

From The Times
May 26, 2007

Man who stayed up for 266 hours awakes to bad news



Michael Horsnell

A bleary-eyed researcher who normally sleeps like a log went to bed yesterday claiming a world record after staying awake for more than 11 days and nights.

But when Tony Wright, 43, finally regains wakefulness today after catching up on his sleep, he could be in for a cruel awakening. The human guinea pig will discover that he may have given up ten hours too early to claim the crown.

The record that he broke – of 11 days, or 264 hours – was set by Randy Gardner, an American, in 1964 and is recognised in psychiatric textbooks.

But that is 12 hours shorter than the record which used to be included in *The Guinness Book of Records* before being removed from the book in 1989. It was deleted on the grounds that it could encourage records harmful to health and was unverifiable because of the claims of insomnia sufferers.

The *Guinness* previous record was for 11½ days, or 276 hours, and was set by Toimi Soini in Hamina, Finland, between February 5 to 15, 1964.

Mr Wright's friend Graham Gynn, who co-wrote the book *Left in the Dark*, about their research into human consciousness, said he had no knowledge of the Finnish record.

"It is interesting but has not cropped up at all in our research and is not mentioned in any of the books about sleep and sleeplessness," he said. "It may have been disputed or not accepted for some reason because everyone now accepts the old record was set by Randy Gardner in 1964 when he was a 17-year-old student.

"As far as we are concerned our main concern was not the record but to show that Tony could train his mind in such a way as to stay awake for 11 days and remain coherent and aware of what was going on around him. That was the main object and I believe what he has done will surprise many scientists who did not believe it was possible. Tony not only stayed awake but handled ten media interviews a day."

Before going to sleep, Mr Wright attributed his success to the "caveman diet" of raw food he followed during his marathon. Instead of celebrating afterwards, he climbed into bed at 8am having tested his own theory for 266 hours that people can achieve astonishing feats by teaching their brains to work more efficiently.

Mr Wright, a father of three, stayed awake with the help of friends at the Studio Bar in his home town of Penzance. He ate raw food, drank tea, eschewed all artificial stimulants, played pool and kept a diary of how he was coping, while thousands of internet viewers watched him on webcam.

Six CCTV cameras were trained on him the entire time in case he tried to catch a sneaky 40 winks and he was entertained by a stream of volunteers popping in to help to keep him awake.

His diary became increasingly surreal as the lack of sleep took its toll and he spoke slower and slower in interviews on television and radio as the marathon wore on.

He claimed the record at 6.05am yesterday, saying: "I feel pretty good. It's been a bit of a slog, but I got there. My diet of raw food made it much easier to switch from one side of the brain, which is really tired, to the other but both are pretty tired at the moment."

He believes that as people get more tired, the influence of the left side of the brain reduces and is replaced by that of the right. "I did this to show that the accepted theory is wrong and the brain does not become less effective with tiredness."

Going too far

Former Guinness world records to have been deleted since the book was launched in 1954 include:

Sword swallowing. It was deemed too dangerous

Heaviest cat (unethical)

Eating and drinking (could lead to litigation)

Source: Times archive