

Highball to Thurmond 50 Mile Race Day Visualization

Congratulations on registering to take on Highball to Thurmond 50 Miler!

Below you will learn about race mindset, strategy, and mindfulness. After that, is your race day visualization! Wrapping things up, you will find out where you can get some more free mindset and mental wellness resources to help you finish stronger in your race and in life.

I wish you all the best in your training!

Happy running,

Coach Shannon

Note: This visualization is for the 2024 Highball to Thurmond 50 Miler race course. I do my best to make these race day visualizations as accurate as possible by including aid stations and other notable course features; however, be aware that the race course, aid station names, etc. may be changed at any time by the race management.

I will not be keeping up with course changes regularly and race management does not notify me of any changes that they make. The good news is, even if the race course changes, this visualization will still be beneficial in a general sense.

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Race mindset and strategy

Ultrarunners, how do you feel at the start line of your race? Are you filled with excitement and gratitude or do you find yourself feeling nervous? Some nervousness is natural, you want to perform well, which can be a “positive stress.” Your race start mindset and strategy is key, it helps set the tone of your race.

Here is a great way to start your race, begin with a positive and strong mindset and remain in the present moment. This strategy is for the start line and for the front portion of the race, especially as you get comfortable and settle into a pace. As you are doing your pre-race activities, it is good to take a moment to reflect on your race training strengths and previous successes.

Successes can come from training or races. Reflecting and reminiscing will increase feelings of gratitude and reinforce that positive and strong mindset. You made it to the event; it is something to be proud of and should be celebrated. Enjoy your race!

Acknowledge nervousness and any other emotions, but focus should be in the present, right where you are at. Do not stress over a potential problem until it happens. Rest in knowing that you should be able to solve it when it occurs because of your previous experiences in training and racing. You are knowledgeable!

We also need to be able to practice our approach to dealing with things outside of our control, in life and in racing. Thinking should be flexible.

Flexible thinking examples: seeing something from a few different perspectives, having two or more possible solutions, or being non-judgmental of our thoughts and emotions.

Returning to addressing the worries of potential problems, remind yourself that there are race volunteers, crew, and pacers who can lend a hand. You can handle it; you can take care of it.

Start your race on the right foot, with gratitude, knowing what you do well, how you can use your problem-solving skills, and staying present. Thrive off connecting with your body, the race environment, and other athletes. Own your mindset!

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What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is **choosing to be aware of the present moment, on purpose, and in a non-judgmental way**. When being mindful, our attention and focus is on whatever we choose to observe or do. In this moment, choose to focus your mind wherever you would like it to be.

Maybe you focus on your emotions, thoughts, and physical sensations as you experience the environment around you. You may also choose to focus on an object. One thing and one moment at a time.

Hold your attention there, focusing on being in the moment. Redirect your focus mindfully, gently, whenever you are ready.

Benefits of mindfulness

Researchers have found positive benefits to mindfulness meditation, including reduced stress, increased focus and attention, regulation of emotions, greater self-compassion, acceptance of current situations, and pain management. Counselors working with clients and students have found that dispositional mindfulness and mindful meditation can increase empathy, self-efficacy, and self-awareness.

People also reported experiencing mental, physical, and emotional shifts during or after practicing a mindfulness meditation. Specifically, people experienced mental relief and achieving some clarity.

Their bodies became more relaxed and their breathing slowed. The predominant emotions were calmness and happiness.

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Who can mindfulness help?

Mindful interventions are effective in reducing or managing symptoms related to diagnoses of posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, and substance use disorders.

I have used appropriate parts of mindful interventions when working with people who struggle with eating disorders, though this is something that I need to be very careful of and know my client very well, as it brings attention to the body and physical sensations that are things to be considerate of with eating disorders.

A little disclaimer

As with any exercise, make sure that you are informed prior to starting it. Know that when we practice mindfulness, we will be aware of emotions, thoughts, and physical sensations. What comes to us through mindfulness is a part of being human.

