

WEBB WILL BE A MARKED MAN IN MANCHESTER

By DON SIKORSKI
Special to the Bulletin

Alan Webb has been running with a bull's-eye on his chest ever since his phenomenal 3:53.43 mile as a South Lakes (VA) High School senior erased the legendary Jim Ryun's 3:53.43 mark set back in 1965. Webb's decision to leave the University of Michigan and turn professional only added to the attention that Webb, 20, has received from the distance running media, fans, and his fellow competitors. This Thanksgiving, locals will get a chance to see Alan Webb race again in Connecticut, as Webb will toe the line amongst the elite runners entered in the 67th Manchester Road Race on Thanksgiving Day.

It remains to be seen if Webb will ever live up to the legend of Ryun, now a United States Congressman from Kansas who went on to earn an Olympic silver medal at 1500 meters. Webb's recent race efforts haven't quite lived up to Ryan's or even to his own standards just yet, but there is some promise despite his struggles with injuries and a college relationship with Coach Ron Warhurst at the University of Michigan that never quite gelled. Webb had been on top of his game ever since a 3:59.86 indoor mile in New York City two years ago, which marked the first time that an American high school runner had ever gone under four minutes indoors. His record breaking run in Eugene, Oregon earned him the national spotlight and Webb entered his freshman year at Michigan with great promise. Under Warhurst, he earned All-American honors in both cross-country and track as a freshman, briefly leading the 2001 NCAA Cross Country Championships race before finishing 11th. But Webb left Warhurst and Michigan just a year later, signing a multi-year contract with Nike and returning to train under his former high school coach Scott Razcko. Since then, Webb has battled the rigors of a professional running job and injuries that included a burst appendix. But he has recovered and his training plan is back on schedule. Webb recently finished 2nd to Ireland's Keith Kelley, a former NCAA Champion at Providence College, at the Mayor's Cup XC Race in Boston's Franklin Park. That effort was encouraging.

Webb will certainly have his hands full in Manchester, as a deep and talented field always gathers for the Thanksgiving Day classic. But Webb's gifted speed will pay dividends on a Manchester course which features a long and draining uphill stretch during the second mile followed by a mostly downhill stretch most of the way home that as historically favored track runners over strength road racers. Look for Webb to be right in the mix coming down Main Street this Thanksgiving.

Racing Roundup

Conard (West Hartford) High School senior Ahmed Haji revenged a 1 second loss to Griswold's Gavin Coombs a week earlier to claim his second consecutive New England Cross Country Championship title in Manchester, New Hampshire. Maine's Ben True stayed with Haji the whole way to finish 2nd, one second back, while Coombs hung on for 3rd. The Haji-True-Coombs 1-2-3 finish was identical to the 2002 New England race results. Amie Shumacher of Holy Cross (Waterbury) again ran away from the field to win in 18:12. But race of the day honors should go to Fitch Senior Betsy Boucher, who posted a strong 3rd place finish overall. Boucher, who was 13th a week earlier in the CT State Open race, took advantage of the extended distance (from 4,000 to 5,000 meters) to run her best race of the season and lead her Fitch team to a 2nd place finish. CT champion New Milford outran Ledyard 90-121 to claim the boy's team title.....New London's Will McGuire and Mystic's Martha Merz were the respective winners at the EBAC Fall Challenge Road Race in New London.....UConn Freshman Kyle MacQueen of Woodstock, CT was the Huskies' top runner at the NCAA Northeast Region Championship race, leading her team to an 11th place finish amongst 36 teams. Providence won the race with 49 points. MacQueen placed 45th overall in 22:32. Kim Smith of Providence was the individual winner, as the Friars placed 3 runners in the top 10. In the Men's race, UConn was led by Eric Fleckenstein of New York and Pat Blake of Lebanon, CT, who finished 36th and 38th respectively. The Huskies finished 12th overall, while a very strong Iona College team won the race with a team score of 58. Iona's Richard Kiplagat won the race with a time of 29:50, with Providence and Brown finishing in the 2-3 slots.....A reminder that the Tommy Toy Fund Run will take place on Friday evening, December 12th at 7:00pm at Billy Wilson's Ageing Still on 57 Broadway in Norwich. Entry fee for the event is a new, unwrapped toy. Check out the Mohegan Striders web site at www.moheganstriders.org for more information.

This Month in History

November 14th, 1993 – The Mohegan Striders and The Hartford Track Club men's teams tangle in the season's final race to determine the USATF Grand Prix team champion at the Chronicle Cross Country Classic at Mansfield Hollow State Park. Tied for the Grand Prix lead going into the XC Championships, Mohegan edges HTC by a mere 11 second difference (top 5 times scoring) to claim it's 7th consecutive team title. Yale Co-Op's Mike Cotton is the overall winner in 26:23 over the 8,000 meter course, followed closely by teammate John Bysiewicz (3 seconds back). Mohegan's Tom Degnan, a winner over Bysiewicz at the Tarzan Brown race a week prior, posts a strong 3rd place finish to claim the 1993 individual Grand Prix title over Cotton. Degnan, along with teammates Greg Quint (7th), Mike Whittlesey (9th), Jim Uhrig (10th), and Bob Davenport (12th), comprise the Striders' winning team in a race that wasn't decided until the final 200 meters. HTC was led by Kevin McCafferty and Steve Gates, who finished 5th and 6th respectively. Kerry Arseneault wins the 5K women's open race (18:48) and the 1993 individual title. Theresa Furr (18:57), Sue Faber (19:37), Sue Julin (19:46) and Kris-Anne Kane (19:55) round out the top 5 finishers. Athlete's Foot claimed the women's team title over runner up Mohegan to earn the season's championship.

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