

2003 SPRING UPDATE – SAME RACES; LESS FACES

By DON SIKORSKI
Special to the Bulletin

While this past winter seemed to wreck havoc on most runner's off-season training, spring was to be the time to break out the singlet and shorts, lace up the shoes, pin on a number, and hit the streets to begin the road racing season. So far, the weather still hasn't exactly cooperated, and some of the new faces on the starting line are familiar names from the past. Overall, attendance and depth a races are down, partially attributed to the difficult winter, but overall, things are beginning to heat up. Here's a look at what we've seen on the local circuit to date:

- The February 22nd Colchester Half Marathon draws 117 finishers despite temperatures in the mid 30's and a driving rain. Eben Robinson of West Hartford (1:18:07) and former Conn College All-American Maura Danahy of South Windsor (1:26:29) post wins on the challenging Colchester course.
- Waterford's Stephen Herrera picks up where he left off in 2002, outdistancing over 200 other competitors to win the Salem 5K Road Race on March 22nd. 13 year-old Erin O'Connell of Salem edges Becca Graves of Uncasville as the top female finisher.
- Chad and Stephanie Johnson earn their first brother/sister win at the St Joseph's of Baltic Road Race March 29th. They would duplicate that same feat six weeks later at the 5K River Run at Ocean Beach on May 10th, with Chad outdistancing Stephen Herrera to win the overall, while Stephanie posts a 13 second win over Becca Graves for top female honors.
- In another downpour, Uncasville's Chadwick Brown (16:31) outruns race veteran Bob Stack to earn top honors at the Connecticut College 5K on March 30th. Conn College employee Laurie Schaffer wins the women's race in 20:00.
- With cold and rain now a common occurrence at road races, Canterbury's Chad Johnson wins his hometown 10K race in a brisk 32:46, with Todd Bennett posting his 3rd consecutive runner-up finish in the last 3 weekends.
- At the 107th Annual Boston Marathon, temperatures took a turn upward, shocking runner's systems that had been adapted to months of sub-freezing winter temperatures. Kenyan athletes again dominated the race up front, taking 8 of the top 9 positions in what was to be a dreadful showing for U.S. runners. The top American was the 42 year-old former Belgian Eddy Hellebuck, who posts an impressive effort to finish 10th overall in 2:17:18. No other Americans run under 2:30. Mystic's Stanley Mickus lead all local finishers with his 350th place finish in 2:54:30. Conn College grad Maura Danahy, who had run extremely well in last fall's New York City Marathon, struggles in the heat, but still posts a very respectable 3:12:38 finish. For NFA runner Brian Foley, now of Norwalk, CT, finishes in 2:53:27, while Pfizer's Tom Buckeley, on of the state's top Master's competitors, runs 2:54:32 to finish just behind Mickus.
- This cold and rain thing is starting to get ridiculous. Waterford's Stephen Herrera ignores the conditions and successfully uses the Flanders 5K as a tune-up for his 5K state championship race the next day, cruising to victory in 16:09, with Bennett again earning runner-up honors. Jennifer Cheung (20:46) is the top female finisher.
- On what is arguably one of the most difficult road races course in the state, Stephen Herrera and Chadwick Brown (who had also won a road race the day prior) go 1-2 to lead the Mohegan Striders to the USATF 5K State Championship in Terryville, CT. It is Herrera's 2nd 5K title in the last 3 years (he was 2nd to teammate Chad Johnson in 2002). Remarkably, there are no signs of rain at Terryville.
- Uncasville's Todd Bennett finally breaks his 2nd place habit (although most runners would be thrilled to post that many 2nd place finishes) at the L&M Spring Stride on May 3rd. A familiar face from years past almost denied Bennett his elusive win, as 48 year-old Wayne Jacob of Mystic returns to the roads after an absence of more than 3 years. The two break away from the field early, with Bennett fending off Jacob by 3 seconds to win the 3.5 mile race in 18:45. Mystic's Martha Merz, one of New England's top Master's runners, is again in top form, winning the women's race by 90 seconds in 21:45. Patti Dillon, who finishes 4th female in 22:20, is a name you may be hearing more of this season and should probably know already. As Patti Catalano, she was the first United States woman to break 2:30 in the marathon. Catalano, 50, married former world class runner Dan Dillon and now resides in New London. The L&M event, always considered the opening day race of the spring season, posted 442 finishes in addition to its large crowd of walkers at the event.

As the temperatures start to heat up, so does the road racing calendar. Look for more racing updates in the next column, including the Delaney Dash, Reliance House 5K, and the Rose City Challenge.

Racing Roundup

Congratulations to Sue Hoagland-Makowicki, who was inducted into the Norwich Sports Hall of Fame on May 18th. Hoagland-Makowicki won three state championships in her four years running cross-country at St. Bernard High School.....Norwich's Melissa Perkins-Banas has returned to top form after injuries that sidelined her for most of 2002 to post a win at the May 11th Vernon Mother's Day 5K in 18:53.....Waterford's Carolyn Verdon finished 96th overall (3rd female Submaster) at the Key Bank Vermont City Marathon in Burlington, VT on May 25th. Verdon turned in a personal best time of 3:07:39. Canterbury's Eddie Eckard finished in 3:23:59, while East Hartford's Heather Gardiner, a Canadian citizen, was the top female finisher and 17th place overall in 2:45:31.....Sad news to report the passing of David Kimani, a native of Nairobi, Kenya and a senior All-American at the University of Alabama. Kimani, 25, was a six-time national champion and 14-time All-American at Alabama. Kimani earned SEC Cross-Country Athlete of the Year twice and won the 1999 NCAA Cross-Country championships as a freshman while competing for the University of South Alabama. He was 10th in the NCAA Cross-Country Championships this past fall.

This Month in History

June 10th, 1995 – The East Lyme Boys High School Track team comes up 4 points shy of as state title at the CIAC State Open Track Championships at Willowbrook Park in New Britain. Hartford Public earns top honors with their 45 point total, bettering East Lyme's 41 points. National class sprinter Jerome Young of Prince Tech wins the 100, 200, and 400-meter races, while Notre Dame's Dan Wilson, on his way to UConn, wins the 3200-meter race. Other local distance runners to earn All-State honors include East Lyme's Kevin Jensen winning the 800 meter race, NFA's Julian Calendar (3rd in 800m), Jeff Novak of East Lyme (4th in 1600m), and St. Bernard's Evan Nicholas (6th in 5000m). In the Girl's Meet, NFA's Jill Akus is 3rd at 1600 meters, while future Conn College standout Maura Danahy of South Windsor is 6th in the 3200 meter race. Bloomfield High School earns 68 points to win the team championship with NFA finishing in 11th place as the top local team.

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