

TERGAT FINALLY IN THE WINNERS CIRCLE

By DON SIKORSKI
Special to the Bulletin

Over the past few years, Kenya's Paul Tergat has proven that he can run with the fastest marathoners in the world. Yet despite compiling a stellar resume including Olympic medals, world championships, a world Half Marathon record, and some of the fastest marathon times in the world, Tergat had never won a marathon in his previous five starts. But at the Berlin Marathon on September 28th, Tergat became the first Kenyan male to set a world record for the marathon, reaching the finish line first in 2 hours, 4 minutes, and 55 seconds. The first ever marathon win for the 34 year-old, 5 time World Cross-Country champion was Tergat's personal best by 53 seconds. Yet despite that effort for 26.2 miles of racing, this one wasn't quite over until Tergat reached the finish line.

Fellow countryman Sammy Korir, who started the Berlin race as a pacesetter, finished a mere 1 second behind Tergat in 2:04:56. Kenyan runners swept the top three spots, as Titus Munji finished a strong 3rd in 2:06:15. With all due respect to Korir, it would have been a shame to see Paul Tergat get outkicked this time. Twice in the past, Tergat had finished in the runner-up position in a major marathon behind American Khalid Khannouchi, including Khannouchi's world record run of 2:05:38 at the 2002 London Marathon. Tergat is no stranger to the runner-up position, having twice finished 2nd in Olympic 10,000-meter races to Haile Gebrselassie of Ethiopia.

But Tergat believed that Berlin would be different. With temperatures 50 degrees and overcast, no wind, and a pancake flat course, Tergat took aim at Khannouchi's record, hitting the halfway mark in 1:03:01 with his pacesetters in tow. Just after 21 miles, Korir made his move, but Tergat was determined to avoid being second best again, and later gapped Korir by nearly 30 yards with less than a mile remaining. Despite some confusion on Tergat's part as he neared the finish area which allowed Korir to get back within striking distance, Tergat held on for the win and earned \$126,000 in prize money for his efforts. His 2:04:55 clocking is another strong argument for negative split racing (posting a 2nd half split of 1:01:54) and calculates to an incredible pace of 4:46 per mile for 26.2 miles of running.

Tergat is now considered the favorite if he chooses the marathon at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens. No Kenyan runner has ever won an Olympic gold medal in the marathon, a surprising statistic given the Kenyan long-distance running dominance. Past history has dictated that strong cross-country runners often bring those credentials along to run great marathons (Bill Rodgers, Alberto Salazar, Carlos Lopes, John Treacy, and Paul Radcliffe are all prime examples), so Tergat's success at the marathon distance comes as no surprise. Look for Kenya's Paul Tergat to establish himself as one of the greatest distance runners ever in next year's Summer Olympics Games.

Racing Roundup

Road Race Directors interested in having their races be considered to host a USATF Championship in 2004 and 2005 need to e-mail a letter of intent, including race name, location, distance, date, and start time, to USATF LDR Chair Will Graustein (wgraustein@snet.net) by on or before November 1st. The race's course must be USATF certified and if selected, must contribute a portion of the prize money for the Grand Prix race circuit.....The 3rd Annual Mystic Places Marathon and Niantic Bay Festival takes place on Saturday, October 25th and Sunday, October 26th in East Lyme's Rocky Neck State Park. The race, which replaces the former East Lyme Marathon, has something for everyone, even if running 26.2 miles isn't in your fall plans. Saturday's festivities include kid's races, rides, and games, a pasta dinner, health and fitness expo, and live entertainment throughout the afternoon and evening. Sunday's race schedule also offers a 5-person marathon relay race and a brand new 10-mile road race in conjunction with the 26.2-mile marathon. To date, the race has drawn entrants from over 30 states, according to Race Director John Bysiewicz. This year's invited guest is Norway's Grete Waitz, a former Olympic silver medalist in the marathon, 5-time World Cross-Country champion, and a 9-time New York City Marathon champion. Volunteers are always welcome; check out the event's web site at www.mysticplacesmarathon.com or call (203) 481-5933 for more information. Make every effort to get to Rocky Neck State Park, support the runners, and take advantage of one last New England autumn weekends.

Mystic makes 50 for Wright

Some people take up fishing or golf when they retire. Will Wright chose a different route: completing his quest to run a marathon in every one of the 50 states. When he crosses the finish line at the Mystic Places Marathon on October 26th, Wright will have accomplished his goal. The 66 year-old runner from Mobile, Alabama will also be attempting to finish his 80th marathon. A runner for 22 years who trains consistently and races often, Wright never dreamed that his debut at the 1983 New Orleans Marathon would lead to this. But after a steady diet of 3 marathons per year, Wright retired in 1998 and hooked up with friend Don Withers in a quest to run a marathon in every state. Wright, who lists Boston and New York City as his two favorite marathons, recently reached #49 at the Maui Marathon and is aiming to finish in the 3:45-4:00 time range, slower than his personal best of 3:08 set back in 1985 but a more than respectable time for a 66 year-old marathoner. In fact, Wright is most often at the top of his age category in weekend 5K and 10K races, but training for the marathon is what keeps him feeling young. Withers, who is shooting for 150 total marathon finishes, has already accomplished the 50 state task in 2001 and now looks to bring Wright along on the second phase of their mission; a marathon finish in each of Canada's 13 provinces.

This Month in History

October 30th, 1994 – Mystic's Wayne Jacob first ran the Strides for the Handicapped Road Race in Waterford back in 1978, finishing 2nd overall to Amby Burfoot. Jacob, now 39, returned to Waterford to win the 17th annual event in 25:49, a time within a minute of his 24:59 clocking in the inaugural race and comfortably ahead of runner-up Ed Zubritsky of Uncasville (26:38). In the women's division, Carla Thompson captured her fifth consecutive Strides title, finishing 23rd overall in 29:51. Preston's Kris-Anne Kane was the 2nd female finisher in 31:12. Other division winners includes Masters' Dennis Crowe (26:54) and Pat Swim (35:02), and Grandmasters Ernie Dumas (28:15) and Shirley Iselin (41:17). In the preliminary 3-mile race, Uncasville's Kevin Gallerani (16:09) and 12 year-old Paula Canning (20:09) were the top male and female runners. There were 419 official finishers in both races on an unusually warm autumn afternoon.

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