

2004 RUNNING IN REVIEW

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2004 was a year filled with sports highlights and drama. New England area fans had plenty to cheer about; the Patriots successful title defense over Carolina in Super Bowl XXXVIII, the Huskies romp over Georgia Tech to earn their second NCAA National Championship, and an 85 year-old curse was lifted in Boston, as the Red Sox claimed baseball's ultimate prize in October. 2004 was also an Olympic year, and the United States showed the world that our athletes can in fact race 26.2 miles successfully against the best world class talent. Mebrahtom Keflezighi and Deena Kastor provided inspiration with their Olympic efforts (earning silver and bronze medals respectively) and led a resurgence in American distance running. The Colorado Buffaloes surprised everyone but themselves in winning both the men's and women's NCAA Cross-Country team championships in November, with Providence's Kim Smith cruising to an individual win on the ladies side. Injuries denied Khalid Khannouchi an opportunity to compete in the Olympic Games; he recovered to finish 5th in this fall's Chicago Marathon. Just how fast is Khannouchi? His time of 2:08:42 was his slowest marathon to date yet only one other American (Alberto Salazar) has ever run faster. Local road racing events continued to flourish, and the Eastern Connecticut Conference was again head and shoulders above the rest of the state, with Griswold's Tradelle Ward picking up right where former teammate Gavin Coombs left off. Sadly, the running world also lost two of its premiere members when Johnny A. Kelley and Arthur Lydiard passed away. Their contributions to the sport will be missed. As always, a special thanks go out to the Road Race Directors, SNERRO timing officials, and all of the race volunteers who help the events alive. Here's a look at running's top performers and performances from 2004:

LOCAL RUNNERS OF THE YEAR:

MALE: CHADWICK BROWN, WATERFORD – Chadwick Brown has run in the shadows in local standouts like Chad Johnson and Stephen Herrera for the past few years. Not in 2004. Brown has now established himself as one of the best runners in Connecticut, winning the state 12K title, finishing a strong 14th overall at the Fairfield Half Marathon (1:13:45), winning the Kelly Race in New London (1:02:20), running 1:05:48 for 20th overall (2nd state finisher) at the New Haven 20K, and running a 2:36:02 marathon at Mystic Places en route to leading his Mohegan Striders team to another USATF championship. Johnson and Herrera both worked themselves into top form by the fall, and with runners like Todd Bennett, Dave Hurtado, Chris Owen, Brendan Cashman, Christopher Kane, Chris McCormack, Jeff Wadecki, Shayne Steadman, and Keith Pellerin all posting strong efforts in 2004, there was plenty of racing action going on up front all season long.

FEMALE: MARTHA MERZ, MYSTIC – Merz showed no signs of slowing down at age 41. Her 1:17:44 clocking at the New Haven 20K was good for 3rd Master overall. Merz also won a number of local road races including the Sneekers Café 5 Miler and the Strides for the Handicapped 10K, and finished 4th female at the Rose City Challenge in Norwich (1:04:23).

HIGH SCHOOL BOYS: GAVIN COOMBS and TRADELLE WARD, GRISWOLD – Gavin Coombs capped an outstanding high school career with State titles at 1600 and 3200 meters. Coombs has since graduated and moved on to North Carolina State, passing the mantle of honor along to teammate Tradelle Ward. Ward, only a junior, was more than up to the task, going undefeated at the state level and, like Coombs before him, winning the Wickham Invitational, the ECC Championship, the Class SS Championship, and the State Open XC Championship. Ward was 2nd overall at the New Englands and finished 9th in the Footlocker Regional at Van Courtlant Park in the Bronx.

HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS: BETSY BOUCHER, FITCH and KELLY SORRELL, LYMAN – Boucher also graduated high school in 2004 (she now competes for Yale University), earning all-state honors in track during her senior season. Sorrell, only a sophomore, had a terrific cross-country season, winning the Class SS race, finishing a strong 3rd in the CT State Open, 4th at the New Englands, and 16th overall (top CT runner) at the Footlocker Regional.

CONNECTICUT RUNNERS OF THE YEAR:

MALE: CHADWICK BROWN, WATERFORD – Brown raced often and raced well, measuring up to the state's best. His 1:05:48 clocking at the New Haven Savings Bank 20K (a U.S. national Championship event) was good enough to finish 20th overall and 2nd state finisher, just 12 seconds behind Clinton's George Luke. Brown followed that performance with a 4th place finish in the Mystic Places Marathon in October in 2:36:02.

