

BOSTON MARATHON SIGNALS THE APPROACH OF SPRING

By DON SIKORSKI
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The sun is beginning to shine, darkness doesn't set in until around 8pm, golfers are hitting the links, the Boston Marathon has completed it's 105th running, and the Red Sox didn't get hammered by a dozen runs on Patriot's Day, claiming 3 of 4 from the hated Yankees. Things are beginning to look as they should in New England.

For runners, the Boston Marathon is usually the landmark dividing Winter and Spring. This year, under sunny skies and an ideal racing temperature of 56 degrees, over 15,000 runners made the annual trek from the little town of Hopkinton, Massachusetts into downtown Boston. They came from around the globe, all intent on putting their miles of training to the ultimate test. South Korea's Lee Bong-Ju, the runner-up of the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Marathon, almost quit running completely after his disappointing performance in last year's Olympic Marathon (Lee finished 24th in Sydney). But after 2 hours, 9 minutes and 43 seconds of running, Bong-Ju was the first to reach the finish line, making him both the first Korean to win at Boston since 1950 and \$80,000 richer. Bong-Ju was competing at Boston with the extra incentive of honoring his Father, who had passed away on March 5th after a bout with cancer. His Father was a hard-working rice farmer back in Korea, who had passed along his strong work ethic to his son. No way was anyone going to get past Bong-Ju on Heartbreak Hill this year; he was clearly on a mission. Lee Bong-Ju claims that the demands of rice farming were more difficult than marathoning, with never an end in sight. He certainly made running 26.2 miles look relatively easy. Bong-Ju's win also ended the 10-year streak of individual championships from Kenyan runners, who win Boston Marathons like the Celtics used to win NBA Championships. Kenya's Catherine Ndereba made sure her country would not be left out at the awards ceremony, however, as she hammered through a 70:47 second half marathon split over the Newton hills for nearly a 3-minute win in 2:23:53.

An American finishing in the top 10 at Boston is about as rare as a Red Sox win on Patriot's Day, but both happened this year, as Wisconsin's Rod Dehaven claimed 6th place overall in a personal best of 2:12:41. Dehaven, 34, and the lone male competitor to represent the U.S. in the Sydney Olympic Marathon, was 15th at 5K, 12th at 10K, 10th at 15K, 9th at halfway, and 7th at 40K before passing South Africa's Laban Nkete down the final stretch to claim 6th; the first American to record a top 10 finish since Bob Kempainen in 1994. Josh Cox (14th in 2:16:17), Mark Coogan (19th in 2:18:58), and David Morris (21st in 2:21:10) added some depth to aid America's marathon effort. Cox was even bold enough to lead at one point as the race passed by the screaming female fans at Wellesley College, but faded about four miles later. Uncasville's Chadwick Brown, 25, was the first local finisher in a very impressive 2:42:32, good for 181st place overall. Oakdale's Lance Baier (2:48:47) and Danielson's Harry Lepp (2:48:58) both joined Brown in the sub 3-hour club.

The Boston Marathon is a Patriot's Day tradition in Massachusetts. Boston is Johnny "the Elder" Kelly as the Master of Ceremonies; it is Dick Hoyt pushing his disabled son Rick in his wheelchair for the 21st time, it is the blend of runners from dozens of different countries competing side by side. Boston is Heartbreak Hill, it is local boy Bill Rodgers stopping to tie his shoe and to drink water yet still winning handily wearing his homemade T-shirt. It is 26 miles, 385 yards of roads lined with thousands of fans nearly every step of the way. And the Boston Marathon is a sure sign that Spring, baseball, and warm weather, have now arrived and plan to stay a while.

Racing Roundup

The local racing scene is beginning to heat up, and judging by some of the early season performances, it appears that a number of runners were able to log some high quality miles through the rough winter weather. Some recent standout performances include:

- Waterford's Steve Herrera (14:48) and Old Lyme's Jeanne Lucey (18:25) claimed wins at the Salem 3 Mile Road Race on March 24th.
- Todd Bennett claimed his first win of the 2001 season at the St. Joseph School 3-Mile Race in Baltic on March 31st. Bennett clocked in at 16:29, while Noank's Katey Kokomoor (20:32) was the first female finisher.
- Uncasville's Chadwick Brown (16:10) won the Connecticut College 5K Road Race on April 1st. Brown, the runner-up to Herrera at the Salem race, used the effort as a final tune-up for Boston. Elizabeth Boucher (19:25) was the top female finisher.
- That same day, Bob Stack of Gales Ferry finished 3rd overall in 53:21 at the Bridgeport Park City 15K. New Haven's Bryce Lindamood was the overall winner in 49:06, while Waterford's Denis Crowe finished 10th overall and 1st Grandmaster in 54:59. Stack and Crowe led a strong contingent of local runners in the Bridgeport race, which served as the USATF State Championship for both Masters and Grandmasters.
- Franklin's Chad Johnson (34:47) outran Todd Bennett (35:13) at the hilly Canterbury 10K on April 7th. Norwich's Melissa Perkins-Banas clocked in at an impressive 39:37 to claim the top female prize.

This month in history

April 9th, 1989 – Norway's John Halvorsen fends off John Gregorek of Barrington, Rhode Island by one second to win the Boston Milk Run. Halvorsen clocks a course record 28:01 over the 10K (6.2 mile) course to bettering Gregorek's 1985 mark of 28:15. Ingrid Kristiansen, also of Norway, smashes the women's course record by over a minute with a blazing 30:58. Norwich's Chris Hansen leads all local finishers, placing 49th overall in 31:51. Other top local finishers include Spyros Barres (31:57), Jeff Kotecki (32:23), Bob Stack (32:28), Dennis Crowe (32:31), Grant Ritter (32:33), Joe Banas (32:54), Walt Smolenski (33:13), Mike Fusaro (33:27), Jack Silva (34:02), and John Brown (34:36). Over 4,000 runners compete in the traditional Boston Marathon tune-up race.

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