

CROSS-COUNTRY AND MARATHON RACING ARE THE FALL FOCUS

By DON SIKORSKI
Special to the Bulletin

Manhattan's Van Cortlandt Park is considered to be one of the all-time classic cross country courses in the country. With long standing records held sacred and comparative finishing times measuring runners from different decades, the history of the course and some of the great distance runners who have competed there make Van Cortlandt Park sacred ground for runners. The recent Manhattan XC Invitational high school meet at Van Cortlandt featured over 11,000 participants from 16 states and produced historical results.

On October 14th, with near-perfect conditions, a well-groomed course, and plenty of competition, the record books were about to be rewritten. In the Boys "E" race, the 5th of 7 seeded varsity races, New Jersey's Craig Forys (Colts Neck) and New York's Steve Murdock (Shenendehowa) took aim at Brad Hudson's 1983 course record of 12:15.7 for 2.5 mile trek. After battling over Van Cortlandt's rolling dirt hills, Forys trailed Murdock entering the flat area of the course's final stretch but took the lead with about 200 meters remaining to finish in 12:10.7, a full 5 seconds faster than Hudson's mark. To his credit, Murdock also finished under the old record, finishing 5 seconds back in 12:15.5. Not to be outdone, Tom Gruenewald of Fayetteville-Manlius in New York, who was running in the next varsity race and unaware that Forys had just lowered Hudson's long-standing course mark, charged down the final stretch to win the race in 12:10.6, again lowering the record by a fraction. A record that stood for 23 years had vanished twice in the same day. For the day, a total of 46 runners ran under the 13 minute mark, bettering the previous mark of 21. On the girls' side, Saratoga Springs (NY) junior Hannah Davidson won in 14:14.7, a time worthy of 9th place on the all-time list. New Jersey's Ashley Higginson (14:16.0) and New York's Shelby Greany (14:18.0) also earned spots (#10 and #12 respectively) on the girls' all-time list. Despite discussions about the ideal course conditions favoring the runners, it was arguable the best day in the history of high school cross country in the 31-year history of the race. (*Finishing statistics from the Van Cortlandt Park meet were provided by Walt Murphy's News and Results Services.*)

Of note was the fact that Brad Hudson was only a junior at North Hunterdon High School in New Jersey when he set the record, subsequently relocating to South Eugene High School in Oregon for his senior season. Though he no longer competes, Hudson, famous for his 140 mile training weeks during his prep days, has recently resurfaced in the Boulder, Colorado area and coaches a number of national class distance runners including Dathan Ritzenhein and Jorge Torres. Ritzenhein, a 2004 Olympian, will make his marathon debut at this fall's New York City Marathon.

LOCAL CROSS-COUNTRY EFFORT DOESN'T DISAPPOINT

Van Cortlandt Park isn't the only site to host outstanding high school cross-country races. The Eastern Connecticut Conference (ECC) Championship race, run at the Norwich Golf Course each October, has been one of the most competitive cross-country meets in New England each fall. This year's races didn't disappoint, with Griswold's Shelby Donahue, the defending ECC champion, edging Lyman's Kelly Sorrell, one the state's best runners, by a half step to win the girl's race. Fitch High School senior Jake Sullivan avenged an earlier dual meet loss to NFA's Jason Wagner and Josh Robertson by running away with the boys' race in an impressive effort. Just as impressive is the terrific crowd of spectators on hand each year to witness the race, always a who's who of Southeastern Connecticut distance running.

MYSTIC PLACES ROUND-UP

Waterford's Chadwick Brown and Niantic's Larz Selmer-Larsen finished 8th and 9th respectively at last week's Mystic Places Marathon to lead all local finishers. Brown, who had finished 4th overall in the Mystic race in 2004, has been battling a foot injury incurred during a cross-country race last month. He finished in 2:47:15 (6:24 per mile) for the 26.2 mile race which starts and finishes in Niantic's Rocky Neck State Park. Selmer-Larsen rode into the Mystic race fresh off consecutive wins at the Lisbon Fall Festival, Moveable Feast 5K, and the Strides for the Handicapped 10K. He was 9th overall in 2:49:01. The overall winner was Dzmityr Sivou, the 2004 and 2005 runner-up, who was not to be denied again this year. Sivou charged back in the race's final miles to win in 2:22:34. Larisa Michailova of Russia was the top female finisher, placing 6th overall in 2:43:24. Each earned \$3,000 for their winning efforts. There were 539 official marathon finishers. Eric Blake, a former State XC champion at Lyman Memorial, won the 10 mile race in 53:53. The 27 year-old New Britain resident was also 4th overall in the Hartford Half Marathon in a brisk 1:08:16 (5:13 pace) a week prior to the Mystic race. Blake used both races as tune-up efforts for December's Tucson Marathon, where he will take a shot at

earning an “A” qualifying standard (2:20 or better) for the 2008 U.S. Olympic Marathon Trials.

ARMSTRONG HITS THE STEETS RUNNING

There’s still time to e-mail your finish time prediction for seven-time Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong, who will toe the line at the ING New York City Marathon on November 5th. Send your predictions to kdcsikorski@sbcglobal.net before race day.

VAN CORTLANDT PARK 2.5 MILE TOP 25 ALL-TIME BOYS PERFORMERS (Updated)

Rank Time Name School State Year

- 1 12:10.6 TOM GRUENEWALD Fayetteville-Manlius NY 2006
- 2 12:10.7 CRAIG FORYS Colts Neck NJ 2006
- 3 12:15.5 STEVE MURDOCK Shenendehowa NY 2006
- 4 12:15.7 BRAD HUDSON North Hunterdon NJ 1983
- 5 12:16.4 LUIS OSTOLOZAGA Bishop Loughlin NY 1975
- 6 12:17.1 VICTOR GRAS Belmont MA 2003
- 7 12:17.5 CHRIS BARNICLE Newton North MA 2004
- 8 12:18.7 JOHN TRAUTMANN Monroe-Woodbury NY 1985
- 9 12:18.7 BILL CROWLEY Seekonk MA 1985
- 10 12:18.8 ALAN WEBB South Lakes VA 1999
- 11 12:20.5 JASON DiJOSEPH Paul VI NJ 1987
- 12 12:20.9 DAVE SANDRIDGE Parkdale MD 1972
- 13 12:21.4 MIKEL THOMAS Clovis CA 2006
- 14 12:22.5 ALBERTO SALAZAR Wayland MA 1975
- 15 12:22.9 CHRIS PANNONE Hunterdon Central NJ 2003
- 16 12:23.2 MARTY LIQUORI Essex Catholic NJ 1966
- 17 12:23.4 ANDY MARTIN North Hunterdon NJ 1983
- 18 12:23.4 AHMED HAJI Conard CT 2003
- 19 12:23.6 JOHN CARLOTTI Bernards NJ 1982
- 20 12:23.8 GENE McCARTHY All Hallows NY 1973
- 21 12:24.4 JONATHON RILEY Brookline MA 1996
- 22 12:24.5 MATT CENTROWITZ Power Memorial NY 1972
- 23 12:24.6 CHRIS HALLINAN Bernards NJ 1975
- 24 12:24.8 BRIAN PETTINGILL Bishop Cheverus ME 1980
- 25 12:25.0 KEVIN McCAREY Cathedral Prep NY 1971

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