

# FAGAN UPHOLDS IRISH TRADITION IN SOPHOMORE EFFORT

By DON SIKORSKI  
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Irish runners have carried a proud tradition at the Thanksgiving Day Manchester Road Race. Martin Fagan is now on his way to writing the next few chapters. The 25 year-old Irish Olympian and former Providence College standout was able to shake the memories of 2007 in which he led from the gun until relinquishing the lead to Australia's Andrew Letherby in the final stretch and settled for runner-up honors. This year, Fagan was determined to drop any and all contenders in a talented chase pack that included Letherby, and left no doubt who would cross the finish line first in 2008. His time of 21 minutes and 41 seconds was 21 seconds faster than Letherby's winning time from a year ago, a race which Fagan lost by a mere second. It was that memory that provided the necessary inspiration for Fagan to return sharper and race ready this time.

Fagan's win was delivered against a talented, international Thanksgiving Day field as always. Kenya's Haron Lagat of Kenya finished 6 seconds back in 21:47, with American Brian Olinger third in 21:49. Letherby, the defending champion and twice a winner in Manchester, was sixth. Fagan's convincing win gives the Irish team confidence heading into next month's European Cross Country Championships in which he will compete.

The women's race was a battle every step of the way, with Teyba Naser of Bahrain getting past fan favorite and five-time Manchester champion Amy Rudolph of Providence to earn a 2-second victory in 25:00 for the 4.748 mile layout. Rudolph's husband, Mark Carroll, finished 7<sup>th</sup> overall in 22:06. Like Fagan an Irish Olympian, Carroll owns two Manchester titles of his own and was the last Irish runner to claim victory in the race (2000). And Joan Benoit Samuelson, winner of the first ever women's Olympic Marathon in 1984, competed at the Manchester Road Race for the first time and walked away with an age group course record of 27:28.

Local runners also fared well at Manchester. Former Danbury High School and Yale University standout Lucas Meyer was the state's top finisher, placing 11<sup>th</sup> overall in a very brisk 22:30. Former Xavier standout Adam Vess, now competing at Marist, followed in 17<sup>th</sup> place (23:15). Eric Blake, this year's Mount Washington Road Race winner and a former state XC champion at Lyman Memorial, also earned top 25 honors (21<sup>st</sup> in 23:29). Kevin Sorrell of Lebanon led all area finishers, running 25:34 for 40<sup>th</sup> place overall, while Baltic's Richard Carmona (28:28), Mohegan Striders recently retired club President Tim Kane of Preston (28:31), and Mystic's Stanley Mickus (28:36) all posted fast finishes.

Of course, the Manchester Road Race represents a great deal more than just elite runners and personal best finishes. There were 10,402 finishers for the 72nd annual event, many of which were still making their way up Highland Street hill when Fagan and company were hitting the homestretch. For many, the Manchester Road race is the only road race these participants will run in, whether it's a competitive effort, a bar bet with buddies, or a casual stroll. Manchester on Thanksgiving is a high school reunion for some. The Manchester Race offers the local college star to see how he or she stacks up against elite, national class competition. Manchester is Amby Burfoot, a seven-time winner who finished his 46<sup>th</sup> consecutive Manchester Road Race and earned the Grandmasters (60+) title in the process. This year's race also acknowledged the late Ray Crothers, a fixture on the local running scene who passed away earlier this year. The Manchester road race delivers an unmatched camaraderie of Thanksgiving traditions fueled by the spectators who line the course, blare music from their front porches, carry Bloody Mary's, encouraging the runners from the race leaders right on to the back of the pack finishers. For these runners, there is no place they would rather be on a crisp Thanksgiving morning.

## Media Coverage Lacking

Running is a sport that should appreciate any media coverage it receives. But Channel 61's attempt to broadcast the Manchester Road Race live on television was a failure from the beginning and seemed to progress to just plain awful as it went along. Anchors Logan Byrnes and Rebecca Stewart attempted to offer training tips and racing advice with little substance, providing inaccurate tips that probably left even the non-runners in the audience confused (runners need to drink something with sugar in it to get them fueled before a race?) WTIC-TV61 film coverage missed the race's start and struggled to get any footage of the lead runners until the final stretch, where commentator Ian Brooks was unable to clearly see who was who and questioned whether or not it was really Martin Fagan out in front. The Teyba Naser-Amy Rudolph duel suffered the same fate. Although the late race lead change was caught on film, the finish footage was poor and out of range for the anchors to call the action. A race that took over 20 minute to complete only provided about one minute of race footage, and the set up location next to the Public Address announcer did not lend itself well to clear communication to the television audience. Byrnes actually did run in the race, stopping frequently to chat with spectators along the course, which worked OK, yet much of what happened out on the course in front of him was a mystery to the viewers. Credit Fox 61 for attempting to promote the event. But there are plenty of kinks that need to be worked out if they hope to attract viewers in 2009.

**Don Sikorski writes a twice-monthly running column for the Norwich Bulletin. His "Coach's Corner" column can be accessed at [www.moheganstriders.org](http://www.moheganstriders.org). He can also be reached by e-mail at [kdcsikorski@sbcglobal.net](mailto:kdcsikorski@sbcglobal.net).**