

2003 RUNNING IN REVIEW

By DON SIKORSKI
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2003 was another busy year in the running world. The marathon again received the most attention, whether it be a world record in Berlin, American's looking to qualify for next year's Olympic Trials race, or the thousands of runners toeing the line anywhere from Chicago, Boston and New York to Hartford and Niantic. Colorado proved it could produce American runners that could run and win against foreign competition on the collegiate level, as sophomore Dathan Ritzenhein returned from injury to claim the individual NCAA XC title (Colorado's Jorge Torres won in 2002). Injuries slowed some of the world's best; Khalid Khannouchi could not repeat his London and Chicago wins from a year ago and will be a spectator for next year's Trials race. Local road races continued to draw respectable numbers of showcasers and some strong performances. The Eastern Connecticut Conference again proved to be the state's best, despite the graduation of Killingly's Megan Owen. And as always, a special thanks to the Race Directors, SNERRO timing officials, and the race volunteers who help keep our sport growing. Here's a look at running's top performers and performances from 2003:

LOCAL RUNNERS OF THE YEAR:

MALE: TIE: CHAD JOHNSON, LISBON and STEPHEN HERRERA, WATERFORD – Chad Johnson and Stephen Herrera have established themselves as two of the best runners in Connecticut and despite injuries and other commitments that cut into their racing efforts, both produced strong seasons again in 2003. Herrera was the state's best runner early season, winning USATF state titles at 5K and 12K. Despite a broken foot that erased most of his summer, Herrera returned to run well in the fall's Cross-Country Grand Prix. Johnson won the Rose City Challenge, was the 4 mile state champion (19:55), and was the second CT finisher at the New Haven 20K (36th in 1:05:20). Uncasville's Chadwick Brown and Todd Bennett also had strong seasons and recorded a number of road race wins.

FEMALE: CAROLYN VERDON, WATERFORD – 2003 was a breakthrough year for Verdon, who posted a 3:07:39 12th place finish at the Key Bank Vermont City Marathon in May, a personal best by over 3 minutes. Verdon won the Kelley Race (1:15:58) in August, ran 1:21:07 at the New Haven 20K, finished 4th at the 5 mile state championship in Old Saybrook (30:30), and ran 28:24 at the Manchester Road Race. Norwich's Melissa Perkins-Banas, Preston's Kris-Anne Kane, and Hebron's Stephanie Johnson all struggled with injuries in 2003 but still managed to post some strong race performances.

HIGH SCHOOL BOYS: GAVIN COOMBS, GRISWOLD – Coombs won a state title in the 1600m (4:14.91) to complete his junior year. Then in August, Coombs became the first high school runner to ever win the John J. Kelly Road Race, showing he was ready for an outstanding senior season in Cross-Country. Coombs didn't disappoint, winning the Windham and Wickham Invitationals, winning a 2nd consecutive ECC title, winning the Class SS Championship, beating defending state XC champion Ahmed Haji of Conard by a step to win the State Open, finished 3rd in New England, and finishing 3rd in the East Regional XC Qualifier (improving from 17th a year ago). Only the flu, which caused him to miss the Footlocker National Finals in San Diego, could slow Coombs down in 2003.

HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS: MEGHAN OWEN, KILLINGLY and BETSY BOUCHER, FITCH - Meghan Owen competing in the prestigious Millrose Games in February and capped her outstanding high school career with a state titles at 800m (2:14.78) and 1600m (4:57.88). Now at North Carolina, the mantle of honors was passed to Fitch's Besty Boucher, who ran her best race at the New England XC Championships, where she finished a strong 3rd.

CONNECTICUT RUNNERS OF THE YEAR:

MALE: TIE: CHAD JOHNSON, LISBON and STEPHEN HERRERA, WATERFORD – Chad Johnson and Stephen Herrera cleaned up on the local road racing scene, but they also proved that they could run and win against the state's best competition all year long.

FEMALE: HEATHER GARDINER, EAST HARTFORD – The 24 year-old Ontario, Canada native outran the men's field to win a 3.5 mile race overall (19:46) in April, ran 35:28 for 10K, won the Tarzan Brown Road Race in Mystic (9th overall), and won the Vermont City Marathon in a personal best 2:45:31. Gardiner currently runs for the Central Mass Striders, but still manages to race frequently in Connecticut.

