

BLAKE'S TREADMILL RUN IN THE RECORD BOOKS

By DON SIKORSKI
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Some people might be bored after about only 15 or 20 minutes of exercising on a treadmill. New Britain's Eric Blake decided to do something to make his treadmill run a bit more interesting. On Saturday, June 24th at Malibu Fitness in Farmington, Blake, 27, who is current the assistant cross-country and track coach at his alma Mata Central Connecticut State University, ran the fastest-ever marathon on a treadmill, completing 26.2 miles of movement in 2 hours, 21 minutes, and 40 seconds. Blake's run, which averaged 5:24 per mile, shaved over two minutes off of the previous best treadmill marathon run of 2:23:58, set in 2004. And boredom probably never entered the equation, especially at that rate of speed.

Eric Blake first made a name for himself on the running scene as a cross-country harrier at Lyman Memorial High School in Lebanon. As a senior, Blake would go stride for stride up the final stretch at Manchester's Wickham Park to outlean Plainfield's J.J. John and win the 1996 CIAC Cross-Country State Open by 1 second. Blake would also go on to finish 3rd in the State Open 3200 meter race to cap his senior season before heading off to Central Connecticut State. After a successful collegiate career, Blake, who now competes for the Boston Athletic Association, continues to train and race frequently in the New England area. The former head cross-country coach at Plattsburgh State (NY) University has also continued to improve, becoming one of the country's brightest young distance running prospects. Blake was one of the youngest qualifiers for the 2004 Olympic Marathon Trials, running 2:21:24 to win the 2003 Steamtown Marathon in Pennsylvania in his debut attempt at the distance. He would go on to finish 33rd over in the Trials race. He also finished 31st in the 2004 New York City Marathon. His strength may be his strongest asset.

His most recent accomplish was an impressive win at the prestigious 45th Annual Mt. Washington Road Race (1:01:09), a 7.6 mile grueling uphill climb. He had finished 4th overall in 2004 and was the runner-up year ago at Mt. Washington. Amazingly, Blake's win on the mountain came just one short week prior to his treadmill marathon record run. He was clearly showing no ill effects from that effort. Blake will now be busy preparing himself to race as a member of the U.S. team at the World Mountain Championships in Turkey in September by virtue of his Mount Washington win. Compared to his recent mountain climbs, the treadmill must have been a piece of cake.

Racing Roundup

To say that every second single counts could be an understatement if you were looking at the results of the recent USATF/CT 5 Mile State Championship race in Branford on June 18th. The Mohegan Striders Racing Team edged their cross-state rivals Athlete's Foot/Hi-Tek Racing by a mere 3 seconds to claim top honors in the open team competition. Steve Swift of Cromwell led the Striders with his runner-up finish in 26:07. Local standouts Stephen Herrera (7th in 27:02) and Chadwick Brown (8th in 27:06) soon followed, putting the Strider team in strong position to claim the win. But Hi-Tek had five finishers in under the 30 minute mark to make things interesting. Norwich's Tim Smith finished in 37th place overall (30:04) to finish 4th man for the Strider team, and Uncasville's Kevin Gallerani, nursing a lingering hamstring injury, rounded out the team scoring in 31:54 for 62nd place overall. Although Gallerani was disappointed with his effort, it proved just enough to edge the Hi-Tek team, led by Farmington's Chris Chisholm, by just 3 seconds. Scoring is calculated by combining the finishing times of each teams' first five runners. The Mohegan Striders team also claimed the first state championship race of the season, the St. Patrick's Day 4 Mile Road Race in Fairfield.

There has always been debate as to how soon a runner should attempt to race the marathon distance. At the relatively young age of 23, Boulder, Colorado's Dathan Ritzenhein plans to make his much publicized marathon debut at the November 5th ING New York City Marathon. He will carry with him the burden of reviving American distance running. A Michigan native and former cross-country and track star at the University of Colorado, Ritzenhein left school early to turn professional, signing a contract with Nike. His training camp believes that the marathon experience will provide a strength base and be beneficial to his long-term Olympic goals. "Ritz" looks no further than former world record holder Alberto Salazar, who now coaches a number of elite athletes, as an example of early success at racing 26.2 miles. Salazar won his first of three consecutive New York City marathon titles in 1980 at the age of 22. Ritzenhein is coached by Brad Hudson, another former distance running prodigy who ran a 2:13 marathon early in his career. The recent Olympic success of Dena Kastor and Meb Keflezighi, both of whom claimed medals at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, along with the impressive American performance at this year's Boston Marathon, serves as proof that the Americans are capable of running with the world's best at the marathon distance.

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