

## 2005 MANCHESTER ROAD RACE

By DON SIKORSKI  
*Special to the Bulletin*

The Manchester Road Race has always been a popular tradition with Ireland's best distance runners. The event may soon become just as popular in New Zealand. New Zealanders Nick Willis and Kim Smith captured the top spots in the 69<sup>th</sup> Annual Manchester Road Race as nearly 10,000 competitors were greeted by snow and slush on a brisk Thanksgiving morning.

The 22 year-old Willis, who had represented New Zealand in the 2004 Olympic Games at 1,500 meters, was accustomed to such climate as a result of his collegiate days spent at the University of Michigan. Willis moved to the front of the pack of a dozen athletes that churned through the opening mile in 4:29. After a second uphill mile covered in 5:10, Willis and Alistair Cragg, a collegiate rival of Willis from his Arkansas Razorback days and also a 2004 Olympian (12<sup>th</sup> place in the 5,000 meter final), broke away from the chase pack on the race's long downhill stretch. But the close finish many anticipated never materialized, as Willis powered home in a brisk 21:50 over the 4.748 mile course. "I was very confident based on how my training had been going over the past two weeks," claimed Willis. "I knew I was capable of that kind of run. I just wasn't sure who else was." Cragg followed in 21:56, with Russian Vyacheslav Shabunin finished 3<sup>rd</sup> in 22:07.

On the women's side, the 24 year old Smith successfully defended her Manchester title from 2004, prevailing over her former Providence College teammate Mary Cullen. Last year, Smith had completed an impressive double by winning the NCAA Cross-Country champion race just three days prior to her first professional race, a win at Manchester. Smith made this year's women's race less dramatic, cruising home comfortably in 24:23 to better Cullen's time of 25:00. 5 time Manchester winner and course record holder Amy Rudolph is returning from injuries and did not compete.

Preston's Tim Kane, 47, was the top local finisher in 28:32. West Haven native and former University of Connecticut All-American Dan Wilson was 11<sup>th</sup> overall in 22:36. Amby Burfoot, the 1968 Boston Marathon champion and a former standout at Fitch High School in Groton, competed in his 43<sup>rd</sup> consecutive Manchester Road Race. Burfoot is a 9 time Manchester champion.

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