

# GRADING THE AMERICAN MARATHON REPORT CARD

By DON SIKORSKI  
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American distance runners having been taking their best shots at proving that they can run with the rest of the world at the 26.2-mile distance. The results have been positive, although to this point, we still have to hang our medal hopes on Khalid Khannouchi, the former Moroccan, now an American citizen, who continues to tear up the marathon world with yet another impressive run in the windy city last month. Americans haven't medaled in the Olympic Marathon since Frank Shorter in 1976 on the men's side and Joan Benoit's historic run in 1984 for the ladies. Another New York City Marathon has come and gone with no American winner in the Big Apple. Next year will mark 20 years since an American has won at Boston. (Trivia: Can you name the last American champions at New York and Boston?) But Khannouchi and a host of others are attempting to lead the resurgence of American marathoning back to the forefront. Here's a look at how the American runners fared at this fall's marathons:

**KHALID KHANNOUCHI (Chicago, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2:05:56):** What is most impressive about Khannouchi's marathon races is that he has proven his critics wrong time and time again. Despite reports of mediocre fitness leading up to Chicago (obviously inaccurate), Khannouchi was able to outrun the world's top marathoners to claim another win in this year's LaSalle Banks Chicago Marathon in a blazing 2:05:56. Khannouchi is the only person to ever run 3 sub 2:06 marathons. All that's missing from his resume to make him the greatest marathon runner that ever lived is an Olympic gold medal. **GRADE: A+**

**DAN BROWNE (Twin Cities, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2:11:35), ALAN CULPEPPER (Chicago, 6<sup>th</sup>, 2:09:41), MARLA RUNYAN (New York, 5<sup>th</sup>, 2:27:10):** Three Americans making the marathon debuts might be wondering what so traumatic about racing 26.2 miles. Dan Browne's 26.2-mile debut had a storybook ending, concluding with a U.S. National Title and the overall win in 2:11:35. Browne, the former U.S. Army Lieutenant, is coached by none other than Alberto Salazar, a U.S. guy who knows a thing or two about running a fast marathon. Alan Culpepper didn't disappoint in his long anticipated debut, running 2:09:41 for 6<sup>th</sup> overall and establishing himself an another American hopeful. And Marla Runyan, the American 5,000 meter indoor record holder, 2002 Olympian, and legally blind, posted a strong 5<sup>th</sup> place performance in 2:27:10 at New York, giving her the 10<sup>th</sup> fastest marathon time ever by an American woman. This group could do some damage when they get a bit more marathon experience under their belts. **GRADE: A**

**MEB KEFLEZIGHI (New York, 9<sup>th</sup>, 2:12:35):** Keflezighi, the American 10K record holder who was also making his marathon debut, ran with the lead group at New York and even took a shot in front in the late miles, only to pay the price over the final 10K. But his 2:12:35 clocking over the challenging New York course was the 4<sup>th</sup> fastest U.S. time of the year behind Khannouchi, Culpepper, and Browne, and gave him the confidence that he can run with the big boys. **GRADE: A-**

**BRAD HAUSER (Twin Cities, 4<sup>th</sup>, 2:14:15), DEENA DROSSIN (Chicago, 6<sup>th</sup>, 2:26:53):** Brad Hauser continues to improve at the marathon distance, and his 4<sup>th</sup> place finish (2<sup>nd</sup> American) at Twin Cities was a strong effort that should make him a legitimate contender for a spot on the U.S. Olympic team. Deena Drossin had run 2:26:58 in New York in 2001 and was looking to go faster in Chicago. She didn't, but still hung on to run fast and prove that her New York debut was no fluke. Drossin, coached by the legendary Joe Vigil, continues to improve at every distance and should be the U.S. favorite in 2004. **GRADE: B+**

