

Our 2008 Hood to Coast Adventure by Anne Bonney

Ahhhh, the 200 mile relay... The opportunity to run 18 or more miles over 17-30 sleepless hours, sit in a cramped van with a bunch of other stinky tired runners, eat junk food, hurry up one second, and wait around the next, stress out, get lost, run in the dark, then run again in the light. Sound like fun? I don't think so either, but somehow it is....it's REALLY fun!

A co-worker Shawn and I decided to try to sneak an entry into the mother of all 200 mile relays, the Nike Hood to Coast Relay. The reason I say "sneak" is because I was advised by a friend who'd know, that we would probably have no chance at getting a lottery entry if they knew we were an Under Armour team. We decided to double our chances by submitting 2 entries. One of our VPs wrote personal checks, and we put our personal info on the registration form, sent it out on precisely the right day and sat back for 6 weeks to wait. One was rejected, the other was accepted. We were in! Then came the task of finding hotel rooms and rental vans, which fortunately enough, we were successful with. Months of planning, meetings, and excitement, and it was time to go.

The way it works is this. A 197 mile course is set up from the top of Mount Hood to the Oregon Coast town of Seaside. 36 legs of 4-8 miles each are separated by exchange points with parking, a runner exchange area, and lots of portopotties (called Honey Buckets in the northwest. We had some fun with that, as did the team running in speedos!) Most teams have 12 runners, but you can have any number up to 12 on a team. Each team is allowed to have 2 vans. Generally teams are given start times coinciding with their projected finish time; slow teams start first, faster teams later with the hope that everyone will arrive at the finish at around the same time. The first teams started at 8am, and every 15 minutes until 7:45 at night, the first runners for about 20 teams start their journey to the coast. Then begins a leap frog game of runners and vans, time coordination, supply monitoring, runner care and course negotiation. The runner lineup has to be in order throughout the race, and you want to get the next runner to the exchange point in enough time to make the hand off from the incoming runner. Legs vary from city streets to highways to quiet residential streets to trails. Sometimes the vans can follow along the runner course where they can stop to cheer and offer water. Other times the vans have to take an alternate route to the next exchange point if the roads are too narrow, or the leg is on a trail. These alternate vehicle routes aren't marked, so finding the next exchange point gets interesting, especially after everyone's a little sleep deprived! A lot of teams take it seriously, but mainly it's an excuse to have some fun with like-minded healthy runners. Teams decorate their vans to communicate their team name and theme. Some teams wear costumes, or at least coordinating outfits. It's a really fun time.

I did a similar relay back in 07 with some people from my Antarctica marathon trip, and we had a blast, so I jumped at the opportunity to be involved again. I'm not usually one to sit on the sidelines, in fact, this was my first time, but we set up a pretty fast team, and I thought my skill set would be better suited to support the team by being a driver. Basically I didn't want to slow them down! Everyone had a great attitude about the whole thing, and we were there to have fun, but were still planning to log some pretty fast legs. It was better if I just worked on the support crew. I was very excited.

When putting together the team, we considered a few factors. Of course they had to be runners. Not necessarily fast, but they had to be able to go the distance. Aside from that, they had to be team players, understand that we were there to have fun and make a little noise for the brand, and have good chemistry with the rest of the group. Not a tough thing to come by in our company, as we're all extraordinarily cool, but the circumstances of this race will put the coolest people on edge, so we needed to be sure the personalities would mesh. So, let me introduce you to the cast of characters...I mean TEAM! Here's the run down, in order. In Van 1 was Raphael Peck, our VP of footwear who footed

the bill for the entry fee, Sean Sharpe, our licensee PLM and a very fast man, Shawn Oshea, my partner in crime in organizing this mess, our men's run PLM and another impressive runner, Joe Trachta the footwear wear-test guy and quite a sandbagger we would find out; Dave Stakel, a footwear PLM who competed in a rainy and difficult Ironman Lake Placid a few weeks ago with a great time, and rounding out van 1 was Pat Bauer, a late addition when another runner backed out. Pat recently transferred over from the footwear team to the sales team and moved to Portland, and can run at a decent clip as well, so he was a welcome addition to the team. Tara, Raph's assistant was our other partner in crime in planning this trip, and she volunteered to be the driver for Van 1. In Van 2 (my van!) was Craig Lindemann, a material developer and accomplished triathlete, Tony Ambroza, retail marketing head and our only Hood to Coast veteran, Cori Koch, our running shoe PLM and super stud fast runner, Jessi Stensland, an Under Armour sponsored professional triathlete, and personal friend, who's been training really hard, so we knew she'd represent. Then came Mike Blaise, footwear sales guy, and quite an athlete himself, and running anchor is the ever cheerful Chris Biersmith, apparel development guru, and a lean, mean running machine. We had the makings of an awesome squad, both athletically and personally. It was going to be a fun adventure!

