



SWEATY, MUDDY— AND LOVING IT

BY CYNTHIA VESPIA | ILLUSTRATIONS BIANCA DIPIETRO



SATISFY YOUR TASTE FOR ADVENTURE
WITH RACES THAT ARE
ANYTHING BUT YOUR STANDARD 5K.

LEAD PHOTO © ANGUS MORDANT/DEMOTIX/CORBIS



says Ho. “By some accounts, the training at The O Course is more challenging than the races themselves. So it doesn’t matter which race you choose – you’ll be well prepared.”

PREPARE ON YOUR OWN

But if you’re not in a city that boasts facilities where you can train Spartan- or Warrior-style, fear not. There are ways to prepare for obstacle course races without the need for specialized equipment.

Before starting Camp Rhino, Johnston ran Boot Camp Las Vegas for a number of years, and says that the training involved in a boot-camp class can translate to obstacle course racing seamlessly. For those looking to prep for a race with virtually no equipment on hand, Johnston recommends mastering the pull-up, working on grip strength, and improving your vertical leap. How? “Find a playground and ‘play’ in between running laps around the park,” she advises. “Pull-ups, monkey bars and crawling up the slide backwards are all great exercises to start with.”

The Warrior Dash and Spartan Race have also implemented training programs on their respective websites to give beginners a better idea of what they’ll be up against come race day. The Warrior Dash offers competitors three training programs – Virgin, Casual or Ultimate Warrior – depending on which program best aligns with their goals. The Spartan Race also offers a WOD (Workout of the Day) by email subscription on their website. Each WOD is designed to provide a well-rounded combination of flexibility, strength, muscle endurance and aerobic training.

YOUR RACE TIMELINE

Putting in the time to train for obstacle race events can really pay off. “It’s best for your body if you put in six workouts per week, with two or three of those workouts being longer than two hours,” says Johnston, adding that you should start with a combination of running and circuit-style training as far out from the race as possible.

“How much you’ll need to train will depend on your baseline fitness,” notes Dan “Nitro” Clark, former American Gladiator and creator of the Gladiator Rock’n Run, a five-kilometer course featuring 17 grueling obstacles. “For women, it seems like the biggest challenge is having enough upper-body strength.” But that doesn’t mean those rope walls are an impossible feat: CrossFit and boot-camp workouts are great for boosting this lagging area, says Clark, adding that the minimum a prospective competitor should be able to do is run moderately and complete some standard body-weight exercises. “The best idea is to see what obstacles you’ll have to conquer, and to be honest with yourself about the areas you need to improve on in order to crush it.”

At the end of race day, when you’re covered in mud and sweat and feeling exhausted, it all comes down to having a fun and memorable experience. “Remember, these races are all about stepping out of your comfort zone and challenging yourself,” says Ho. “A great number of participants are happy with just completing the race and having done things that they never thought they’d be able to do.”