**KYLE BAKER, CLINT VERRAN, KEITH DOWLING, RYAN SHAY, PETER DELACERDA, and JOSH COX (Chicago, 13<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>, 2:14:13 – 2:15:01), DAVID MORRIS (Twin Cities, 5<sup>th</sup>, 2:15:27), MILENA GLUSAC (New York, 10<sup>th</sup>, 2:31:14):** The group of Americans at Chicago worked together for most of the race in the chase pack, and these 6 individuals all posted strong marathon times as a result. Less than a minutes separated the group. Many thought that David Morris was through, but the former American record holder proved otherwise with his 5<sup>th</sup> place finish at Twin Cities. Glusac, who like Keflezighi made a bold move only to struggle in the final miles, still posted a solid effort, with her 2:31:14 clocking under the women's "A" qualifying standard of 2:32. **GRADE: B**

**TRIVIA ANSWER:** Alberto Salazar was the last American to win the New York City Marathon with his 2:08:52 clocking in 1982. Greg Meyer was the last American winner at Boston, running 2:09:00 in 1983.

## Racing Roundup

- Speaking of fast American marathons, how about Waterford's Stephen Herrera's 2:29:56 6<sup>th</sup> place (top American) finish at Mystic Places on October 27th? A review of Herrera's recent racing schedule shows that he was either going to run terrific or else crash and burn from sheer exhaustion. Herrera won back to back races on September 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, won the Stenger Farm XC race in the pouring rain on October 12<sup>th</sup>, and again posted back-to-back wins on October 19<sup>th</sup> (Strides for the Handicapped in 25:19), and October 20<sup>th</sup> (Cocaponset 8 Mile Trail Race) leading up to his second marathon attempt. Recovery clearly wasn't a problem for Herrera either, as he quickly bounced back six days later to win another pair of weekend races (Owens 6K XC Invitational on November 2<sup>nd</sup> and Tarzan Brown on November 3<sup>rd</sup>). Despite all his racing, Herrera hasn't lost to an American since the U.S. Championships at the New Haven 20K on Labor Day.
- It's pretty impressive that Jim Euell's 4:10.8 mile time in the 1970 State Open still stands at the fastest of any Connecticut High Schooler to date. Euell, who won back-to-back State Open titles in Cross-Country in 1968 and 1969, was recently inducted into the NFA Hall of Fame on October 19<sup>th</sup>. How fast would Euell have run on today's all-weather tracks and in today's hi-tech racing flats?

## This Month in History

November 5th, 1993 – Griswold High School's Matt Papuga and NFA freshman sensation Jill Akus each claim individual state titles at the Connecticut Cross-Country State Open at Wickham Park. Papuga, a senior who improved from his 3<sup>rd</sup> place finish a year ago with a winning time of 16:36, posted a comfortable 17-second margin over Chris Longo of Holy Cross and led the Wolverines to a 3<sup>rd</sup> place finish (191 points) behind winner Manchester (103) and runner-up Xavier (159). Fitch, paced by Brad Malay's 22<sup>nd</sup> place finish, also turns in a strong 4<sup>th</sup> place team performance with 207 points. Other top local individuals include Ellis Tech's Jason Thayer (5<sup>th</sup>), St. Bernard's Evan Nicholas (17<sup>th</sup>), East Lyme's Jeff Novak (25<sup>th</sup>) and Griswold's Kevin Larkin (28<sup>th</sup>). In the girl's race, NFA dominated the field with a 45 point win, paced by their 1-2-3 punch of Akus (posting a 1 second win over Liz Swift of Mercy), Erin-Kate Mandelburg (4<sup>th</sup>), and Stephanie Johnson (7<sup>th</sup>). Other top local finishers include Courtney Bellows of E.O. Smith (5<sup>th</sup>), Jill Difrancesca of St. Bernard (9<sup>th</sup>), Lori Boncek of Tourtelotte (21<sup>st</sup>), Jessica Griffith of Wheeler (22<sup>nd</sup>), and NFA's Corrie Hanson (28<sup>th</sup>). Akus' brother Marc, a sophomore who finished 52<sup>nd</sup> in the boy's race, would return to claim 4<sup>th</sup> place in the Open as a senior. East Hartford's Allison Hansom, who finished 15<sup>th</sup> overall and nearly a minute back, would return a year later to win, with Akus regaining her title in both 1995 and 1996. Hascomb has the honor of being the only non-ECC runner to win the Girls State Open in the last 13 years (Waterford's Liz Mueller-4, Akus-3, Fitch's Jessica Schenk-3, and Killingly's Megan Owen-3).

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