

Patrick Mies Is Obsessed with the Spartan Death Race. Is That a Bad Thing?

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Photo provided by Patrick Mies

Mies at a smaller Spartan Race.

Patrick Mies II is a very intense individual, the kind who will barely let you get a word in edgewise in a conversation. I have called him to talk about his participation in something called the [Spartan Death Race](#), and I have just inadvertently become a part of his first challenge.

Mies, 33, is one of only four Houstonians competing in the 2013 Spartan Death Race, which will take place on June 21 in Pittsfield, Vermont. You know those "adventure" races like the Tough Mudder and the Warrior Dash? The Death Race is like the Ironman version of those. The entry fee is \$600. The course is 50 miles long (or longer). Last year, the race's eighth year, 344 ran the course, but only 51 finished. That's less than 15 percent. And in addition to the physical challenges, which the contestants aren't informed of until they actually set foot on the course, there are also mental challenges. Past contestants have had to memorize the names of the first ten U.S. Presidents or a Bible verse, translate a Greek saying, and more.

That's where I come in. As a rookie, Mies' first challenge is to get an interview with a local media outlet. The interview has to be published or broadcast. I don't know about this until I talk to him, but by doing so, I am saving him the challenge of having to lift 50,000 pounds before he can even start the race on race day. (That's lifting a 50-lb weight 1,000 times.) Other rookies must complete this task in 5 hours, or earn a DNF -- "did not finish" -- on their race record.

Mies, who worked in construction for 12 years, has run all those other races too. At 6 feet and 200 pounds, he's always been athletic. He first heard about the Warrior Dash from a secretary at his job.

"I really enjoyed running around in the woods and meeting people," he said. "It's like being a kid again. It's like learning to ride a bike then getting in a car and forgetting how to ride."

So-called mud runs quickly became an obsession for Mies. In 2012, he vowed to do as many as possible. Once, on his way to a race called the Tough Mudder, his vehicle broke down 40 miles before the race location. So he slept in his car, then hitchhiked the rest of the way the morning of the race.

On New Year's Eve of this year, he stayed up until midnight to register for the Death Race. Potential participants have to be accepted into the fold. As soon as he was accepted, he joined a Facebook group for fellow Spartans, where previous participants share race secrets and rookies trade rumors. One key behind the race's difficulty is that participants do not know what to train for. There are also moles on the Facebook page who have been known to use participants' weaknesses against them.

Here is how Mies is training:

"Right now my backyard is full of wood I've chopped. I live by Terry Hershey Park so I run the trails at night. I have a bag of rocks that I taped together with duct tape and I run sprints with it. I'm trying everything I can to just do awkward stuff. I spend one day a week working out at 24-Hour Fitness and not sleeping. I'll work out for 6 or more hours and eat while I'm working out. Once I was approached by a personal trainer who tried to give me some advice. I said 'Do you have a Death Race shirt?' The guy said no so I didn't listen to him."

For trivia, Mies listens to the Rod Ryan show. He also says he's been reading a lot about gear and health.

Mies, who now works as a welder, spends pretty much all of his day thinking about the Death Race under his welding helmet and ear plugs. Each day at work he dreams up new ways to work out when he gets home. He also thinks about the mental challenges of the race.

"I think, what are they going to throw at you? This isn't some race with people cheering on the sidelines. They're trying to make you quit."

Mies says one of the things he likes most about these



racers is the camaraderie. All the participants are strangers in the beginning, but after a physically demanding event in a place without cell service, people often become fast friends. I ask Mies if he's in a relationship, and how his obsession might affect that. He's not any more, but his ex-girlfriend still helps his mom take care of his grandmother, who is 102 years old. All three are supportive of his training, he said.

"Basically all I do is work, take care of my grandma, train, then sleep for four or five hours. Sometimes I feel like I'm sucking on too big of a lollipop. But I'm getting older. I gotta use this body while I can."

"This is a life-changing experience for a lot of these guys," he said. He's spent so much time obsessing about this particular race, I ask him what he'll do once the event is over. He's already got a plan for that too.

"The Death Race creator has made a World Death Race in February. The participants won't know until 90 days before the event where it will take place. It could be Siberia, could be Africa."

Until then, he's only got June's race to obsess over. He's taped a picture of himself fire-jumping on the wall next to his bed. He said he looks at it every night for inspiration. He even knows his exact number on the list of Death Race participants. He sums his life up like this:

"I have a very black and white, balls to the wall attitude. I almost consider myself like an animal, a beast. I'm just a bearded man who likes to run through the woods. I've got a dog. I love my grandma. I try to eat healthy."

And then he tells me:

"I am getting excited now. I might not be able to sleep tonight."

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Provided by Patrick Mies