

LOCALS FARE WELL IN THE BIG APPLE

By DON SIKORSKI
Special to the Bulletin

If you've never heard of Marilson Gomes dos Santos before, don't worry. Most of the elite field he outran in last weekend's ING New York City Marathon didn't know him either. It wasn't until after the 29 year-old Brazilian crossed the finish line in 2:09:58 to become the first South American to win the race that the upset victor made a name for himself.

Running alone for the final seven miles, Gomes broke a decade long African winning streak at New York and did it in convincing fashion. It was clearly a mistake when the field failed to cover his move at 19 miles. With perfect 47-degree temperatures and a very calm wind, it was also surprising that the stellar field didn't produce a faster winning time, as the course record of 2:07:43 was never in jeopardy. Gomes did earn victory over such notables as defending champion and world record holder Paul Tergat of Kenya (third in 2:10:10), former Boston and New York City Marathon champion Rodgers Rop (fifth in 2:11:24), and 2004 Olympic champion Stefano Baldini of Italy (sixth in 2:11:33).

Defending champion Jelena Prokopcuka of Latvia also erased all drama in the women's race, outrunning Tatiana Hladyr of Ukraine by nearly a minute to win in 2:25:05. Four-time Boston Marathon winner Catherine Ndereba of Kenya, who had finished either no worse than runner-up in her previous 15 marathon races, was third in 2:26:58. Deena Kastor, the American record holder, struggled to a sixth place finish in 2:27:54.

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Joy Sieklucki of Colchester went to the ING New York City Marathon with an ambitious goal. Years ago, she had run the B.A.A. Boston Marathon as a "bandit," since Boston required a qualifying time that Sieklucki had not met. Her determination to return to Boston as an official entrant paid off, and that goal will become a reality in April 2007 as a result of Sieklucki's 3:37:50 clocking in last weekend's ING New York City Marathon. "It was a beautiful day and everything clicked," said Sieklucki of her marathon PR (personal record). "The race was great. For marathons, I would put New York right up there with Boston, and I would definitely run New York again." Sieklucki is also enjoying her quickest recovery from a marathon. "I walked around the city for about two hours afterwards," said Sieklucki. "I think that helped me recover". Sieklucki will run the Manchester Road race on Thanksgiving Day before turning her attention to Boston next April.

As a Massage Therapist, Uncasville's Libbie Baxter certainly understands the science behind the aches and pains that a person endures after running 26.2 miles. In her third marathon effort, Baxter finished in 4:24:58, also personal best. She felt fortunate to be accepted into the New York Marathon's lottery system, which limits the field to 37,000 runners. "New York is one of those races that are on everyone's list to run," explained Baxter. "I've never run any race with that amount of people. It was a wonderful race." Baxter has been smart in her marathon recovery, focusing on stretching, icing, and getting enough sleep. She plans on taking two weeks off from training and hopes to return to the Madison Turkey Trot Race on Thanksgiving. She will then resume training for some off-road racing next season and possibly another fall marathon.

Stan Mickus of Mystic had struggled through difficult 2006 racing season. Naggng foot and ankle injuries curtained his training for New York, so he was very pleased to make it to the finish line in Central Park in a brisk 2:52:56. "The race went very well," said Mickus, 38. "I felt great; the weather was great. I've had some injuries and was hoping for sub 3 hours, so I was more than pleasantly surprised with my race." Mickus, a converted cyclist who played baseball and basketball during his high school years at East Lyme, wasn't quite ready to commit to Boston in 2007, but will certainly consider it once the pain from this marathon wears off. He plans to finish off his 2006 racing season by competing in the Li'l Rhody Runaround race in Charlestown next weekend and the Manchester Road Race on Thanksgiving.

American Men Struggle

Blame the food and blame the airlines. Or if you're Meb Keflezighi, you'd have a case against both. Meb may be best know for his starring role in the recent MasterCard commercial where he stops in a Convenience Store to purchase a soft drink and still returns to the streets to win the race. His pit stops last Sunday were less humorous. The 2004 Olympic silver medalist had suffered a case of food poisoning on Thursday and was rumored to have downed shots of Pepto-Bismol just prior to the race's start. His airline also lost his luggage on his flight from San Diego to New York, forcing Meb to purchase new running shoes and clothes just prior to race day. Keflezighi, who had finished 2nd and 3rd in New York the last two years, struggled home in 21st place (2:22:02). Colorado's Dathan Ritzenhein, making his much heralded marathon debut, struggled over the final miles to finish 11th in 2:14:01. Another U.S. hopeful, Alan Culpepper, also struggled with stomach problems and dropped out of the race just after the 20 mile mark. Then lone bright spot for the Americans was California's Peter Gilmore, who was the top American finisher in 10th place overall (2:13:13).

Armstrong Watch

The most famous athlete in the field finished nearly 50 minutes behind the winner. Seven-time Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong, running in his first marathon, posted a strong effort to finish in 2:59:36 (6:51 per mile), good enough for 869th place overall and accomplishing his goal of a sub 3 hour effort. Armstrong was gracious after his finish, calling his run “the hardest physical thing I have ever done”. The closest prediction to Armstrong’s finishing time was sent by a runner that is much faster than Lance. New Britain’s Eric Blake, an Olympic Trials Marathon qualifier, submitted a guess of 3:03:00. Predictions were sent in from as far away as Seattle, Washington and ranged from 2:32:41 to DNF.

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