by the time Jerry started Leg 5 the Bubbas were a solid 14 minutes back of 3<sup>rd</sup> place. Dale ran a good leg, but he was up against the strongest of the GVH-2 runners – no doubt selected for this leg as it is arguably the most difficult of the 7 legs, due to being the longest leg at 12.3 miles. While discussing the relative difficulties of each leg on the ride to Tahoe on Friday afternoon and not coming to any particular consensus, Dale postulated that the most difficult leg is the one you are running. Agreed!

Meanwhile, with a spot on the podium slipping away, Hutch and I decided to take another break and go look at the monstrous trout patrolling the waters below Fanny Bridge. There were a number of them swimming about in what we now know is about 45F water – much more suited for trout than people. All of this reminded me of Shelli's and my trip to New Zealand a few months ago when we discovered what a fanny is in Australian speak – suffice it to say there are no bridges named Fanny Bridge in Australia.

When Jerry came by we realized that he was making a serious move on the 3<sup>rd</sup> place runner (GVH-2), we quickly lost interest in the trout. Back in the game, we stayed close to Jerry as frequent water stops were becoming necessary on this warm, dry afternoon. Jerry continued his surge and the day became warmer and less hospitable to long distance runners. With a mile to go, on this 10.6 mile leg, it was apparent that Larry was going to start his leg within sight of our competition – the first time since midway on my leg that our two teams were within sight of each other.

Larry started with a lead of only a few steps, a minuscule difference after roughly 50 miles. Larry's intimate knowledge of all 10.5 miles of leg 6 paid-off as he let the other runner pull away on the lead-up to the long, steep finishing climb. With great determination to give Chris a lead and not let Val (who was going to run leg 6 for Team Skirt) have a better time, Larry dug deep and prevailed (in both counts). The GVH-2 runner gave all he had and nearly collapsed with leg cramps before the exchange point. We found-out later that this GVH-2 runner had run leg 1 for GVH-1. My guess is he will limit himself to one leg next year.

Chris, who was told by leg 7 veteran Dale, that “no lead is too big on leg 7”, was given a lead of only 40 seconds. With no prior experience running the Tahoe Relay, or being a Bubba, Chris had the task of holding off a team that had fielded a number of strong runners. And do this on a leg with steep climbs and descents over the first 6 miles (perhaps a total of 400 ft of up and 1,000 ft down) before a painful, rolling 4.5 miles to the finish. In spite of the heat of the day Chris endured, held a consistent pace and stretched out his lead to 9 minutes by the finish. We were happy with our 3<sup>rd</sup> place finish, 31<sup>st</sup> overall. The Lucky Guys finished around 11<sup>th</sup> in their tough age group and 46<sup>th</sup> overall; and Team Skirt finished 3<sup>rd</sup> in their age group, 68<sup>th</sup> overall.



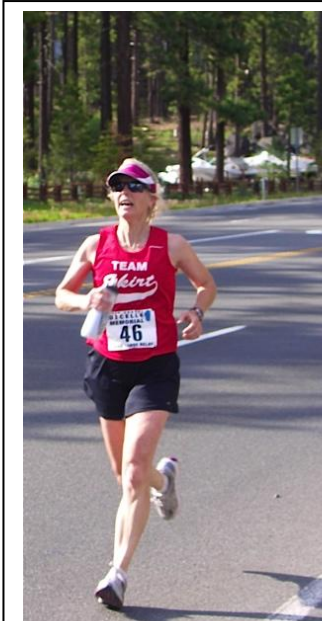
## Around Lake Tahoe – One Mile at a Time!



Team Skirt: Nivea, Tanya, Robin, Shelli, Val Shelly and Lisa



Hutch gets things going on Leg 1



Robin finishes strong!



Stephen having Fun

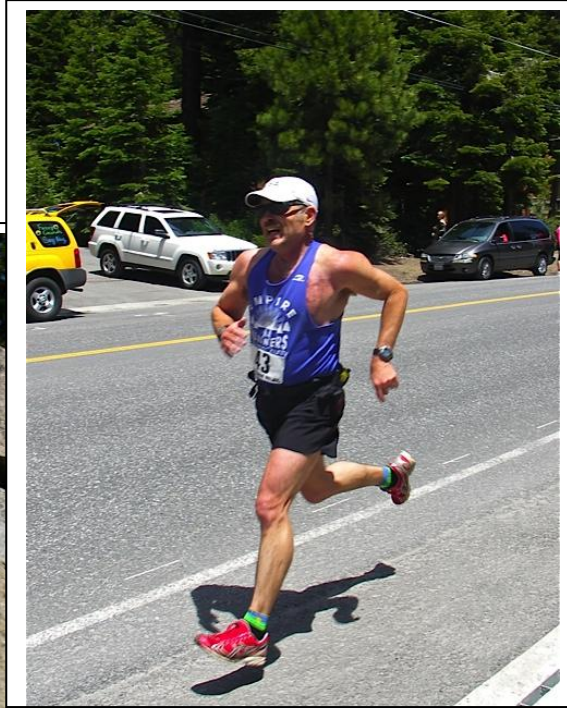
# The Empire



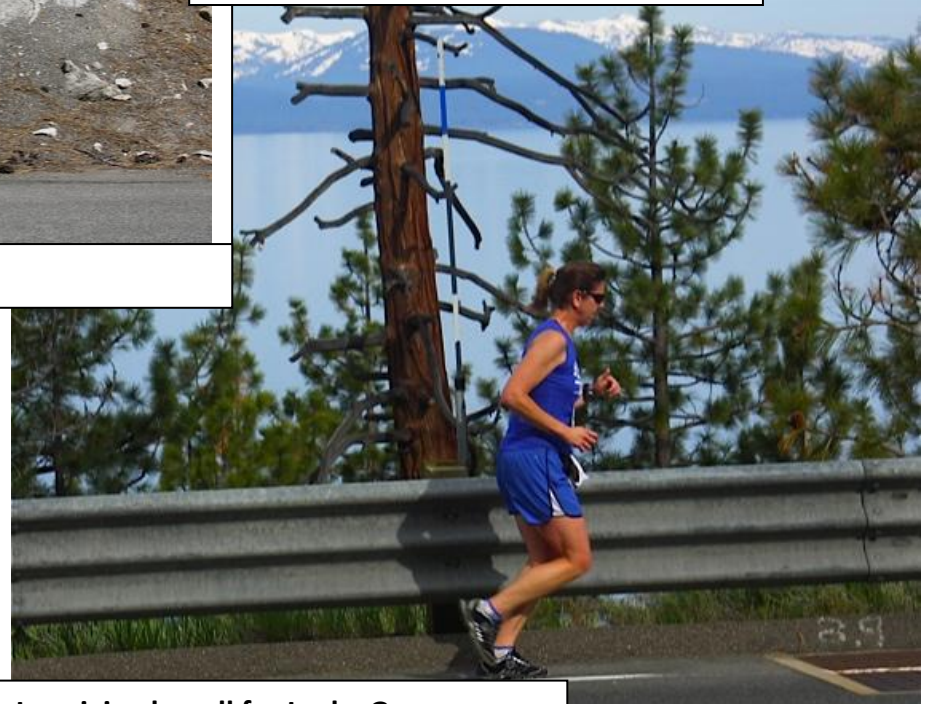
# Runner



**Rob working hard!**



**Dale looking for the exchange zone.**



**Jen giving her all for Lucky Guys**