

Youthful Team Looks To Continue Success At 2008 Untamed New England Adventure Race

by Johnny Utah with photo credits to Brian Knight of Will Ramos Photography (www.waramos.com) and Untamed Adventure staff

They didn't look like podium contenders; the "UltraBambi" team from Massachusetts were clearly the youngest team at the Untamed Adventure race 2007 check-in, two of them had never competed in an adventure race of this magnitude and their race gear was relatively untested -- their mountain bikes had kick-stands, in fact. Their competition was tough; several racers had experienced PrimalQuest, raced mountain bikes for money, or competed in other high profile events in exotic locations.

UltraBambi, in contrast, was composed of a quiet Massachusetts school teacher, Brian Staveley, and two students; one student, Bex, was a Freshman in college, and the other student, Miles, was a high school Sophomore. Brian had raced some smaller adventure races before, Bex had done a single short race months earlier, but this was the first event of this kind for Miles.

The sport of adventure racing is known to reward experience, and the UltraBambi team was, like their team name suggests, innocent and inexperienced. Veteran racers aspired to the podium at the Untamed Adventure race; UltraBambi aspired to just survive.



The team is all smiles during a canoeing segment of the race

Undeterred by their competition, UltraBambi embraced the challenge and surprised everyone when they came out of the first canoeing leg in 9th position out of 46 teams. It was a hot Virginia day and the race was just getting started.

Several hours later, after running rooty riverbank trails, biking rolling back roads, swimming portions of the James River, and even more canoeing, they had risen to 6th place in the race. UltraBambi was squarely in the "lead pack" and only 30 minutes behind the race leaders.

UltraBambi had surprised everyone up to this point, including themselves, but they were approaching what would be the crux of this Untamed Adventure race: hours and hours of detailed map and compass work through densely forested valleys, ridges, and swamps. Darkness fell . . . briars tore at their skin . . . the terrain played tricks on their navigation . . . but they arrived at the campfire on the other side of the forest to cheering fans and a slightly stunned race staff.



The team rushes to get their gear together at a transition area in the middle of the night

"That was HARD," exclaimed Staveley, when they arrived at the fire, "I mean . . . that was hard." He was covered in dirt, out of breath, and smiling.

UltraBambi had passed 4 teams during the tough orienteering courses and had emerged in 2nd place.

The race was far from over, however, as there was technical mountain biking and more technical orienteering still to go. The team refueled and continued pushing through the course. Spurred on by the rising sun, the team continued their improbable success and handled all the obstacles the brutal course could throw at them.

After 30 hours of racing through the mid-Atlantic heat and dense vegetation of Virginia, UltraBambi proudly crossed the finish line in 2nd place. Over half the teams in the Untamed Adventure race didn't finish the grueling full course, and for UltraBambi to finish on the podium is a remarkable achievement.

"We kept a steady pace and worked well together as a team," commented Staveley after their race, "Miles is very detail-oriented – in a way that I'm not – and Bex has a quiet implacability that manages to be both soothing and motivating at the same time."



The team at the finish line

Not content with such an impressive first showing for an adventure race team, it wasn't long before UltraBambi set their sights on an even bigger challenge: the 3 day Untamed Adventure race in June of 2008. This event would be twice as long and feature the rugged mountainous terrain of northern New England.

When asked about the team's preparations, Brian shared one of the UltraBambi training secrets, "it's what we call 'Sisyphus' (after the character from Greek mythology). Sisyphus involves walking quickly on the treadmill at max elevation, carrying plates (ranging from 25 to 45 pounds) in alternating hands, then directly overhead. "

Sisyphus, in Greek mythology, was required to roll a boulder up a hill for all eternity; it was punishment for his evil deeds.



The Untamed New England Adventure Race will be the next challenge for UltraBambi

The Untamed New England Adventure Race will have teams dangling from ropes on sheer mountain cliffs, paddling rivers fed by alpine snow melt, trekking through some of America's great forests, and biking staggering mountain passes. The race will not, however, include rolling boulders up hills and that's perfectly fine for UltraBambi.

"We're all pretty scared about the Untamed New England race," observed Staveley, the team Captain, "our goal is just to finish the entire course in the allotted time."