

24 Hours of Sunlight: The Heart of Darkness

Contributed by Superhuman
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Hike 2,000 vertical feet, then ski down. Repeat ... for 24 hours straight! Get a first hand account of pain and suffering at the 2008 24 Hours of Sunlight. EXCLUSIVE VIDEO of Eric Sullivan going for a world record!

{flv}SUNLIGHT{/flv}

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By Jon Maletz

March 4, 2008

GLENWOOD SPRINGS — The third-place finisher in the 24 Hours of Sunlight is recovering after experiencing kidney problems that emerged after the Glenwood Springs endurance race.

Aspen resident and Highlands ski patroller Brian Johnson was “in good condition” Monday afternoon at St. Mary’s Hospital in Grand Junction, hospital spokeswoman Samantha Moe said.

She did not disclose when Johnson arrived or when he will be released.

“I was quite upset to hear about Brian’s kidney failure. I’m excited he’s doing well,” said Mary Kenyon, 24 Hours of Sunlight’s event director. “Obviously, the race is set up so everybody enjoys themselves and has a real good time.”

Both Johnson and the Highlands ski patrol declined to comment.

The 39-year-old Johnson, competing against 13 others in the men's solo division on Feb. 23 and 24, completed 27 laps in 24 hours, covering 37.8 miles and 40,554 vertical feet at Sunlight Mountain Resort. He equaled his mark set one year earlier when he also finished third.

Gunnison's Eric Sullivan set a new world record, completing 34 laps — six better than Glenwood's Robert Lowe — and 51,068 vertical feet.

"Brian is in the pro class and he attacked it and did so well," Kenyon said. "When world records are being set, people are pushing themselves. ... If you watch the video, you see Brian, and it looks like he's doing great. He wasn't kidding anyone when he said this [race] is tough, but he was having a good time challenging himself."

A video chronicling the race, one in which Johnson is featured prominently, can be seen on superhumanmag.com. In one scene, a visibly fatigued Johnson tells one race coordinator: "I'm suffering ... I'd be lying if I didn't tell you that."

Serious health issues have been rare in the event's three years, Kenyon said.

"We're mindful of what's going on on the course, and we're conscious of these things when they come up," she added. "We meet with Sunlight and the people involved to make sure we're providing the amount of safety we can and are making smart decisions."

Sullivan was forced to leave the course because of an undisclosed medical condition eight hours before the finish of last year's race, Kenyon said. The 27-year-old still managed to finish second.

Race organizers hope to learn more about Johnson's ordeal in an attempt to improve the experience for all competitors.

"We want to make sure we do everything we can to make this a great race for everyone," she added. "As soon as [Johnson's] in the clear, I'd love to sit and meet and talk about what we can improve to help racers along."

(www.aspentimes.com)