

2002 RUNNING IN REVIEW

By DON SIKORSKI
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For the running world, 2002 was the year of the marathon. The 26.2 mile race distance received most of the attention, especially from the new breed of young American distance runners looking to step up in distance and make a name for themselves against the best international competition had to offer. High school runners chased the ghosts of Ritzenheim, Webb, and a 3:53 mile. Collegiate running saw an American win a national cross-country championship for the first time since 1998, as Colorado's Jorge Torres' win was the first by a U.S. runner since Adam Goucher. Khalid Khannouchi won big in London and Chicago, when nobody expected him to do either. An American is now clearly the best marathon runner in the world, with the 2004 Olympic Games possibly providing the stage for Khannouchi to prove he's also the best marathon runner that ever lived. Britain's Paula Radcliffe may have done just that win her 2:17:18 world record effort in Chicago. Local road races were most often won by runners named Herrera, Johnson, or Merz. They rarely lost, and did more than hold their own against state competition. The Eastern Connecticut Conference again dominated state high school competition, with Charlie Ewers' Ledyard Boys team claiming the State Open XC crown and Killingly's Megan Owen putting more exclamation points on her running resume, capped by an 8th place finish in the Footlocker Finals in San Diego. As always, great thanks should again go out to the Race Directors, SNERRO timing crew, and all of the road race volunteers who help keep our sport alive. Without them, runners would have no stage to perform on. Here are my personal choices for running's top performers and performances of 2002:

RUNNERS OF THE YEAR (LOCAL):

MALE: TIE: CHAD JOHNSON, CANTERBURY and STEPHEN HERRERA, WATERFORD – This one was too close to call, as both Chad Johnson and Stephen Herrera established themselves as the best runners in the state and two of the best in New England. Johnson was strong out of the blocks, claiming USATF state championships at 5K, 12K, 10 Miles, 1 Mile, and the Half Marathon distances. In fact, Johnson didn't lose a race to a USATF Connecticut runner until Kenyan Gideon Mutisya finally got the better of him at the 4 Mile State Championship Race in Middletown in July. Johnson also won the prestigious Eliot 5K in Eliot, Maine against a stellar field and ran sub 15 for 5K twice. Herrera chased Johnson in all of the USATF races through July, then took over with a suicidal race schedule for the remainder of the season that included a 36th place finish at the prestigious New Haven 20K, a complete sweep of the USATF Cross-Country Grand Prix series, and a 6th place finish (1st American) at the Mystic Places Marathon in October in a personal best of 2:29:56. For his efforts, Herrera earned the USATF individual points title, with Johnson claiming runner-up honors. Uncasville's Chadwick Brown ran 2:37:55 at Boston in the spring and ran well through the summer despite some nagging injuries. Uncasville's Todd Bennett also ran very well in 2002 and found enough time in his schedule between Motorcross races to win a few local road races as well.

FEMALE: MARTHA MERZ, MYSTIC – Martha Merz tuned 40 in 2002, but that didn't stop her from beating up on the younger competition all year long. Merz demanding 2002 race schedule included impressive runs at the Park City 15K (1st in 55:24), Friehofer's 5K (3rd CT finisher in 18:13), Rose City Challenge (1st), Fairfield Half Marathon (1:25:44), New Haven 20K (1:17:04), Ridgefield Half Marathon (1st in 1:21:24) and Tarzan Brown (1st in 31:25). Merz also finished 5th overall in the USATF Open race circuit despite participating in only 4 of the 9 scheduled races. Norwich's Melissa Perkins-Banas and Preston's Kris-Anne Kane both struggled with injuries for most of 2002 but still managed to post some strong performances.