FEMALE: KATE O'NEILL, NEW HAVEN – The 24 year-old Yale graduate clocked personal bests at 5,000 meters (15:21.66) and 10,000 meters (31:34.37) in 2004. O'Neill capped her 2004 season with a 3rd place at the U.S. Olympic Trials 10,000 meter race this summer (32:07.25) and was also the runner-up at the prestigious Falmouth Road Race (36:26).

NEW ENGLAND RUNNERS OF THE YEAR:

MALE: JOHN MORTIMER, MASSACHUSETTS – Mortimer was the 1995 Footlocker High School XC runner-up and went on to a successful career at Michigan before being sidelined with injury. Now the Assistant XC Coach at Boston College, Mortimer has returned to his New England roots, is healthy, and is running fast again. Besides winning road races, Mortimer also finished a strong 5th at the Olympic Trails final in the 3,000 meter Steeplechase this summer.

FEMALE OPEN: KATE O'NEILL, CONNECTICUT (See Connecticut Runner of the Year)

U.S. RUNNERS OF THE YEAR:

MALE: MEBRAHTOM KEFLEZIGHI, CALIFORNIA – Keflezighi's runner-up effort in the Olympic Marathon (2:11:29) behind Italy's Stefano Baldini made him the first American to earn a medal in the Marathon since Frank Shorter's silver in 1976. Keflezighi recovered quickly from that effort to finish 2nd to South Africa's Hendrik Ramaala in the ING New York City Marathon in November.

FEMALE: DEENA KASTOR, CALIFORNIA – Kastor (formerly Deena Drossin) executed her game plan to perfection earn a bronze medal in the Olympic Marathon. With all of the spotlight on Britain's world record holder Paula Radcliffe, the 31 year-old Kastor ran down nearly everyone in the field over the final 10 kilometers to finish 3rd behind Japan's Mizuki Noguchi and Kenya's Catherine Ndereba in 2:27:20.

WORLD'S BEST RUNNERS OF THE YEAR:

MEN: HICHAM EL GUERROUJ, MOROCCO – Although El Guerrouj had been the most dominant miler in the world for the past decade, he had never won an Olympic gold medal. The disappointment of 1996 and 2000 was clearly erased in Athens, with El Guerrouj finally capturing gold at 1,500 meters and then, five days later, El Guerrouj defeated the world 5K and 10K record holder Kenenisa Bekele of Ethiopia at 5,000 meters to achieve a second gold medal. Not since Paavo Nurmi in 1924 has this 1,500 / 5,000 meter double sweep been completed.

WOMEN: SUSAN CHEPKEMEI, KENYA – Chepkemei has been near the top of most road race ranking for the past few years, but a strong summer of road race wins and a classic duel with Radcliffe in Central Park were more than enough to earn her top honors in 2004. In an 11 week stretch from the 4th of July to mid September, Chepkemei posted victories at the prestigious Peachtree Road Race in Atlanta (31:55), Utica Boilermaker 15K (48:50), Quad City Bix 7 Miler (35:24), the Peoples Beach to Beacon 10K (31:36), and the Dam to Dam 10 Miler in the Netherlands (53:07). Greta Britain's Paula Radcliffe redeemed her disappointing Olympic effort with a terrific 4 second win over Chepkemei at the ING New York City Marathon in November, making her the first non-Kenyan winner in New York City since 2000.

BEST PERFORMANCE – LOCAL:

Chadwick Brown's best effort was at this fall's Mystic Places Marathon in Niantic, where Brown assumed the duty of running the opening leg of the 5 person marathon relay for his Mohegan Strider team, then continued to race the complete 26.2 miles distance in 2:36:02, good enough for 4th overall and top American honors. New Grandmaster Richard England of East Lyme ran an impressive 2:58:47 at Mystic Places, good enough for 20th place overall.

BEST PERFORMANCE - UNITED STATES:

Keflezighi or Kastor, take your pick. Each year, talk of potential American contenders in the marathons is erased by dismal performances and foreign dominance. But in 2004, the success of Keflezighi and Kastor led other Americans to believe that they can contend on the world class level. Each opted to race the marathon distance three times in 2004; both plan to focus in cross-country, road and track races in 2005.

BEST PERFORMANCE - WORLD:

Hicham El Guerrouj's 1,500/5,000 meter double was clearly the most dominant performance on the track in 2004. Paula Radcliffe's New York City Marathon earns top honors for the ladies. Both athletes faced tremendous pressure to perform; El Guerrouj had twice failed in the Olympics to win the event he had dominant for years, while a DNF in the Olympic Marathon just weeks earlier didn't deter Radcliffe from racing and defeating some of the world's best marathoners to earn the victory in the Big Apple.