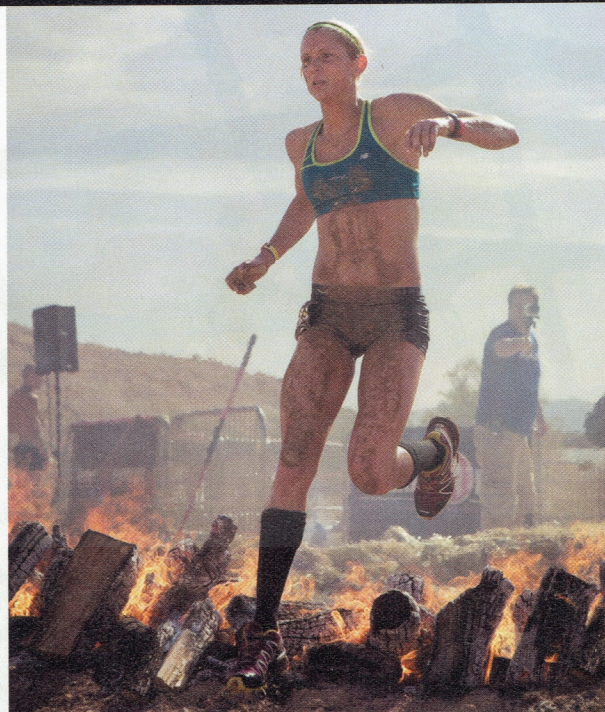
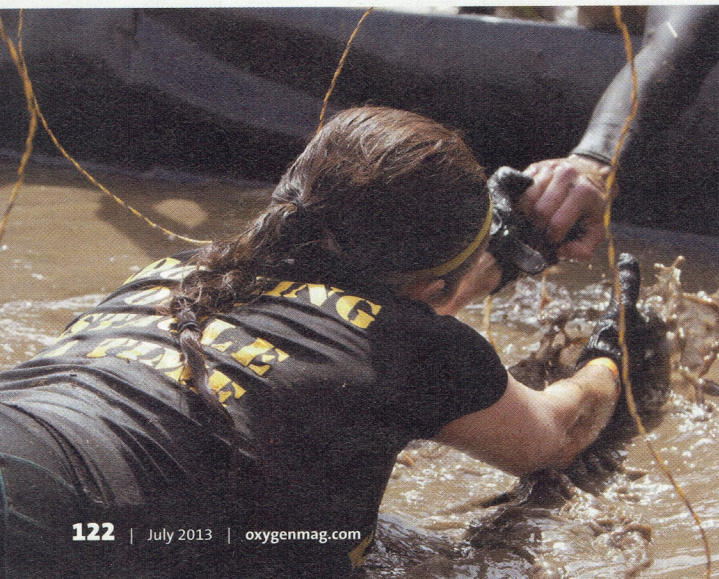
PHOTOS: TOP: LEFT COURTESY OF RED FROG EVENTS | BOTTOM LEFT COURTESY OF SPARTAN RACE



You're at the starting line with five hundred new friends. Each of you is vying for position, ready to race through mud, fire and even electrified wires – all for the chance to cross the finish line with your arms hoisted in victory. No, this is not a scene from *The Hunger Games*. This is the new breed of racing – a combination of fitness and fun – that is promising to become the sport of the future.

Obstacle races (also known as adventure races) have been growing in popularity over the last few years, and the numbers are staggering: take the Warrior Dash, a five-kilometer race known for the

fuzzy-horned helmets that participants wear, which has seen an increase from 120,000 participants across North America in 2010 to a projected six hundred thousand in 2013.



Carrie Adams, PR director for the Spartan Race – a competition founded by seven ultra athletes and a Royal Marine, and which is now backed by Reebok – attributes part of the popularity of these types of events to a human instinct that society has ignored for far too long. “We spend so much time sitting at desks and in front of the television, we’ve forgotten that, as humans, we’re meant to run, jump, throw, climb and play,” explains Adams. “This is a reawakening, a re-connection to that part of ourselves.” And once you get a taste of it, she says, you’re never the same.

TRAIN WITH THE BEST

One of the best things about obstacle races is that they welcome both the novice and the seasoned athlete. But if you’re new to these races, the question you’re probably asking is, how do you prepare for an event with so many different obstacles? Julie Johnston, owner of Camp Rhino in Las Vegas, Nevada,

has a solution: train in an environment that allows you to mimic the activities you’ll be doing. “We have all the obstacles for all the different races at Camp Rhino, along with conditioning circuits that include the basic functional movements you need to be able to complete the obstacles,” she explains. “We have beginner obstacle training classes that show you techniques, and practice races that add an element of competition and intensity to your training.”

Ian Ho, manager of Fit Factory Fitness in Toronto, Canada, also recognized the need for training regimens specific to obstacle course designs. That’s why Ho enlisted the expertise of a former U.S. Marine drill instructor to develop The O Course, Canada’s first and only obstacle training course. “We wanted to provide the civilian public with an authentic taste of military-style fitness training, and to provide the training grounds for all of the adventure races,”

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