Tara and I flew in to Portland on Wednesday to get the vans, décor, supplies, food, drinks, etc. Everything ran smoothly, and our runners started arriving that night. Dinners, shopping trips, retail visits, and a few runs in our new UA running shoes, and it was time to go.

We checked out of the hotel at noon on Friday, loaded up the vans, grabbed some lunch on the way out of Portland, and then started up the road to the top of Mt Hood. Everyone was very excited, and all wearing their black team shirts. There was lots of chatter and joking. Energy was high. Unfortunately, our start time wasn't until 6pm, but we wanted to get to the starting line with plenty of time to pick up our packets, decorate the vans and soak up the excitement of the race.

We arrived at the starting area around 3pm. We piled out of our vans, and were immediately greeted by a passing car yelling "Under Armour sucks". Now you have to remember, Nike Corporate Headquarters is in Beaverton, OR, right outside Portland, so we were in Nike-ville now! The Hood to Coast Relay is title sponsored by them as well, and the word was that 200 out of the 1000 teams were Nike affiliated, so there were at least 2400 Nike people out there. We show up with our branded magnets and window stickers announcing our affiliation, all in matching Under Armour shirts, so there was no question who we were, and we stuck out like a sore thumb! We clumped together a little more tightly, and headed up to the registration area.

We were definitely being stared at, but we were so excited to be there that we were laughing and enjoying the day. The weather was unbelievably gorgeous, and the view from Timberline Lodge was amazing. It was going to be a great race! We picked up our packet, got shirts distributed (not like we were going to wear them, but for some reason we all took one) cheered on some starting teams, and soaked up the day! We were finally here, and this was exciting. I ran into my friends from the Reno-Tahoe relay I did in 2007. They were the Texas Chain Gang, and all had on bright yellow prison jump suits. They looked great, and it was awesome to see them.

We had about 2 hours before our start, so we headed back to our vans to chill out, only to find that one of our "friends" had used red window paint to "decorate" our van with a big swoosh on the window, and a big x over one of our logo magnets. Real mature guys! There had been a few other comments from other teams, and we noticed that another team nearby (in Nike shirts) was sneakily taking pictures of our van and us. We would have happily posed for them if they'd have asked! I was suddenly concerned that the fun of this event was going to be sucked out by bitter reactions to our presence there, but hoped that once people were involved in the race, they'd be too busy to think about tormenting

us. This turned out to be pretty much the case, aside from a few snide remarks along the way; we were pretty much left alone. (That didn't stop me from doing a vandalism check every time we got back to the van though!)

We sent for Raph to come and take a look at the addition to our decor. We thought he'd blow up, because he was already pretty defensive and fired up. Jessi readied the video camera. He didn't give us quite the reaction we thought he would, but we all had a good laugh, took some pictures, and then washed it off with our Nike race shirts!

We hung out for a while longer, had some snacks, laughed and joked, took some team photos, and finally it was time to get started. We all headed up to the starting line with Raph who was to be running the first leg. The infamous first leg! This 5.64 mile leg is the one everyone talks about and dreads. It drops 2000 feet in elevation, is breathtakingly beautiful, but brutal, and the adrenaline flowing from the start of the race often sends runners out way too fast, and by the time they reach the exchange point, their quads are shot and the other 2 legs are highly unpleasant if not impossible. The starting gun rang, we cheered our brains out, and we were off!

We hopped in the vans, and headed to exchange point 1. We weren't allowed to stop along the way, so we yelled at Raph out the window as we passed, and proceeded to exchange point 1. There were a lot of teams already there, and we chatted with a few of them. Van 1 got some supplies at the little convenience store there; we had a few snacks, and waited for Raph. He came running down the road, 8 minutes ahead of his projected time. We were off to a blazing start!