We all experience emotions, thoughts, and physical sensations. They will come and go. Just know that you will experience these things, and if they become too intense, have a helpful backup plan to manage what comes up.

Your backup plan needs to be in place before beginning the exercise. I recommend going through a few mindful exercises with an experienced professional before using mindfulness as a coping strategy or tool.

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Practicing mindfulness (in general)

Tips:

Practice regularly, five minutes, once per week is a good amount, but feel free to do more. Remember that this is a skill, it needs to be learned.

Not everyone may connect with this skill.

1. Let go of judgments

We all have judgments. Whenever you notice yourself judging, let the judgment pass through and drift off, do not allow it to stick around. Judgments should come and go like clouds and ocean waves.

2. Practicing mindfulness in the moment

Be present in the “small moments.”

Example:

Take 10 minutes and clean part of your home, fully immersing yourself in the process.

When you find yourself distracted, this could be a judgmental thought, refocus on what you are doing. Full focus and attention, non-judgmentally.

3. Meditation

A thought on meditation. Meditation can be considered anything if you are present, being non-judgmental, and have an open heart.

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4. Practice

Meditate on your life experiences, starting with the moment you are currently in. Stay present for some time, connecting to the moment, then, when you're ready, shift your focus to another moment.

5. Teflon mind

Let potentially stressful situations, criticisms, or anything else that might "stick" to you, causing needless suffering, roll off your mind. Allow these experiences to slide through your awareness.

6. Dealing with distractions

Distractions do not go away; they are a part of this world. Do not get frustrated with distractions, they are reminders to go back to what you are working on. They are natural.

When you become distracted, bring yourself back to the present moment. Do this over, and over, and over again, if you need to.

7. Taking hold of your mind

Direct your mind where you want it. There are many thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations to direct your attention towards. Choose one of those, opening your mind to it and closing your attention off from the other options.

If your mind drifts towards a closed off option, gently re-close it and return to the option of choice.

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Mindfulness on the trail

Be aware and pay attention: by watching, listening, and considering the environment. This is what is naturally occurring.

Engage your five senses, connect with your body, and the Earth.

Examples: What you see, hear, smell; feeling the ground with your feet as you run; noticing your breathing; listening to the crunching of leaves; noticing the shadows on the ground; watching the clouds slowly reshape; noticing the texture of rocks; noticing shades of lighting in the woods; water and mud as you run through it; paying attention to thirst and hunger or gut cues.

Final tips for practicing your mindfulness skills

Schedule skill use: Many people start with great intentions for doing skillful behaviors, but they lack follow-through. Schedule time to practice skillful behaviors, write them in your planner or on your calendar, treat them like a “to-do” list.

Stick with it: Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary defines a skill as “the ability to do something that comes from training, experience, or practice.” Being skillful is not automatic, so don’t be discouraged if it takes time and practice for skills to work. Stick with it, and the benefits that will come from your skills will be self-reinforcing in time.

Applying mindfulness to trail running and racing

Practice mindfulness at home and on the trail. Practice at home because it supports your mental health and may help you get through rough days. Practice even when things are going well, not just when you are struggling. As you practice the exercises at home, you will be able to transfer the learned skills to the trail.

As we are mindful while running, there will be more awareness between the mind and body. We can connect more with our bodies and environment. The more in-tune with things, the more power we have. The more we can stick to our goals and achieve them. We can better regulate our emotions and problem-solve.

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Video:

<https://www.loom.com/share/86ce9885db8d4285a78f3b06bc125d6c?sid=972dd4f1-c79e-4e15-b80e-f13b054316e8>

Transcript:

You can do this a couple of times leading up to the race, taper time!

Sit comfortably, close your eyes, and take time to notice the eb and flow of your breath.

Bring your awareness to your breath, notice it enter and exit your nose, and the rise and fall of your belly.

Breathe in, breathe out. Find any tension in your body and allow it to flow out with every exhale.

Guide your awareness to the front space of your mind and hold your attention there.

