

# WHERE ARE THEY NOW: DENNIS TETREAU

By DON SIKORSKI  
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There was this stretch of time, now long ago, that every road race I competed in, this guy was there. And I mean right there, either just one place in front of me or breathing down my neck in pursuit. It was the mid 1980's and local road races were plentiful and competitive. North Stonington St. Patrick's Day 10K, Willimantic Easter Road Race, Groton Elks 5 Miler, Father Casey Road Race, Moosup VJ Day 10K.....all events long since vanished and now just distant memories of the running boom. You had to earn your place in those days, with plenty of tough, well-trained competitors lining up every weekend to run you into the ground if you didn't bring your "A" game to the starting line. Dennis Tetreault was one of those competitors.

Today, Tetreault fuels his competitive fire hitting golf balls and skiing down steep slopes at break neck speed. It was that competitive nature that introduced him to running. "I started running to improve my tennis game," said Tetreault of those early days. My wife (Pat) played tennis and I got hooked on it." Athletic as a youngster, Tetreault was now in his early 30's, smoked cigarettes frequently, and had gotten away from physical activity. Running was a way to improve his game. "The disparities were quite apparent," joked Tetreault of his lack of physical conditioning required to keep up with his wife's tennis game. With friend Colin Thomas, Tetreault continue to refine his tennis game. He also began training for a hometown event, the 1982 Lisbon 5K Road Race. Advised that he should be able to run double the race distance in training, Tetreault pushed his body out the door and did the work, followed by a relaxing cigarette. And he only knew one speed. "I would just hammer," recalls Tetreault. "I would go out for a run, and I would hurry up so I could get back home and be done. That was the majority of my training, and I guess I never changed." Tetreault's debut race performance was strong; he averaged 6 minute mile pace. But instead of searching for a post run cigarette, something was different this time. "I crossed the finish line and I was in pain," recalled Tetreault. "My chest was on fire. I had tried everything to quit smoking, but nothing ever worked. Well, I quit smoking for good right then and haven't had another cigarette since."

Little did Tetreault know at the time that he would become hooked on something other than nicotine. "Mike Smith was the runner than finished right next to me in that race," remembered Tetreault. "He gave me an application to join the Mohegan Striders." Tetreault's wife Pat and children James and Tina, 11 and 10 years old at the time, would soon all begin to participate in running. James and Tina would both go on to compete in cross-country and track at Norwich Free Academy, earning varsity letters in every season. Tetreault remembers the camaraderie that existed at road races back in those days. "The people were great," said Tetreault. "You would run races, and there would be beer and clam chowder afterwards." Tetreault's running would continue to evolve, and soon the lure of the marathon would follow. Tetreault ran his first marathon in East Lyme, finishing in a very respectable time of 3:05 despite no training runs longer than 14 miles. The next year, when would return to East Lyme and run under the then 2:50 qualifying standard for the B.A.A. Boston Marathon. Like many runners back in the day, Boston became a permanent fixture on Tetreault's schedule. Earning a personal best of 2:46 in 10 starts, Tetreault soon became one of the area's better Masters (40+) runners, and along with Mohegan Striders teammates Billy Marshall and Tim Smith, would comprise one of the best Masters teams in New England. "I was pretty proud to wear the (Mohegan Striders) singlet," said Tetreault of that team effort. "It was a big deal".

Always looking for a new challenge, Tetreault's cousin, Rick Brousseau, a former cross-country coach at Eastern Connecticut State University and at Woodstock Academy, convinced Dennis to give trail racing a try. "Trail running and racing was a lot of fun," said Tetreault. "And the people you would meet that were out there running were diverse and extremely interesting characters." But as all runners encounter sooner or later, the injury bug would eventually claim another victim. Lower back and sciatic nerve problems plagued Tetreault, and the continued setbacks eventually led to the decision to give up the sport for good after running the 100<sup>th</sup> Boston Marathon in April 1996. "Once I stopped competing, I stopped enjoying running," said Tetreault. Today, the 57 year-old Lisbon resident no longer runs even for enjoyment. His broken down body simply won't allow it. A skiing accident, in which Tetreault suffered a fractured coracoid (shoulder), broken tibia, and a fractured tibia plateau (essentially the bottom of the knee), continue to cause him pain. "I can't even walk downhill without pain," said Tetreault of his body's current condition. Only frequent trips to the Physical Therapist allow him to still hit a pretty decent golf ball from time to time.

Tetreault still has fond memories of those days of running and racing, and still has plenty of respect for those individuals still out on the roads. "There are only a very small percentage of people who are still in it (racing) for a long time," Tetreault rationalized. "Tim Smith is one of the exceptions that have been able to withstand the pounding on his body from years of training and racing. He was just an amazing runner and a heck of a nice guy". Even though the running boom days from the 1980's are now long gone, it was blue collar runners like Dennis Tetreault that made you earn your race place. And if we both decided to ever compete in the future, I would bet that Dennis Tetreault would be right there one place in front of me again.

## Racing Roundup

Dathan Ritzenhein and Shalane Flanagan earned victories at the USA Cross-Country Championships in San Diego. Ryan Hall, preparing for April's London Marathon, finished 5<sup>th</sup>, while former Suffield (CT) resident and Trinity College standout Ryan Bak was 8<sup>th</sup>.....Bob Kempainen was the runner that ended Pat Porter's streak of eight consecutive U.S. Cross-Country Championships from 1982-1989.....UConn earned both the men's and women's team titles at the Big East Indoor Track and Field Championships on February 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>. The men's total of 167 points easily bettered Notre Dame's runner up total of 139, while the women's team scored 103.5 points, ahead of Georgetown's 92 total. It is the first ever championship for the women's team and the first time since Georgetown in 2001 that the same school earned both team titles.

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