

Keep It Simple

Rob Krar on racing, training, nutrition, and life.

BY BREE LAMBERT

First spoke to Rob on the Friday before the “big” race. It was a brief encounter. He was leaving the prerace briefing and I yelled out to him as he was making his way across the parking lot in Squaw Valley. He was very cordial and politely declined my invitation to interview him. Instead he agreed to speak with me after the race, at the finish line. I understood his need to block out all distractions and focus on what he was about to do. The next day, I saw Rob at the start and later at Foresthill, mile 62. He came through Foresthill less than two minutes behind Max King and was followed by Seth Swanson and then by Dylan Bowman. All four men were running a solid race and seemed to move through the aid station without any obvious sign of fatigue. The race was about to heat up, and Rob was ready to make his move. On that day Rob Krar ran the race he intended, one



Photo by © Alex Aristei

▲ Rob Krar enjoying the solitude of running solo.



© Joe McCladdie

▲ Rob tackles the Rucky Chucky River crossing during the 2014 Western States 100.

year after he had placed second to Tim Olson. The 2013 Western was Rob's first 100-mile experience. He went into the race with little preparation and said, "I just winged it. I didn't even attend the training weekend."

That was last year; this year was different. He went into Western States with a different plan. For the past year he dreamed of the moment when he would be back at this, the most distinguished of 100-mile events. He knew it would be important to run his own race. His strategy was to use his fellow runners as markers. His plan was to follow comfortably behind Max King until Foresthill and then, at the right time, surge ahead and hold his lead position with confidence, paying close attention to the rhythm of his body. Rob said the low point during his race came at miles 80 to 90, where he felt tired. Then came miles 90 to 100, and it was all about survival. He was in the zone. He said, "I assessed my body at Robie Point and was able to relax that three-quarters of a mile heading into the finish. It was a magical moment as I made my way around the track. So much was going through my mind, all the struggles of the past year." For Rob, it was a dream that became reality as he ran the second-fastest race in the history of an event that began in 1974.

The day of my interview, I asked Rob several questions about his training for Western States, his fueling plan, his diet, and his personal life. The common theme that played out in nearly every aspect was "keep it simple."

On training

Rob: “I like to keep things loose. I’m motivated by the challenges of training and racing to my greatest potential.”

Rob describes himself as having a stubborn character. He says his wife, Christina, fully supports what he does. He says one important thing he learned after coming back in 2012 from injury is the importance of listening to his body. He likes to keep both his life and his training simple. He is not a numbers or gadgets guy. He likes to be “the smartest runner” he can be. Unlike many other ultrarunners who set goal mileage each week, Rob doesn’t approach his training like that but rather does a combination of workouts: fartleks, hill training, long runs, back-to-backs, and most important, *rest* days. He says he takes at least one rest day a week. When asked to identify a favorite workout, he says: 8 x 3-minute hill repeats with 90 seconds of rest in between.

Rob is a believer in cross-training and has adopted his own functional circuit program that has been dubbed “the equalizer.” The series takes 30 to 40 minutes and is composed of 10 to 15 exercises that incorporate the use of a kettle bell, medicine ball, resistance band, Indo Board, yoga mat, stability ball, and battle rope. When asked about his favorite piece of training gear, he replies, “I don’t really have a favorite piece of gear. But I do practice the Active Isolated Flexibility Technique by Phil Wharton. The strap and regular practice of these stretching techniques is pretty important to me.”



© Joe McCladdie

▲ Rob Krar, the 2014 Western States 100 champion.

ad

Ultimately, Rob emphasized the importance of listening to his own body and mind. He stressed the importance to “be in the moment.” He also said, “I don’t want this to be taken wrong, but I don’t seek the advice of others when it comes to race preparation because I don’t want others’ thoughts to influence my own.”

On fueling and diet

Rob: “In 2006 I stopped eating meat. I do eat fish and eggs. I am not against those who eat meat. But personally, I don’t do it for both moral and ethical reasons.”

Christina Bauer, Rob’s wife, has a passion for cooking. Her blog, *feedingthefrenzyblog.com*, *Balancing Indulgence in Moderation One Run at a Time*, features a wealth of healthy recipes, desserts, and simple meals with a highly vegetarian flare. Rob says, “Food is a huge part of our lives.” While he and Christina splurge from time to time on ice cream and other desserts, they maintain a food regimen that isn’t complicated but is fresh, nutritious, and simple. When I mention the debate over paleo versus vegan versus high-fat diets for athletes, Rob replies, “I encourage people to avoid extremes. Eating too little and worrying about weight just adds complications.”