Our plan (Van 2) was to stay with van 1 for a few legs, cheer them on and take in the energy of beginning of the race as well as a few logistical details, so that when our time came, we'd have a better idea what was going on! Our first runner didn't start until about 10:30 at night, so we had plenty of time. After cheering on Sharpe and Oshea, we high-tailed it to Exchange 6. Fortunately there was a big grocery store there, so we took the opportunity to get some dinner hit the bathroom and relax before our legs began.

It was at exchange point 6 that we figured out who our vandals were! Team 932 had painted a very familiar looking red swoosh on the window of their vans. Our mantra was "rise above" but that didn't stop us from slowing down when we drove by them, and walking by their vans and looking at them. Craig even took a few pictures. We shared our findings with the other van, between texts of each runner's times. We were thrilled to hear that each runner in van 1 was beating their projected times by at least 3 minutes, if not more. Joe the sandbagger had shaved 16 minutes off his projected time on his long 7.18mile leg. The pressure was on! Van 1 had called, and it was time for us to answer. Team Under Armour was already 40 minutes ahead of schedule. Tony was not traveling in the van with us for the first few legs. He was planning to meet us at his first exchange point. We called him to let him know that the team was kicking ass, and that we'd be there early. The report from Van 1 was that Pat was running fast, and should arrive shortly. Van 1 arrived, we all exchanged high fives and reports from the road, and headed up to the runner exchange area to get Craig started.

It was 10:00pm, and our runners were finally on the road. A lot of the next 6 legs were on trails, and it was dark! Really dark! We were hoping to drive very near Jessi and Cori, our 2 female runners on their legs, but it turned out that both of their legs were all on trails, so we couldn't even drive past them during their runs. Cori emerged from her 7 mile leg, handed off to Jessi, then announced that she was a city girl, and wasn't used to such dark, such quiet, and the possibility of wildlife on her runs! Happily, everyone did fine in the dark. In fact, they did more than fine, we too met or beat our projected times. We were very proud, but also realistic, knowing that we had 2 more legs each. By the end of our first 6

legs, we were 45 minutes ahead of our projected time. We considered this time in the bank that we could give back on the later legs.

Biersmith finished his leg in Portland around 1:30am, and handed off to Raph for his second leg. We'd saved 2 hotel rooms in Portland for this point. Van 1 had spent their few hours of break back at the hotel eating pizza, showering and trying to get some sleep. Unfortunately due to traffic delays getting to the hotel, and the need to be at exchange 12 in time to meet us, they didn't get much sleep, but they were in good spirits when we saw them, and excited that we'd kept up our end of the bargain! They headed down the road, and we headed back to the hotel for some rest. (after a 20 minute waste of precious time at some train tracks)

It was 2:00 in the morning, and we were all tired. We had eaten at Exchange 6, and had some snacks in the van, so we didn't need any food. Most of us skipped the opportunity to shower in order to maximize the amount of time we had to sleep. We were meeting at 3:30 to drive the 30 miles down to exchange point 19 where we'd pick up Tony and start our second set of legs. Fortunately we all had at least an hour of solid shut eye, and were feeling refreshed when we reloaded and headed down the road. Tara had been sending updates as their runners finished, and they were cranking out the miles again! By the time left the hotel, 3 of their runners were already finished. These legs were the industrial legs heading out of Portland. They were ugly and dismal, and while we felt bad for the other team, we felt lucky that we hit these legs in the dark!

We arrived at the exchange point at around 4:30. Van 2 runners were pretty quiet the whole way, taking advantage of the additional time to sleep. I tried to contact Tony again to see where he was. We had about a half hour before Pat would be arriving to hand off to Craig. We were all looking forward to sunrise, and Craig communicated how he wasn't excited to be doing another run in the dark. (if we were on our projected time, it would have been light by now, but we were faster!) He was really looking forward to running during sun up though. Pat arrived around 5:30, and sent Craig off for his 6 mile leg. Unfortunately Tony didn't meet us until 20 minutes later. Once we had him, we raced to the next exchange point, hoping we'd beat Craig there.