BEST LOCAL ROAD RACE:

JOHN J. KELLEY / OCEAN BEACH ROAD RACE, August 7th – The 42nd annual race again lived up to its reputation as being the best bargain in town. Waterford's Chadwick Brown and Guilford's Kerry Arsenault, both enjoying strong racing seasons in 2004, earned top individual honors. This year's race avoided the hot and humid conditions for the most part, with 381 finishers completing the 11.6 mile footrace, which continued its tradition of no entry fee.

BEST CONNECTICUT ROAD RACE:

CHRISTOPHER MARTIN'S 5K, NEW HAVEN, December 12th – The Christopher Martin's race can't measure up to Manchester in terms of history. It falls well short of the New Haven 20K in terms of elite athletes. The course isn't as scenic as Tarzan Brown; there's no traditional hill climb like in Litchfield. But the Christopher Martin's 5K is rapidly becoming a cult favorite of runners looking for one last pre-holiday party/road race before winter sets in. Although it suffers from a challenging December date, the event still drew 175 runners in 2004, the race course is flat and fast, the field of top runners strong, and the post race party (featuring complimentary Sam Adams beer) is one of the most talked about events of the entire road racing season.

Local Runners:

MEN'S OPEN

2004 Chadwick Brown
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

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

MEN'S MASTERS

2004 Dan Dillon
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
Martha Merz
Rebecca Stockdale-Wolley
Rebecca Stockdale-Wolley
Rebecca Stockdale-Wolley

MEN'S GRANDMASTERS

2004 Richard England
2003 Tim Smith
2002 Wayne Jolley
2001 Tim Smith
2000 Dennis Crowe
Dennis Crowe
1998 Tim Smith

1999

State Runners:

MEN

2004 Chadwick Brown
2003 Chad Johnson / Stephen Herrera
2002 Chad Johnson / Stephen Herrera
2001 Chris Chisholm
Steve Swift
1999 Steve Swift
1998 Steve Swift

WOMEN

Kate O'Neill
Heather Gardiner
Sue Faber
Marie McMahon-Davenport
Zofia Wieciorkowska
Christine Junkerman
Kerry Arsenault

2000

High School Runners:

LOCAL BOYS

2004 Gavin Coombs and Tradelle Ward (GRISWOLD)
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

Betsy Boucher (FITCH) and Kelly Sorrell (LYMAN)
Meghan Owen (KILLINGLY) / Betsy Boucher (FITCH)
Meghan Owen (KILLINGLY)
Meghan Owen (KILLINGLY)
Meghan Owen (KILLINGLY)
Jessica Schenk (FITCH)
Jessica Schenk (FITCH)

STATE BOYS

2004 Gavin Coombs and Tradelle Ward (GRISWOLD)
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

Amie Schumacher (HOLY CROSS)
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

2004 John Mortimer, MASSACHUSETTS
2003 Keith Kelly / John Mortimer, MASSACHUSETTS
2002 Dave Hinga, MASSACHUSETTS
2001 Mike Donnelly, MASSACHUSETTS

WOMEN

Kate O'Neill, CONNECTICUT
Blake Russell, MASSACHUSETTS
Blake Russell, MASSACHUSETTS
Amy Rudolph, RHODE ISLAND

United States Runners:

MEN

2004 Mebrahtom Keflezighi, CALIFORNIA
2003 Mebrahtom Keflezighi, CALIFORNIA
2002 Khalid Khannouchi, NEW YORK
2001 Rod Dehaven, WISCONSIN
2000 Rod Dehaven, WISCONSIN

WOMEN

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

World Runners:

MEN

2004 Hicham El Guerrouj, MORROCCO
2003 John Korir, KENYA / Paul Tergat, KENYA
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

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

Best Performances (Local):

MALE

2004 Chadwick Brown Mystic Places Relay and Marathon
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 1:17:44 20K in New Haven
Carolyn Verdon's 3:07:29 Marathon @ Vermont City
Martha Merz 1st Master @ Army 10 Miler
Melissa Perkins finishes 3rd @ Mystic Places Marathon

Best Performances (United States):

MALE

2004 Meb Keflezighi's Silver Medal in the Olympic Marathon
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

Deena Kastor's Bronze Medal in the Olympic Marathon
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

2004 Hicham El Guerrero's 1,500/5,000m Olympic double
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 win at the ING New York City Marathon
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

2004 John J. Kelly / Ocean Beach Road Race
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

Christopher Martin 5K
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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