NEW ENGLAND RUNNERS OF THE YEAR:

MALE: TIE: KEITH KELLY, MASSACHUSETTS AND JOHN MORTIMER, MASSACHUSETTS – Kelly, an Ireland native and the 2000 NCAA XC Champion at Providence College, returned from injury to post a number of strong performances, including a 14:39 5K win in Rhode Island, a win at the Race for the Cure 5K in Boston (14:16), and a win over Alan Webb at the Mayor's Cup XC race in October. Mortimer, the 1995 Footlocker High School XC runner-up and now the Assistant XC Coach at Boston College, won the Ollie 5 Miler in a course record 24:34, finished 26th overall at the New Haven 20K (1:03:37), and was the first New England finisher at the Ro-Jacks 8K (23:50).

FEMALE OPEN: BLAKE RUSSELL, MASSACHUSETTS – Russell's most impressive effort was her win at Twin Cities in

2:30:41. She also ran 32:28 for 10,000 meters and posted a 3rd place finish overall at the Boston Race for the Cure 5K in September. Russell clocked 16:04 to shave 5 seconds off Cathy O'Brien's 1993 course mark.

U.S. RUNNERS OF THE YEAR:

MALE: MEB KEFLEZIGHI, CALIFORNIA – Keflezighi finished 11th at the World XC Championships in March, won US Championship races at the Gate River Run 15K (43:31), NYRR 8K (22:28) and New Haven 20K (58:57), and finished a strong 7th overall (top American) at the Chicago Marathon in October (2:10:03). With Khannouchi out of the picture, Keflezighi will toe the line as the favorite in February's Olympic Marathon Trials race.

FEMALE: DEENA KASTOR, COLORADO – Formerly Deena Drossin, Kastor set an American record at both the Gate River Run 15K (47:15) and at the Flora London Marathon in April (2:21:16), where she finished 3rd female overall behind Paula Radcliffe's record setting performance.

WORLD'S BEST RUNNERS OF THE YEAR:

MEN: TIE: JOHN KORIR, KENYA, and PAUL TERGAT, KENYA – Korir won the Crescent City Classic 10K, the Cherry Blossom 10 Miler, The Lilac Bloomsday 12K, the Utica Boilermaker 15K, and the Falmouth Road Race. Tergat's world record marathon run (2:04:55) in Berlin earns him a share of the title. Also deserving of a mention is 19 year-old Kenenisa Bekele of Ethiopia, who won the World XC Championship races at 4K and 12K on back-to-back days.

WOMEN: PAULA RADCLIFFE, GREAT BRITAIN – 2:15:25. The numbers speak for themselves. It wasn't long ago that there was debate on whether or not a woman was capable of breaking the 2:20 mark in the marathon. Radcliffe took women's marathoning to a new level with her world best in London. She also won the Great North Run Half Marathon (1:05:40) and the World Half Marathon Championships in Portugal (1:07:35).

BEST PERFORMANCE – LOCAL:

Lisbon's Chad Johnson has run very well in each of his Rose City Challenge race appearances. But Johnson had never won the race until this year. His 53:52 clocking over the extremely challenging Norwich course was good enough for a 53 second win over teammate Marc Robaczynski of New Hartford.

BEST PERFORMANCE - UNITED STATES:

WOMEN – After falling behind by 70 yards at the 8 mile mark, Oregon's Marla Runyan ran down Colorado's Colleen De Reuck in the final stretch of the New Haven Savings Bank 20K to win by less than a step. 42 year-old Eddie Hellebuyck winning the Twin Cities Marathon overall in 2:12:47 has to rate as one of the best U.S. men's performances of the season.

BEST PERFORMANCE - WORLD:

Radcliffe in London, hands down. But aside from the two world record marathon runs, the best race of the year took place in Paris, France at the 2003 World Track and Field Championships. In the 5,000 meter final, Kenyan steeplechase specialist Stephen Cherono, Hicham El Guerrouj of Morocco (a miler moving up in distance) and Kenenisa Bekele of Ethiopia (a 10K/XC runner moving down) were all surprised by Kenyan Eliud Kipchoge, who held off El Guerrouj by a mere 4 hundredths of a second for the win, with the top 6 runners finishing between 12:52 and 12:58.

BEST LOCAL ROAD RACE:

JOHN J. KELLEY / OCEAN BEACH ROAD RACE, August 2nd – The 41st annual race also offered a deserving tribute to the late Jessie Kelley, who passed away in June. Gavin Coombs, one of the many runners sporting the homemade "WLMK" shirts (We Love Mrs. Kelley), outdistancing defending champion Greg Wenneborg and former Providence College standout Tyler McCabe for the win. Waterford's Carolyn Verdon outdueled Norwich's Melissa Perkins-Banas to win the women's title. The Kelley Race, the 2nd oldest road race in Connecticut, again continued its long-standing tradition of charging no entry fee.