Van 1 wasn't allowed on the next 6 legs, so their plan was to zoom to Exchange 24 and get some much needed rest before our arrival around 9:30am. Unfortunately every other van had the same plan, and the 1000 or so vehicles on the small Oregon roads caused quite a bit of traffic, and they wasted 2 hours jammed up on the way to their quiet spot. They were all pretty tired, having run another 6 impressive legs, and needed the rest, but that's what makes these relays such an adventure. You never know what curve ball is going to be thrown your way! Oh yeah, another feature of these beautiful back road Oregon areas was that there was poor cell reception for the next 13 legs, so getting them updates on our runner's times was a challenge. We would just have to hope to find them at 24 for the exchange!

We zoomed to the next exchange and did beat Craig there by about 8 minutes. Tony was getting ready, and looking for pins when Craig came flying up the road. After a heart wrenching minute and a half, Tony came running to the exchange area, grabbed the wrist band from Craig, and flew off down the road. When seeing another similar situation transpire with another team later in the race, Blaise dubbed it the "Ambroza hand-off". We all had a good laugh.

Craig was flying high! The sun had come up, and it was clear and cool. He'd had a great run through the woods, and had his second wind. We all felt a renewed sense of energy and purpose with the arrival of the new day, and were ready to tackle the rest of our second segment. Tony came flying in well ahead of his projected time after a very hilly and very dusty leg, and Cori headed down the road, then she handed off to Jessi. We only had a quarter of a tank of gas left, and toyed with the idea of quickly finding a gas station during Jessi's 6.8 mile hilly run. The GPS wasn't feeding us logical

information about the location of that gas station, and we didn't want to have another late exchange. We figured we'd make it through our segment, and then find gas and a good meal during our break. Jessi cranked, Blaise cranked, and Biersmith finished our segment up strong. Again, we turned out amazing times, consistently faster than projected. We started throwing around the idea that we might be able to finish under 23 hours which would be very impressive for a rookie team thrown together without any particular speed goals in mind. We knew that the last legs would be the hardest, and we might give some of our banked time back, but we were 50 minutes ahead of schedule, and we felt strong. Hungry, but strong.

We met van 1 at exchange point 24, and found out the trouble they'd had getting there. Most of them hadn't slept and hadn't gotten anything substantial to eat. Raph's legs were killing him after his tough runs, Sharpe had run so fast that he'd come in a little woozy on his last leg, and the rest of the team was strong, but also quite tired. We knew that we might give some of that time back, but could still finish under 23 if we stuck to our projected times. They found a new motivation, and were ready. I gave Raph a pep talk, and off he hobbled to start his leg.

It was 9:30am. We got some directions to the nearest gas station; they matched what the GPS said, so we set off to find it, then food. The race had a breakfast, shower and nap area set up at a nearby school, which we identified as a food option if necessary. We didn't have cell reception, so we needed to stay on schedule, and arrive at the exchange point a bit early, just in case they continued to tear up the course. We zipped off in the direction of the gas station. It seemed to take forever to get there, but we finally found it, and right next door, was the Elderberry Inn and diner! (they didn't have Elderberries, but other than that, they were fully stocked!) We debated for a bit to be sure we had time to sit and eat, and decided that we did. We had a great breakfast, and watched a bit of Olympic table tennis. We joked about feigning injury of one of our runners so Raph would think he'd have to do another leg, but decided that in their sleep deprived condition; the humor would probably be lost on them. We tried to get in touch with Tara, and someone mentioned doing this again the next year! We were all in! We were having a great time.

After a great meal, around 11:45am, we set off back up the road to rejoin the course. We got to exchange 24 pretty quick, then headed up the road with the runners. At this point, the fast teams who started late are catching up to the slower teams that started earlier the previous day. The runners weren't as spread out so there were more runners to cheer for, but also more vehicle traffic, especially at the exchange points. We went as fast as we could to get to Exchange 30. Most of these runners were on their last leg, so I was in full cheering spirit, yelling encouragement as I drove pretty straight down the road! We had some good laughs as my tired mind tried to come up with good things to cheer. We decided that while "Athletes Run" is a great message, it's not a very good cheer! "Nice Light" was a favorite from the night cheering that we continued with several times at this point. (Runners had to wear head lamps and reflective vests during the nighttime runs, so we'd yell "Nice Light" at them as we drove past. Hey, we were being supportive!) We were getting a little nervous as we drove leg after leg and hadn't passed our runners yet. We'd hit a spot with cell reception and gotten word from Tara that van 1 wasn't slowing down, so we needed to get to the exchange! We finally caught up with them during Stakel's leg. It was a brutally hilly leg, and the mid-day sun was beating down. Teams were starting to run low on water, and were looking for provisions, but we were still in the back woods, with no stores in sight. Stakel was pushing it up a hill, so we got out and cheered! Still going!