RUNNERS OF THE YEAR (WORLD):

MEN: TIE: PAUL KOSGEI, KENYA, KHALID KHANNOUCHI, UNITED STATES, and ROGERS ROP, KENYA – Too much talent here to leave any of these three out, especially considering what they accomplished in 2002. Kosgei won the IAAF World Half-Marathon Championships in May (60:39), won at the Peachtree Road Race in Atlanta (27:36), won the Utica Boilermaker 15K (43:22), and later ran sub 60 for the half-marathon distance in England in September. Khannouchi's London / Chicago double gives him 3 of the top 4 fastest marathon times ever, with an amazing three sub 2:06 marathon finishes to his credit. And although he didn't run as fast as Khannouchi, Kenya's Rogers Rop was the first runner since Alberto Salazar to claim the elusive Boston / New York City Marathon double in 2002, both against strong competition.

WOMEN: PAULA RANCLIFFE, GREAT BRITAIN – Paula Radcliffe took women's marathoning to a new level in 2002 and established herself as a national hero. A successful World Cross Country title defense preceded her debut marathon in London in April, which resulted in a runaway win in 2:18:56, a mere 9 seconds off Catherine Ndereba's 2:18:47 world record set just six months earlier in Chicago. Radcliffe has bigger goals in mind, however, and geared up for a big fall marathon effort with a win at the London 10K, just missing a world record in the process. In October, Radcliffe and Ndereba went head-to-head in the Chicago Marathon, with Radcliffe obliterating the competition and the world record with her 2:17:18 world best.

HIGH SCHOOL STANDOUTS (LOCAL):

BOYS: GAVIN COOMBS, GRISWOLD – Coombs, younger brother of former Griswold standout Meghan Coombs and only a junior, had a major breakthrough in the spring of 2002 by winning the 3,200 meter State Open race in a photo finish. In Cross-Country this past fall, Coombs proved to be the area's best runner, winning the ECC individual title, finishing 2nd to Conard's Ahmed Haji in the XC State Open and finishing 3rd behind Haji and Maine's Ben True in the New England XC Championships. He also posted a strong 17th place finish in the Footlocker Regional at Van Courtland Park in New York. Haji would go on to finish 8th in the nation. The Ledyard Boys team outran Manchester, New Milford, and Griswold to claim their first ever State Open title. Mark Olivier of Fitch, John Paul Mandelburg of NFA, and Dave Holliday of Ledyard all posted top 15 finishes in New England in Cross-Country.

GIRLS: MEGHAN OWEN, KILLINGLY - Meghan Owen owned the local headlines. Owen ran unchallenged in Connecticut, winning for the third consecutive year at the ECC Championships, the Class M race, and the State Open. She was 2nd at New England's, 7th in the Eastern Region, and 8th overall in the nation at the Footlocker Finals. Both Owen and 7th place finisher Katelyn Kaltenbach of Aurora, Illinois will join returning NCAA Champion Shanane Flanagan at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill next year. Owen has also extended the ECC's winning streak at the XC State Open to 13 of the past 14 individual winners (Liz Mueller-4, Jill Akus-3, Jessica Schenk-3, Owen-3). Griswold's Abbey Sadowski (10th in New England) and Fitch's Betsy Boucher (4th in CT) both were considered amongst the state's top runners, but again had the unfortunate task of having to chase Owen all year long.

BEST PERFORMANCE (LOCAL):

MALE – Steve Herrera's 6th place finish in 2:29:56 at the Mystic Places Marathon was a breakthrough race for Herrera, who showed no ill effects of frequent racing leading up to his Mystic Effort. Recovery wasn't a problem for Herrera either; a week later, he won the Tarzan Brown race with relative ease, running 27:47 for the 5.5-mile race.

FEMALE – Martha Merz ran so consistently well in 2002 that it would be difficult to choose a best performance. In October, Merz ran 59:47 to place 2nd female overall and 1st Master (40+) at the Army 10 Miler in Washington, D.C.