BEST CONNECTICUT ROAD RACE:

TIE: NEW HAVEN SAVINGS BANK 20K, September 1st and THE MANCHESTER ROAD RACE, November 27th – Both New Haven and Manchester continue to offer race events that rank amongst the best in the country. A second consecutive year of rain couldn't diminish New Haven's atmosphere. With an outstanding field to compete for the U.S. 20K title, Meb Keflezighi set a United States 20K road record (58:57), while Marla Runyan outleaned Colleen De Reuck at the tape for the women's title. Manchester, the oldest road race in the state, implemented a number of procedural changes in an effort to improve its race (chip timing and no race day registration), drew some big name American talent (Alan Webb, NCAA 10K Champ Dan Lincoln), and drew nearly 10,000 runners in what has become a long-standing Thanksgiving Day tradition.

Local Runners:

MEN'S OPEN

2003 Chad Johnson / Stephen Herrera
2002 Chad Johnson / Stephen Herrera
2001 Chad Johnson
2000 Steve Herrera
1999 Ed Zubritsky
1998 John Anthony

WOMEN'S OPEN

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

MEN'S MASTERS

2003 Mike Fritz
2002 Bob Stack
2001 Bob Stack
2000 Bob Stack
1999 Wayne Jacob / Jim Murphy
1998 Tim Kane

WOMEN'S MASTERS/GM

Martha Merz
Rebecca Stockdale-Wolley
Rebecca Stockdale-Wolley
Rebecca Stockdale-Wolley

MEN'S GRANDMASTERS

2003 Tim Smith
2002 Wayne Jolley
2001 Tim Smith
2000 Dennis Crowe
Dennis Crowe
1998 Tim Smith

1999

State Runners:

MEN

2003 Chad Johnson / Stephen Herrera
2002 Chad Johnson / Stephen Herrera
2001 Chris Chisholm
Steve Swift
1999 Steve Swift
1998 Steve Swift

WOMEN

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

2000

High School Runners:

LOCAL BOYS

2003 Gavin Coombs (GRISWOLD)
2002 Gavin Coombs (GRISWOLD)
2001 Jon-Paul Mandelburg (NFA)
2000 Mark Brissette (STONINGTON)
1999 Chris Andrew (NFA)
1998 Chris Andrew (NFA)

LOCAL GIRLS

Meghan Owen (KILLINGLY) / Betsy Boucher (FITCH)
Meghan Owen (KILLINGLY)
Meghan Owen (KILLINGLY)
Meghan Owen (KILLINGLY)
Jessica Schenk (FITCH)
Jessica Schenk (FITCH)

STATE BOYS

2003 Gavin Coombs (GRISWOLD)
2002 Ahmed Haji (CONARD)
2001 Brian McGovern (FAIRFIELD PREP)
2000 Brian McGovern (FAIRFIELD PREP)
1999 Chris Andrew (NFA)
1998 Ren Provey (FAIRFIELD)

STATE GIRLS

M.Owen (KILLINGLY) / A.Schumacher (HOLY CROSS)
Meghan Owen (KILLINGLY)
Meghan Owen (KILLINGLY)
Meghan Owen (KILLINGLY)
Jessica Schenk (FITCH)
Jessica Schenk (FITCH)

New England Runners:

MEN

2003 Keith Kelly / John Mortimer, MASSACHUSETTS
2002 Dave Hinga, MASSACHUSETTS
2001 Mike Donnelly, MASSACHUSETTS

WOMEN

Blake Russell, MASSACHUSETTS
Amy Rudolph, RHODE ISLAND

United States Runners:

MEN

2003 Meb Keflezighi, CALIFORNIA
2002 Khalid Khannouchi, NEW YORK
2001 Rod Dehaven, WISCONSIN
2000 Rod Dehaven, WISCONSIN

WOMEN

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

World Runners:

MEN

2003 John Korir, KENYA / Paul Tergat, KENYA
2002 Paul Kosgei / Khalid Khannouchi / Rogers Rop
2001 Hicham El Guerrouj, MOROCCO
2000 Reuban Cheruiyot, KENYA
1999 Hicham El Guerrouj / Khalid Khannouchi
1998 Khalid Khannouchi, MOROCCO

WOMEN

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

Best Performances (Local):

MALE

2003 Chad Johnson 1st @ the Rose City Challenge
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

2003 Eddy Hellebuyck's win at Twin Cities Marathon
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 win over De Reuck at New Haven 20K
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

2003 World T+F Championships 5,000 meter final in Paris
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 @ London
Paula Radcliffe's record run @ Chicago
Catherine Ndereba record run @ Chicago

Tegla Laroupe's record run @ Rotterdam

Road Races:

LOCAL

2003 John J. Kelly / Ocean Beach Road Race
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

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

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