We got held up at a big traffic jam at exchange 29, and high tailed it to exchange 30. We got a bit less than mile from the exchange point and traffic was inching along. We sat in it for 20 minutes, then realized that if Pat was running like the rest of the van was running (and the word was that he was) he was going to beat us to the exchange point. Craig, Blaise and Tony hopped out and ran ahead (as many other teams were doing). It's a good thing they did too because a

few minutes later, Pat ran by us. We cheered and screamed and hoped Craig and the gang had made it to the exchange point. They had, and a few minutes later we drove through the exchange area, handed Pat a Gatorade and told him we'd tell his van that he was done. We scooped up Mike and Tony, and off we went.

Craig's leg was only 4 miles long, and he was feeling strong because he'd been rocking the Recovery Suit, so we didn't have much time to get to the exchange point. We were hoping that since most of the team's first vans would be done by now, that the congestion would be lighter. We were pleased when we reached the next exchange with a few minutes to spare. Craig blazed in, happy to be done and Tony set out for his last leg, another short one, so off we went. We hit another big traffic jam at the next point, so Cori and Biersmith hopped out, and did the exchange while we caught up. It was getting exciting. We were moving fast, feeling strong, and were on our way to the beach. We were on pace to make or beat 23 hours, and life was good. We picked up Biersmith and Tony, cheered for Cori as we passed and decided to go straight on to the next point. We were hoping to cheer for people, but with the backups, we didn't want to risk missing the exchange. We reached the next few exchange points with time to spare, and used to restroom, and loaded up on water, which we'd unfortunately run out of. Our team continued to deliver the projected times, and by the time Blaise finished his leg, and handed off to Biersmith for the last leg, it looked like he had over 40 minutes to run his moderately difficult 5.23 mile leg. It could be done....it could be done.

We got in touch with Van 1 to find out where they were. They'd gone straight to the beach after picking up Bauer, parked at the hotel and were at the finish line area waiting for Chris. We wanted to get there and all run in together, so we put the pedal to the medal and got to the hotel with around 20 minutes to spare. Cori quickly checked into the hotel so our van wouldn't get towed and we jogged to the beach. I had to remember that they'd just spent the last 23 hours running their butts off, and then sitting in a van, so their legs were tired and sore, but I was so excited! We'd done it, we'd had a great time, and it was time to celebrate. We met up with the rest of the team on the beach, exchanged some high fives, hugs and fist bumps. We were all tired and bleary eyed, but were feeling very energetic and excited. Finally they called our team; we ran out onto the course, met up with Biersmith and finished the last 100 feet all together at 5:00pm! It was awesome! We went through the finishing chute, got medals, official team photos, and headed to the VIP tent area! My watch read 23:00:01 right after we'd crossed the finish line. I knew it had been stopped for a minute or so at one point, but wasn't sure for how long, so we didn't know quite what our final time was. We grabbed some food and beer and sat around and swapped stories. A few of us went into the cold ocean. The view was gorgeous. After a little while, everyone decided it was time to go get a shower and hit the hay. We got checked into our hotels, and cleaned out our van. I was still running around a little getting people squared away and moving the van, and finally met up with Jessi, Blaise and Craig around 8 and went onto the beach to people watch and walk around. Seaside is a cute little town, and after an hour and a half of wandering, trying on hats and drinking milk shakes, we all started losing steam. We didn't want the day to be over, but it was time to go to bed. We had an early departure the next morning for the airport 2 ½ hours away in Portland, so any sleep we could get would be a great idea.