Visualize the start line near the train stop in Montgomery, West Virginia. Visualize the colors of the starting corral. Notice all the visual details of the starting corral, the banners, race crews, and spectators.

Notice the time of day. The streetlights are still on, but the daylight is gradually appearing. The chilliness in the air resting on your skin. The refreshing air in your lungs.

Visualize yourself lining up at the start, ready to conquer your goal.

What are you wearing? Picture yourself in your shoes, race outfit, and with all your gear.

Are you wearing shorts? How about your shirt? Are you wearing a hat? What shoes are you wearing?

Do you have any water and nutrition on you?

Your watch is ready.

The race is about to begin, the signal goes off that the race has begun.

You start into a light jog on the paved roads that weave through a neighborhood. There is no need to go out too hard. Let your body ease into comfortable pace and stick to your plan.

People will go off ahead of you, allow them to go. Be with your appropriate, relaxed pace. Many runners will tire and you will catch them later in the race.

During this first portion of the race, you will feel calm and pace yourself appropriately. Your effort feels brisk and good, hold onto that feeling. Follow the six Ps: Proper pacing prevents piss poor performance.

The race course is a mix of pavement, single track, bridle trail, and towpath. Follow the course markings.

Leaving town, you head East along the Kanawha River. Over the next 3.5 miles, you are on a rolling road.

At mile 5.9, will be the first aid station, Deepwater. Check-in with yourself to see what you might need, keeping in mind that there are more rolling hills to come.

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Arriving at the first aid station, you hear volunteers cheer for you and greet you. Grab what you need. Do you need water?

After the Deepwater aid station, you proceed, feeling strong and confident.

About 9 miles into the race, the course turns into a narrow dirt road. There is a small brook and waterfalls along the way.

Coming into Kanawha Falls Overlook aid station, at mile 9.7, ask yourself what you need. Do you need water? Electrolytes? A snack? Get what you need and continue running strong.

Approaching a hill, you decrease your speed as you start the climb to reserve your stamina. Your cadence may increase slightly as you climb up the hill.

Now that you are at the top of the hill, you can readjust your speed. You have a nice downhill coming. You cruise down it for a little bit. As you are running down, you pass by two runners who took the hill too hard and expired when they reached the top. You feel great as you maintained your pace appropriately. Hold onto that great feeling.

Though you are working on the hills, you absorb the beautiful vistas, overlooks, rock walls, and drop-offs.

You peak Cotton Hill and check-in with yourself to see what you need at the second aid station. You are around 13.9 miles in.

Entering the aid station. Grab what you need. Do you need water? A gel? A piece of fruit? A sandwich? If you would like, allow the friendly volunteers to assist you.

After grabbing what you need, you are feeling good. From here, you descend quickly over the next 2.4 gravel miles.

You continue to enjoy the company of the trail community over the next few miles. Notice who is around you. Are you having conversations with others? Are you sticking with your plan?

The next few miles, you are back on pavement, making your way downhill towards the New River. This section of the course is gorgeous.

Once over the river, the section is relatively flat along the river. You arrive at Hawk's Nest State Park and take the Fisherman's Trail to the Hawk's Nest Connector Trail. The Connector Trail goes all the way to the New River Bridge.

Approaching the fourth aid station at Hawk's Nest State Park, ask yourself what you need. If you have a drop bag, do you need anything from it? Do you need to rehydrate? Do you need electrolytes? Are you feeling a little hungry? Take what you need.

There are great views and you see the Hawk's Nest Dam.

In about 5 miles, you will be at the Fayette Station Rd. aid station. As you get closer, you take note on what you might need as after the aid station, you will have about 8 miles until the 5th aid station. What do you need? Do you need to rehydrate? Do you need electrolytes? Are you feeling hungry?

In the aid station, take what you need.

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Now, on a small bridge, underneath the gargantuan New River Bridge crossing the river. Here, you are half way done with your race. You are focused and feeling determined.

While crossing, you check out some of the iconic rapids. This small section is a quick drop down to the river, soon you will be climbing out of the gorge.

