

LOOKING BACK TWENTY YEARS ON ROSE ARTS

By DON SIKORSKI
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With the absence of this year's Rose City Challenge 10 mile road race, all that remains of the Rose Arts tradition are the distant memories of the former 10.4 mile road race (well, the beer festival and pancake breakfast were also pretty popular events in their day). The Rose Arts race, which began at Chelsea Parade and traveled through historic Norwichtown into Taftville and through the heart of downtown Norwich back to the finish, was the one top notch race that many runners would focus on each year. If the competition didn't get the best of you, the elements certainly would, from the challenging climb up the early Canterbury Turnpike hills to the heat and humidity of a mid-June morning. But those challenges are what made finishing the Rose Arts road race so special. Going back 20 years, here's a look at what took place at the Rose Arts race.

Talk leading up to the 1986 race centered more on who would not be competing. Although the Rose Arts race would be offering cash prizes for the first time in the race's 20 year history, many of the area's best runners would not be on the starting line in Norwich. Defending champion Wayne Jacob opted top race the Fairfield Half Marathon on the same day, claiming the Norwich course beat him up pretty good last year. Danielson 5K winner Gary Nixon of Higganum would also run the half marathon (Jacob and Nixon would finish 2nd and 5th respectively at Fairfield.) Top area runners like Dave Raunig (hamstring), Fran Houle (back), and Jim Unrig (ankle) were nursing injuries and would not be competing at Rose Arts. Other potential contenders, like Joe Banas and Phil Garland, would race but were retuning from injury and still not at 100 percent. All five of these runners had earned top three finishes in past Rose Arts races. Still, there were plenty of quality runners that would be racing in Norwich. Former Xavier High and Yale University standout Ron Cozean of Moodus would be making his first attempt at Rose Arts. He had been running extremely well leading up to the race. North Stonington's Will Rodgers also possessed excellent long distance credentials. Norwich's Chris Hansen, a two time Junior champion at Rose Arts, was entering his senior year at Holy Cross and had been running well enough to be a threat. Out of towners Steve O'Connell, Mike Plaisted, and Randy Accetta all had impressive running resumes and were threats to win it all. And never count out Tim Smith, the 38 year-old Norwich runner who had never missed a Rose Arts race in twenty years. On the women's side, it was expected to be the Carla Brown show. Brown had won the past three Rose Arts women's titles and was in top shape for this year's race. Expected to challenge would be former local high school standouts Kim Hawkes (Montville) and Janice Boyes (NFA). And although race officials expected a decrease in entrants, over 500 pre-race applications had been received (runners were not eligible to register on race day). The race was on.

Near perfect conditions would greet the runners on Sunday morning, as a group of ten runners moved out front early, reaching the two mile mark in a brisk 10:12 before hitting the hills. Two miles later, it was Cozean clearly out in front by 15 seconds and looking comfortable, while the battle continued for second. Rogers would get past Colchester's Darrin Eisman to move into the runner-up position, with Accetta, Plaisted, and O'Connell all in hot pursuit. Right behind them were some other top flight runners, including New London's Bob Stack, Keith Pigeon of Danielson, and fan favorite Tim Smith. Carla Brown had been hammering from the opening gun, and a strong move on Canterbury Turnpike left her well out in front of the women's field.

With the remainder of the field jockeying for position over the hills and then hanging on for dear life through the long, flat stretch of Central Avenue into downtown, Cozean had continued to extend his lead over his pursuers. He would race down Broadway and hit the finish tape in 55:06, \$150 richer and comfortably ahead of runner-up finisher Will Rodgers (55:56). Plaisted (56:12), a former Waterford High School track standout now residing in Washington, D.C., would fend off Accetta (56:18) for 3rd, with Bob Stack moving up to claim 5th place overall (56:43). O'Connell, Pigeon, Smith, Eisman, and Mike Matteson would round out the top ten places. On the women's side, Brown would cruise home to her fourth consecutive Rose Arts title, running the second fastest female time ever on the course (1:05:01, second best only to Sally Zimmer's 1982 women's course record of 1:03:13). Hawkes, a member of UConn's cross-country and track team, would earn runner-up honors in 1:07:00, with Boyes 3rd in 1:11:29. Local division winners included NFA's John Jacaruso (Men's Junior), Rose Buckingham of Waterford (Women's Submasters), and Billy Marshall (Men's Masters), who would outduel Danielson's Ernie Dumas for the title. A total of 443 runners would finish the challenging 10.4 mile course, with 19 runners going under the 1 hour mark.

Memorial Run

Those inspired by these memories of Rose Arts past may just have an opportunity to re-live some past glories. An unofficial Rose Arts Memorial group run is scheduled to take place on Sunday morning, June 4th. Runners will leave from the NFA parking lot at 9:00am and run the original 10.4 mile Rose Arts race course. Whether you're a past Rose Arts race participant or a newcomer to the running scene looking for company on a long training run, you're invited to join the group for a Sunday stroll through the streets of Norwich. E-mail Kevin Gallerani (kgallerani@telaid.com) for more information.

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