BEST PERFORMANCE (UNITED STATES):

MALE – The hopes for the future of American distance running were rejuvenated in 2002. Khalid Khannouchi's impressive wins in both London and Chicago show he is the man to beat at the 26.2-mile distance. Alan Culpepper's 6th place finish in his marathon debut in Chicago in 2:09:41 tied Alberto Salazar's American best. Dan Browe's win at Twin Cities (also a marathon debut) in 2:12:35 also deserves mention.

FEMALE – The legally blind Marla Runyan had earned 5K titles in both the track and on the roads in 2002, as well as a half-step win at the Tuft's 10K in Boston in October. But her 2:27:10 5th place effort in her marathon debut at New York City in November made her the 2nd fastest American female ever in New York and gave her the 10th fastest American female marathon time in history.

BEST PERFORMANCE (WORLD):

MALE – Ethiopia's Halie Gebrselassie win at the Lisbon Half Marathon in Portugal in March was not only incredibly fast (59:41 or broken down, 4:33 pace for 13.1 miles) but came against superior competition, with Hendrick Ramaala of Russia, sub 2:06 marathoner Paul Tergat of Kenya, and 2001 New York City Marathon winner Tesfaye Jifar of Ethiopia rounding out the top 4 places.

FEMALE – No contest; Paula Radcliffe's 2:17:18 world record at the Chicago Marathon on October 13th was clearly the best performance in the world in 2002.

BEST ROAD RACE (LOCAL):

MYSTIC PLACES MARATHON, October 27th – Race Director John Bysiewicz and the former East Lyme Race Committee had made the Mystic Places Marathon a major event. Arguably one of the most scenic marathon courses in the country, Mystic Places, in just its sophomore effort, ironed out most of the kinks in its first running to provide runners with a true New England racing experience. Chasing Kenyan Simon Cherokony and the lead pack of foreign, national class marathoners were Waterford's Stephen Herrera and Cromwell's Steve Swift, who posted 6th and 8th place finishes respectively. A total of 719 runners completed the 26.2 mile race, which also included a 5 person marathon relay event with over 100 teams competing.

BEST ROAD RACE (CONNECTICUT):

MOONLIGHT RUN 5K, May 25th – Terrific local and national talent line up for this unique Friday evening road race in New Milford, Connecticut. The race features a finish under the stadium lights, brings in an exceptionally talented field (the top 25 were all under the 17 minutes mark), and continues to grow in popularity, drawing over 900 runners in the 2002 running. Canterbury's Chad Johnson finished 4th overall in 14:51 behind winner Moses Macharia of Kenya (14:17).

THE WINNERS:

Local Runners:

MEN'S OPEN

2002 Chad Johnson / Stephen Herrera
2001 Chad Johnson
2000 Steve Herrera
1999 Ed Zubritsky
1998 John Anthony

MEN'S MASTERS

2002 Bob Stack
2001 Bob Stack
2000 Bob Stack
1999 Wayne Jacob / Jim Murphy
1998 Tim Kane

MEN'S GRANDMASTERS

2002 Wayne Jolley
2001 Tim Smith
2000 Dennis Crowe
1999 Dennis Crowe
1998 Tim Smith

State Runners:

MEN

2002 Chad Johnson / Stephen Herrera
2001 Chris Chisholm
2000 Steve Swift
1999 Steve Swift
1998 Steve Swift

High School Runners:

LOCAL BOYS

2002 Gavin Coombs (GRISWOLD)
2001 Jon-Paul Mandelburg (NFA)
2000 Mark Brissette (STONINGTON)
1999 Chris Andrew (NFA)
1998 Chris Andrew (NFA)

STATE BOYS

2002 Ahmed Haji (CONARD)
2001 Brian McGovern (FAIRFIELD PREP)
2000 Brian McGovern (FAIRFIELD PREP)
1999 Chris Andrew (NFA)
1998 Ren Provey (FAIRFIELD)

New England Runners:

MEN

2002 Dave Hinga, MASSACHUSETTS
2001 Mike Donnelly, MASSACHUSETTS

United States Runners:

MEN

2002 Khalid Khannouchi, NEW YORK
2001 Rod Dehaven, WISCONSIN
2000 Rod Dehaven, WISCONSIN

WOMEN'S OPEN

Martha Merz
Melissa Perkins-Banas
Martha Merz
Kris-Anne Kane
Kris-Anne Kane

WOMEN'S MASTERS/GM

Rebecca Stockdale-Wolley
Rebecca Stockdale-Wolley
Rebecca Stockdale-Wolley

WOMEN

Sue Faber
Marie McMahon-Davenport
Zofia Wieciorkowska
Christine Junkerman
Kerry Arsenault

LOCAL GIRLS

Meghan Owen (KILLINGLY)
Meghan Owen (KILLINGLY)
Meghan Owen (KILLINGLY)
Jessica Schenk (FITCH)
Jessica Schenk (FITCH)

STATE GIRLS

Meghan Owen (KILLINGLY)
Meghan Owen (KILLINGLY)
Meghan Owen (KILLINGLY)
Jessica Schenk (FITCH)
Jessica Schenk (FITCH)

WOMEN

Blake Russell, MASSACHUSETTS
Amy Rudolph, RHODE ISLAND

WOMEN

Marla Runyan, OREGON
Deena Drossin, COLORADO
Libbie Hickman, COLORADO

World Runners:

MEN

2002 Paul Kosgei / Khalid Khannouchi / Rogers Rop
2001 Hicham El Guerrouj, MORROCCO
2000 Reuban Cheruiyot, KENYA
1999 Hicham El Guerrouj / Khalid Khannouchi
1998 Khalid Khannouchi, MORROCCO

WOMEN

Paula Radcliffe, BRITAIN
Catherine Ndereba, KENYA
Gabriela Szabo, ROMANIA
Gabriela Szabo / Tegla Laroupe
Catherine Ndereba, KENYA

Best Performances (Local):

MALE

2002 Steve Herrera 6th @ Mystic Places Marathon
2001 Chad Johnson 17th @ New Haven 20K
2000 Mike Slinsky defends title @ Rose City Challenge
1999 Mike Slinsky wins first Rose City Challenge

FEMALE

Martha Merz 1st Master @ Army 10 Miler
Melissa Perkins finishes 3rd @ Mystic Places Marathon

Best Performances (United States):

MALE

2002 Khalid Khannouchi's 4th win @ Chicago
2001 Alan Webb breaks high school mile record
2000 Rod Dehaven wins Olympic Marathon Trials

FEMALE

Marla Runyan's 5th place finish @ NYC Marathon
Deena Drossin runs 2:26:58 debut @ NYC Marathon
Christine Clark wins Olympic Marathon Trials

Best Performances (World):

MEN

2002 Khalid Khannouchi's record run @ London
2001 Hicham El Guerrero run 3:44.95 mile in Rome
2000 Haile Gebrselassie's Olympic 10,000 meter win
1999 Khalid Khannouchi record run @ Chicago
1998 Ronaldo da Costa's record run @ Berlin

WOMEN

Paula Radcliffe's record run @ Chicago
Catherine Ndereba record run @ Chicago

Tegla Laroupe's record run @ Rotterdam

Road Races:

LOCAL

2002 Mystic Places Marathon
2001 John J. Kelly / Ocean Beach Road Race
2000 Rose City Challenge
1999 L & M Hospital Spring Stride
1998 L & M Hospital Spring Stride / Tarzan Brown

STATE

Moonlight Run 5K, New Milford
New Haven 20K
Litchfield Hills Road Race
Manchester Road Race
New Haven 20K / Manchester Road Race

Don Sikorski writes a twice-monthly running column for the Norwich Bulletin. His "Coach's Corner" column can be accessed at www.moheganstriders.org. He can also be reached by e-mail at kdcsikorski@netzero.net.