You are on a 6.5 mile climb with technical sections and some stairs. You are between miles 26 and 32.5. During all your hard work, on the Fayetteville Trail, you are rewarded with iconic views, including one on a small out and back section. You also see beautiful waterfalls and abandoned mines.

Continue to keep up the work and have a flexible, yet strong mind. Repeat to yourself, "You got this."

After passing 50k, you are on a wide trail with rock walls on the right and steep drops on your left. The terrain is runnable, with rolling hills.

As you run along, there are tributary streams coming off the mountain, trailing down to the New River. The river roars below.

Reaching the Kaymoor Miners Trail aid station, volunteers are happy to see you and help. Do you need water? Electrolytes? A sandwich? Get what you need and continue running strong.

You continue to follow your race plan and you handle any issues that pop up. You are mindful of your effort on the hills and are racing smart.

You remind yourself of why you are out there.

At about mile 39.8, you will enter the Kaymoor Trailhead Cunard aid station. Do you need anything from your drop bag? Again, you support your body.

The Cunard River Access aid station is in about 2 miles. You may grab something that you didn't get at the previous aid station or you may top off your water or electrolytes to cover the next 5 miles.

From miles 39 to 48.5, you will come off Kaymoor Trail and then get on the Brooklyn Trail. During this 7.2 mile section, you climb about 300 ft in a .2 mile hill. Now that you motored your way up the climb, you run on an old railroad bed, which barely has any elevation gain.

Knocking off the next few miles, you continue to motivate yourself, "Keep moving." "Relentless forward progress." "Every step forward is a step closer to getting that award."

If it helps, break up the course mentally. Run tree to tree or rock to rock, and then power hike. All you need to do is to keep moving forward and to keep working hard. Dig deep, as needed.

You are doing amazing.

At mile 47 you arrive at the Southside Junction Trail aid station. Do you need anything for these last 3 miles?

Over these final two miles, you see the finish line in Thurmond. Awesome! Keep it up, you are close!

Imagine yourself receiving the award and holding it. Imagine the people who will be with you at the finish.

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1.3 miles left, you leave Rend Trail and get on the road. Just before the bridge into Thurmond, turn right and head to the finish line!

Your energy increases, you are doing it.

All your strength, possibilities, and determination fill your mind and body. Feel this positive energy fill your body.

Spectators are rooting for you. Happiness and gratitude also fill your body.

You can clearly see the finish line arch. Notice the details, what else can you see around the finish? Will anybody be waiting for you to congratulate you?

You feel emotions of accomplishment and excitement.

It is time to get to that timing mat.

The energy is swelling, as you feel it increase with every step towards the finish. The energy is expanding.

You continue to use your strength, possibilities, and determination as you surge towards the timing mat. You are strong, powerful, keep moving.

Notice the details of the finish line, volunteers, and spectators. The cheering, clapping, cow bell, smiling, and waving.

You finish!

You receive congratulations from the race director and your award.

This moment is what you are capable of, it's your potential. All the work that you are doing has led you to right here. Absorb that energy. You achieved something great.

Bring up to your mind any dreams and aspirations that you have for that event. Visualize your hopes.

Think about what it feels like to accomplish your goal and all the hard work that you have done.

Mentally repeat to yourself that you can achieve your goals. You have the potential. Repeat to yourself in your head or out loud, "you are a capable person." "You have unlocked your strength." "You can feel the positive energy."

Breathe in and out. When you are ready, you may open your eyes. Notice that the positive energy is still there. Hold onto it, now and during the event.

You have earned it.

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Talks and workshops for trail and ultrarunners

I lead a workshop for trail and ultra runners called **The Power of Mindfulness in Trail Running. THE POWER IS WITHIN YOURSELF.**

The workshop is packed with high quality information on what mindfulness is, who it benefits, what the benefits are, practicing it at home, and using it for trail racing.

For more details, please visit:

<https://finishstrongermindsetcoaching.com/talks-workshops/>

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