

SELL GIVES AMERICAN RUNNERS HOPE

By DON SIKORSKI
Special to the Bulletin

Morocco's Jaoud Gharib proved he is the top male marathoner runner in the world, posting a second consecutive marathon world championship win in Helsinki on August 13th. But back in the States, most of the talk was the terrific effort of Michigan's Brian Sell, the top American runner by virtue of his impressive 9th place finish. Not only was Sell's top 10 finish a strong effort against world class competition, but it was the way Sell raced that made the effort even more credible. A conservative start found Sell back in 53rd place at 5K. He then moved up to 39th at the half marathon mark (1:05:42), up to 22nd at 30 kilometers, and into the top 10 by 40K. Sell hit the finish tape in 2:13:27, the fastest-ever performance by an American runner in a world championship. Sell's top notch effort measures up to two other comparable standout efforts by American men in the World Marathon Championships; Mark Plaatjes ran 2:13:57 to earn a gold medal in 1993, and Steve Spence clocked in at 2:15:36 under warm and humid conditions to earn bronze in 1991. Now Sell's race, on the heels of last year's Olympic Marathon medals earned by Deena Drossin and Meb Keflizghi, gives American distance runners hope for the future.

Although his shorter distance credentials are modest by world class standards (13:59 for 5K and 28:36 for 10K), Sell began to make some noise on the national level with a breakthrough runner-up effort at the 2003 New Haven 20K. A member of the Hansons-Brooks Distance Project in Michigan, Sell would later set the pace at the 2004 Olympic Trials Marathon, making an aggressive move to the front at seven miles and leading through 22 miles before eventually fading to finish in 12th place. But despite not earning a spot on the Olympic team, that experience would pay dividends for Sell, who would return to the hard work and structured training program of the Hanson team to eventually yield more continued improvement as a marathoner. Sell would race the Chicago Marathon later that fall and finish in a personal best time of 2:13:18, giving hope that he may have what it takes to compete on a world class stage. Leading up to the world championship race, Sell won his first U.S. championship race at the 25K Championships in Grand Rapids, Michigan in May. Sell was also the runner-up at the U.S. 10 Mile Championships (47:37) and posted a tip ten finish at the prestigious Lilac Bloomsday Run for top American honors.

Both the competition and the conditions were fierce for Sell's championship race. Sunshine, high humidity and a steady wind challenged the runners right from the start, slowing times and making it a race of attrition. Gharib, 33, with a 2:07:49 marathon effort in London to his credit, made his move at the 10K mark with only Olympic Champion Stefano Baldini of Italy covering the move. At around 30K, Gharib shook Bandidni, who would eventually drop out, and hung on the remainder of the way to win in a time of 2:10:10, seven seconds slower than Rob De Castella's 1983 effort at the first-ever world championship marathon run on the same course. Christopher Isegwe of Tanzania followed closely behind Gharib to earn the silver medal 11 seconds later, while Tsuyoshi Ogata of Japan earned the bronze in 2:11:16. Gharib has also committed to run the ING New York City Marathon this November.

Sell led an American performance that also breathes more hope for the future. The U.S. team, consisting of Sell, Clint Verran (22nd in 2:17:42), and Jason Lehmkuhle (40th in 2:22:46), finished a strong 4th overall in team competition (posting a team time of 6:53:55 for the top 3 runners) behind the Japanese (6:38:39), Kenya (6:46:38), and Ethiopia (6:52:14). And while comparisons to the past will always loom for Americans, who have chased the ghosts of Shorter, Rodgers, and Salazar for years, today's world class marathon runners are stronger and faster and the fields deeper, loaded with a ton of international talent that didn't exist 20 or 30 years ago. Brian Sell is not the most talented long distance runner in the United States, but he has trained smart and trained hard, posting a number of impressive performances when it matters most. His 2:13 effort is a terrific performance for a championship race, and he outran a dozen sub 2:08 marathoners in the process (there were 7 entrants with sub 2:07 credentials in the field). Consider that Sell wasn't even a Division I scholarship athlete in college but earned his credentials with hard work and a dedicated training regime. Now Brian Sell has run the fastest-ever marathon by an American in a World Championships.

Racing Update

The 18th Annual Harry "O" Kids Fun Run, sponsored by People's Bank and the Norwich Recreation Department, will take place on Sunday, September 18th in Mohegan Park Center. The race begins at 11:30am and is free for children ages 6-14. The race course is approximately 8/10th of a mile and travels on paved paths around Spaulding Pond. Ribbons will be awarded to all finishers, and refreshments and a ton of Family Day activities will take place in the park that day. Call the Norwich Recreation Department at 823-3791 for more details.

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