

# BUTLER'S CAMELS ARE HEADING NORTH

By DON SIKORSKI  
*Special to the Bulletin*

Connecticut College Men's cross-country Coach Jim Butler recently ran his personal best for the half-mile. And it wasn't in a race. Butler was running over to the scorers table at the NCAA Division III National XC Qualifier in Westfield, Massachusetts to confirm what his team, who had just tackled the 130 pound Butler in celebration, was telling him just minutes after the race had ended. And about 2 minutes, 30 seconds, and one strained achilles tendon muscle later, Butler had confirmed the facts: his Camels team was going to the big dance for the first time in school history.

Connecticut College has posted a strong 4<sup>th</sup> place team finish in the Division III qualifier, behind powerhouse Keene State (the overall winner with 64 points), Bowdoin College (111), and Williams (132). The top four teams advance to the National Championships, held this weekend in Northfield, Minnesota. Dave Clayman and Adam Fitzgerald led Conn by claiming the 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> places overall respectively, just 4 seconds apart. Jesse Efron also earned All New England (Top 35) honors with his 33<sup>rd</sup> place finish. East Lyme's Matt Buchholz (39<sup>th</sup>) and Alex Roe (54<sup>th</sup>) completed the scoring for the Camels, posting a 151 point total to earn their first trip to Nationals. John Ridyrd (63<sup>rd</sup>) and Brett Haselton (83<sup>rd</sup>) rounded out Conn's top seven. When the smoke had cleared, Connecticut College had qualified as a team for the first time in school history. Clayman, a senior who had qualified as an individual twice in the past, has now earned all New England honors all four years of his career. The U.S. Coast Guard team, who had beaten Butler's Camels a few times during the regular season, were 9<sup>th</sup> overall with 213 points. USCGA's Ian Bartonicek (4<sup>th</sup>) and Matt Dowhit (18<sup>th</sup>) also qualified as individuals.

Jim Butler had learned the art of mental preparation in distance running from his cross-country days at St. Bernard High School and Rutgers University. From that experience, Butler knows that true preparation for a sport like cross-country starts not in September but months sooner. His athletes responded to his challenges. "We had talked last April about this", explained Butler. "I asked the guys to do some difficult mileage over the summer and they did that," he said. "We also tweaked out schedule from past years, and I think that helped too. They stayed fresh and they stayed hungry." Butler also was aware that the NCAA had dealt him some difficult cards by reducing the number of teams earning automatic qualifiers from 5 down to 4. "It was one of the strongest regions in the country," said Butler. "But we set this as a goal and now I couldn't be happier".

Butler was quick to credit his team's work ethic, the help he receives from his volunteer Assistant Coach Kevin Grant, and those who have supported his team and the program over the years. "I'm very proud of these guys," Butler said. "I asked them to believe in themselves and they did." Now if Butler can heal that achilles tendon, the Camels trip to Minnesota should be one to remember.

## Racing Roundup

- Cromwell's Stephen Swift won the EBAC 4.75-Mile Fall Challenge Road Race on November 9<sup>th</sup>. Swift, who two weeks prior had placed 8<sup>th</sup> overall at the Mystic Places Marathon, ran unchallenged after the opening half-mile and cruised home comfortably in 24:59. Uncasville's Todd Bennett ran a strong race for 2<sup>nd</sup> in 25:52. Preston's Kris-Anne Kane returned to the racing scene after battling injuries all year long to claim top female honors in 30:13, fending off Master's winner Carla Thompson by 3 seconds and Waterford's Carolyn Verdon (3<sup>rd</sup> in 31:06). 234 runners were treated to temperatures in the mid 60's for what was historically one of the coldest road race events in Southeastern Connecticut in past years.
- It's disappointing to see the quality of road race fields get weaker every year. Not to single out one event of take away from the performance of the runners who did compete there, but this year's Tarzan Brown race in Mystic is a classic example. Waterford's Steven Herrera ran 27:47 for the 5.5-mile race, especially impressive considering he had run a Marathon a week prior and a cross-country race the day prior. More surprisingly, though, was how easily Herrera ran away from the field and win by two minutes, with only former Fitch High School standout Steve Sergeant (2<sup>nd</sup> in 29:48 at age 39) able to get under the 30-minute mark.
- I have a great deal of respect for Killingly senior Megan Owen not only because of her running credentials but also because of her attitude and maturity. Owen, who will attend the University of North Carolina next year (coached by former UConn standout Mike Whittlesey) on a full scholarship, has won 3 Connecticut State Open Championships, run 4:50 for the mile on the track, and was the defending New England champion in cross-country. If anyone has earned the right to be a bit arrogant, Owen has, yet she remains one of the most modest high school athletes around. After being outkicked at this year's New England Championship in Portland, Maine, Owen, who earlier in the race had yelled assistance to two opposing runners who were headed off course, praised her opponent's effort and never once mentioned that she had been suffering from a virus and wasn't at 100% for the race. Combine Owen's abilities and attitude with the great job that Coach Alden Miner has done, the ideal training weather in Chapel Hill, and a North Carolina women's team rich in distance running talent and the Tar Heels may have found themselves a gem with Megan Owen.
- There are still some tickets remaining for the St. Bernard High School cross-country Alumni Testimonial Dinner for Coach Doug Sharples, who had retired from the school after 34 seasons of coaching. The event will take place at Ocean Beach Park in New London on Saturday evening, November 30<sup>th</sup>. Tickets to the event are \$34 each and are available by contacting Kevin Gallerani @ (860) 848-8059 ([guildrepair@ids.net](mailto:guildrepair@ids.net)) or Jim Butler @ (860) 443-7437 ([jsbut@conncoll.edu](mailto:jsbut@conncoll.edu)). More information is also available from the St. Bernard High School Alumni Office at (860) 848-1271 x143 ([www.saint-bernard.com](http://www.saint-bernard.com)).
- The Annual Tommy Toy Fund Run will once again take place on Friday evening, December 13<sup>th</sup>. The double loop, 3-Mile group jog with Santa (at a very pedestrian pace; beginners and non-runners are always welcome) starts at 7:00pm in front of Billy Wilson's Ageing Still on 57 Broadway in Norwich. Entry fee is an unwrapped toy. Don't miss this popular social event for a great cause.

## This Month in History

November 18th, 1989 – Former Xavier High School and U.R.I. standout Joe Swift wins the Southeastern Connecticut EBAC Fall Challenge Road Race in New London. Cromwell's Swift, the oldest of a long line of talented distance runners in the Swift family, breaks away from his nearest competitors Darrin Eisman (2<sup>nd</sup>), Tom Wimler (3<sup>rd</sup>), and Greg Quint (4<sup>th</sup>) midway through the 4.75 mile race to win in 23:54, 15 seconds up on Eisman. Hollis Franklin of East Haddam outruns Southern Connecticut State's Tracy Dowden for top female honors in 29:40. Division winners include Old Saybrook's Sean Delaney in the Men's Submasters (10<sup>th</sup> overall in 24:59), Pat Swim in the Female Submasters (8<sup>th</sup> female in 32:36), Xavier's Greg Swift and NFA's Tina Tetreault (Boys and Girls Juniors), Norwich's Tim Smith (Men's Masters), and Jan McKeon (Women's Masters).

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