

A test of endurance

Hudson man to run Death Race in honor of ailing father

By Jeff Adair
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HUDSON - As the father of a 4-year-old and a job at Brigham and Women's Hospital, Matthew Melcher found little time to do anything outside of work and home.

Exercise? Well, back in high school in upstate New York he played basketball, baseball and ran track. Since then, not so much. "Last March, my wife gave me a good kick in the butt," Melcher, 35, recalled. "She said you're not active any more. I had gotten lazy ... I decided to help get back in shape I would sign up for an event."

Melcher gave himself three months to prepare for a Tough Mudder, which he ran with three friends in Gunstock, N.H. Since then, he's been hooked, "a bit obsessed" to put it accurately.

He did a second obstacle course race at Vermont's Mt. Snow in August. It was such a rush, running, climbing,

and crawling 11 miles, that at the end, Melcher grabbed his obligatory beer, T-shirt, and headband, got back in line and did the course a second time.

His most recent race was a 24-hour ultra obstacle course race in New Jersey, that while difficult pales in comparison to the Peak Summer Death Race in Pittsfield, VT, that he plans to do on June 27.

The Death Race involves hiking in the Green Mountains with rucksacks that could weigh in excess of 50 pounds for 20-plus miles and many other odd physical and mental challenges.

"No one really knows when the race starts and when it finishes but in recent years it has lasted as long as 70-plus hours and the finish rate in consistently around only 10 percent," Melcher said.

Throughout the race, organizers play mental games on the 300 or so athletes. "They tease you with beer, food and luxuries to try to get you to stop," he

said. Melcher, who trains logging a weighted backpack up Mount Pisgah on the Northborough/Berlin line along with sessions at CrossFit of Marlboro, said the main point of the race is to push oneself to the limits.

"You either finish it, and accomplish something pretty amazing, or you don't finish it but you at least you know in your heart you gave it your all," he said. "You know what you're capable of. It's kind of a win-win situation."

Besides the personal satisfaction, Melcher is doing the race in honor of his father, who was diagnosed with brain cancer at the age of 35 and has endured two major brain operations, chemotherapy, and radiation over the years.

"My father recently turned 60. The fact that he is still here is amazing with what he has been through in his life," said Melcher. "I gain a lot of my inner strength from growing up with a parent with a terminal illness, never knowing how long he would be around. Fortunately he has been able to witness many special moments such as seeing his four children grow up, walking my older sister down the aisle on her wedding day, seeing me get married, and the birth of his two granddaughters."

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Matthew Melcher training at Mount Pisgah.



Matthew Melcher in a 50-mile Tough Mudder. COURTESY PHOTOS.



Matthew Melcher and his daughter Quinn following a Spartan endurance race.

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