A couple of Rob’s favorite Feeding the Frenzy recipes are Tofu Po’ Boys, Black Pepper Tofu, and Slow-Cooker Lasagna. (All can be found on Christina’s food blog.)

I asked Rob about the fueling plan he used for Western States. He said, “I have a pretty hardened stomach. I carried a single bottle tucked in my shorts. I’m not a vest guy. I like to stay hands free.”

Rob’s WS100 Mile Recipe for Fueling:

GU’s (Salted Caramel/fruit flavors)	Electrolyte drink
Justin’s Nut Butter	Watermelon
Chocolate-covered almonds	Perpetuem

There is no variation in how Rob eats before a race. He keeps his diet the same. He generally has a bigger lunch and a smaller dinner the day before a race. He mentioned a tendency toward ethnic foods of Italian and Mexican origin.

On life

Rob: “Patience, perseverance and sacrifice are all hugely important, not only in running but in life. I’m constantly motivated to explore the boundaries of those traits.”

If you have been following Rob’s ultraracing career of late, you will discover that he is a man who loves breaking through barriers. He enjoys challenging himself to discover what he is capable of. He has become one of the best-known ultrarunners in North America and perhaps in the world.

In May 2013 he set the record for the Grand Canyon Rim to Rim to Rim in 6:21:47 (fastest known time). After his second-place finish to Timothy Olson at Western States, he proceeded to complete the year with two first-place finishes at UROC 100K and TNF50 in San Francisco. *UltraRunning Magazine* named him the 2013 ultrarunner of the year. This year with his win at Western States, he made the cover of both *UltraRunning* and *Running Times* magazines. While I was writing this profile, Rob went on to win the 2014 Leadville Trail 100-mile in 16:09:02 and the Run Rabbit Run 100 in 17:40:05.

One interesting note about Rob is his ability to run at a highly uncomfortable level when racing. He said, “I go into the dark place. I can’t replicate this in training. The vast majority of runners don’t want to go there.” But apparently it’s where he goes when things get tough. Rob admittedly struggles with depression. He doesn’t treat his depression or understand the root cause. But perhaps there is some link between his struggle and his ability to suffer well when competing.

When asked for six words that best describe him, he takes a few moments and then replies, “I’d say patient, simple, complicated, thoughtful, passionate, and dedicated.” Rob enjoys being in the mountains and will get away to refresh himself with Christina and friends by enjoying hobbies such as ski mountaineering (skinning) and fly fishing. While he is grateful that his job as a pharmacist has provided a comfortable life in Flagstaff, Arizona, it’s not a job he is passionate

ad

► Rob and his wife, Christina, celebrating after the 2013 Transrockies Run.



© Christina Bauer

about. His demanding work schedule consists of seven graveyard shifts followed by seven nights off.

Rob says that he won't ever let a race interfere with work. In the event of a conflict, he will just skip the race. He says he looks forward to taking a leave of absence next year to make time for other opportunities.

Rob aspires to coach other runners one day. He would like to pass on the wisdom he has gained from his running experiences and help others avoid some of the pitfalls that sidelined him over the years. Rob agrees there is a certain amount of self-focus in the sport of ultrarunning. There is a degree of guilt that he feels about this, and it's an area in his life he has had to work on balancing. Rob doesn't want to look too far into the future. He is enjoying every moment of every win. After each race, he takes time to refresh and to regroup mentally.

Rob's words of advice for newbie ultrarunners

"Take your time and enjoy the process. Training and racing ultras is very demanding of body, mind, and time. Gradually work from shorter trail races to the longer distances. Be respectful of the importance of rest and recovery in the training process."

One final note I would like to add about Rob Krar is that he is a man of his word. That day when we met in the parking lot at Squaw Valley and he told me he would get back to me after the race to do this interview, I didn't think he would follow through so soon. On Sunday afternoon while I was driving back to the Bay Area with my boyfriend, Joe, a message popped up on my phone. I said to Joe, "Guess who just sent me a message?" Joe replied, "Rob Krar?" I said, "Yep, the winner of Western States 100! He's following up regarding an interview." I later learned that Rob sent me that message while *driving* back to Flagstaff in a car with a broken air conditioner. He had to get back to work at the pharmacy to begin another round of graveyard shifts. 