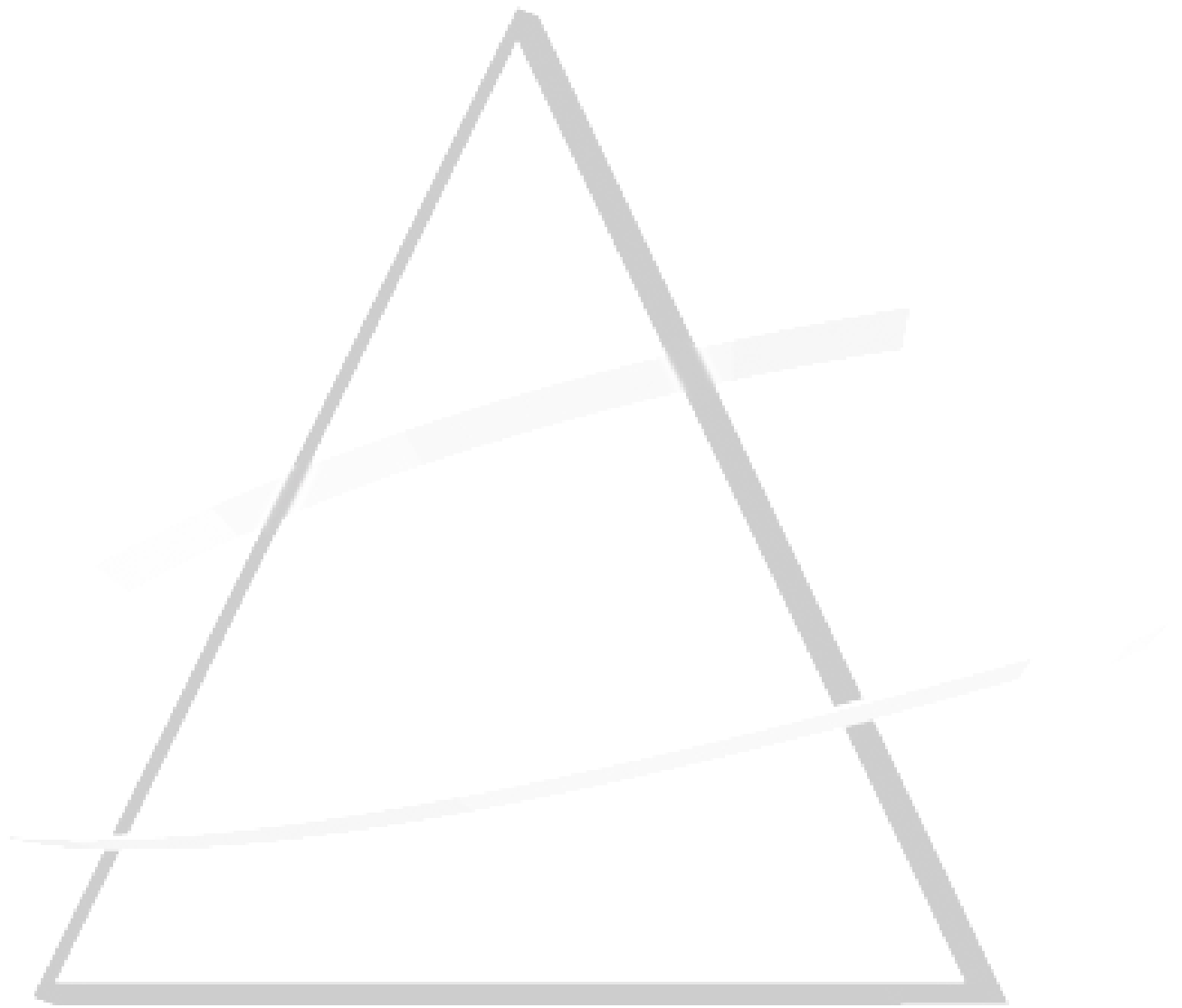
3:30 came way too early for the 6 of us on the early flights the next morning, but we didn't hit any of the traffic we were told we'd hit, and got to the airport with plenty of time to grab breakfast, and recount what a great time we had. We arrived home in Baltimore, and you could tell that we were all sad to see it end, but wished each other goodnight, and we'd see them tomorrow.

We left Baltimore as co-workers, and came home as friends and teammates. Everyone ran their hardest, and left it all out on the course. Aside from feeling proud of our performance, and feeling lucky for how smoothly things had gone, we had fun! We laughed a lot, and really enjoyed ourselves, and look forward to next year. (on that note, we made a

contact through our tent in the VIP area that will be able to get us a couple of entries for next year if we want them, so it won't be up to lottery luck again! SCORE!)

Oh, and we checked out the results for our Nike friends on team 932, and it was something like 28 hours. Maybe they should stick to vandalizing cars!

DELTA



Triathlon