Heritage Teacher Phil Armstrong Rises to the Challenge at Obstacle Course Race World Championships

Q1 – You are just coming back from your participation in the Obstacle Course Race World Championships held on October 14-15 in Collingwood, Ontario. Are you pleased with your performance?

This was my first experience competing at an international event let alone the Obstacle Course Race World Championships (OCRWC). I had no idea of what to expect in terms of the caliber of the athletes or the level of difficulty with the obstacles on the course. That being said, I competed as hard as I was able and pushed myself to the limits of my abilities. Overall, I am very happy with my performance and I know now what I need to work on to improve my standings should I qualify to compete again next year.

Q2 - What are the qualification requirements to participate?

In order to qualify for the World Championships, athletes need to place in the top twenty within their age group at any number of obstacle course races such as Spartan Race, Dead End Race, Mud Hero, Warrior Dash, Savage Race, the list goes on. For smaller races with fewer participants usually only the top 3 are selected for this event.

Q3 – Can you describe the event and tell us how many participants did you compete with? Which distance did you compete in?

The OCRWC weekend consisted of 4 races. On Friday Oct 13, athletes competed in the 3 km sprint race that included 15 obstacles. Saturday was the main event which was the 15k long course championships including 45 obstacles. Some obstacles were spaced apart but others were very close together. In some cases the obstacles were mere meters apart which can be exhausting. I think one aspect of racing in Canada that surprised a lot of my international counterparts is the fact that most obstacle races here take place on ski hills so each race includes significant changes in elevation but the mountain itself doesn't count as an obstacle despite adding an extra challenge for the racers.

Q4 – How long did you train prior to the Championships?

I qualified for the OCRWC at the Spartan Race at Edelweiss in June. However, I had not planned on going to the OCRWC this year due to work and family commitments. But a perfect storm of good fortune presented itself and it turned out I had the opportunity to attend the race. So I did not arrive at the start line with my highest level of fitness. Usually for an event like this I would begin preparations about 24 weeks in advance with each weeks training having a specific target and focus.

Q5 – How does the World Championships compare to other races such as the Spartan race?
Without question, this was the hardest 15k obstacle race that I have ever completed. The beauty of this race is that each of the other obstacle race organizations are invited to bring their signature obstacles to this event. So the hardest and most challenging obstacles from any given race are all grouped together in one very challenging race. This year we even saw some obstacles brought over from Europe. Having never had the opportunity to prepare specifically for those obstacles made the event that much more enjoyable.

All of the obstacle course races each have their own features that are appealing. And the obstacle course racing community is really phenomenal. Just being at the OCRWC felt like a really big family reunion for me. I have many friends that I only see at races but since we all race so often we get to know each other quite well.

Q6 – Do you compete in other similar events on a regular basis?

My racing season runs from January until the OCRWC in mid October. In 2017, I am looking at somewhere between 10 and 15 competitive races and about the same number of races purely for fun or to support some of the athletes that I coach. One race that I am particularly looking forward to is the Ragnarok run happening on March 18 in Smiths Falls. What makes this race special is that it is a night race so the atmosphere is quite different. The big milestones for me next year are the New Jersey Spartan Ultra Beast on April 29, the Spartan Race Eastern Canada Ultra Beast in late summer 2017 then back to the OCRWC in October 2017.

If I could make it to the top 10 in any of these events that would be really special but regardless of the results, I absolutely love the sport and feel so grateful to have the opportunity to be a part of it.