

# FALL MARATHON FEVER

By DON SIKORSKI

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After a disappointing 10<sup>th</sup> place finish in the 1984 Olympic Marathon, Rod Dixon was quoted as saying that “the marathon is a strange, bloody event”. Dixon should know. Less than a year earlier, the former Olympian from New Zealand had fought off serious hamstring cramps and fatigue to run down a weary Geoff Smith in Central Park to win the 1983 New York City Marathon in a brilliant 2:08:59 clocking. Smith himself, after a suicidal 1:02 opening first half staggered home just 9 seconds later in what would be the fastest debut marathon ever. Dixon would have the distinction of being the only man to ever run under four minutes for the mile and under 2:09 for the marathon, a range uncommon to distance runners. Now, less than a year later, a stronger and more experienced Rod Dixon was left to ponder why it was not his day in Los Angeles.

Racing a marathon is a crapshoot. A runner can train for months only to roll the dice concerning injuries, weather conditions, viruses, and any other element of surprise that can possibly go wrong on race day. And while the recovery period from a 5K or 5 miler is minimal, the body doesn't react quite so kindly to a treatment of 26.2 miles of pounding. Plus, the marathon is not as glamorous as it would appear on television. For every runner that seriously commits to doing the proper training for racing 26.2 miles to the best of their ability, there are dozens who treat running a marathon like mowing the lawn of Saturday afternoon. And they often pay dearly for it. With that being said, it's time to look at a few examples of some terrific efforts for the 26.2-mile distance.

Reuben Chesang of Kenya collected \$9,000 in Connecticut in October for less than five hours of work. Of course, he had to run over 50 miles at about 5:20 pace per mile to do so. The 38 year-old Chesang won the Hartford Marathon at \$6,000 on October 13<sup>th</sup> in 2:19:01, then posted his second victory of the month by winning the Inaugural Mystic Places Marathon in East Lyme on October 28<sup>th</sup>. Chesang clocked in at 2:23:46 for Mystic, earning \$3,000 for his win over Brazilian Carlos Ramos, who also finished 2<sup>nd</sup> to Chesang in Hartford. All in a month's work.

Speaking of the Hartford Marathon, it's fair to say that Lance Baier of Oakdale is probably the best marathon runner in the area that few people know about. Baier, while not possessing top level credentials at the shorter race distances, proved that his 2:48:47 marathon in Boston this past spring was no fluke by running 2:41:02 in Hartford, good enough for 8<sup>th</sup> place overall. Like Tim Smith during the 1970's (who owns the record in the former East Lyme Marathon of 2:23:56) and Al Lyman in the 1980's (who ran 2:39 at Boston and now is a top-level tri-athlete at the Ironman distance), Baier has demonstrated that the marathon is definitely his preferred racing distance.

Another runner who has showed tremendous potential to excel at the marathon distance is Melissa Perkins-Banas. The 31-year-old Norwich resident finished 3<sup>rd</sup> female and 17<sup>th</sup> place overall at Mystic Places in 2:52:57, a personal best by over 5 minutes. Her 2<sup>nd</sup> place showing at the Hartford Half Marathon two weeks earlier (1:21:05) showed that she was ready to race a fast marathon and Perkins-Banas delivered. Bob Stack of Gales Ferry was the top local finisher at Mystic Places, running 2:48:48 for 10<sup>th</sup> place overall. The 44 year-old Stack, now a veteran of 66 marathons (which is about 60 more than I want to put my body through) won the very first East Lyme Marathon in 1980.

Finally, Naoko Takahashi smashed the women's world record at the Berlin Marathon on September 30<sup>th</sup> and became the first woman to ever run under 2 hours and 20 minutes with her 2:19:46 clocking. That effort was good enough stay on top for all of one week, as Kenya's Catherine Ndereba erased Takahashi from the record books with a world record run of 2:18:47 at the Chicago Marathon on October 7<sup>th</sup>. More impressively was the way Ndereba raced in Chicago; covering miles 10 through 20 in 51:54, only 36 slower than the women's world record for 10 miles. She ran the second half of the race in 1:08:33, only 3 seconds slower than her personal best for a half marathon. Clearly, Ndereba was rested and ready for a world class effort. Said top American marathoner Rod DeHaven, who himself a terrific 2:11:40 for 6<sup>th</sup> place overall, “I'm happy I ran a personal best or she would have been right on my back”. Ndereba earned \$75,000 for the win, \$100,000 for the world record, and a 2001 VW Jetta as a bonus. Considering the effort that goes into a marathon racing performance of that magnitude, some might argue that Ndereba was underpaid. On the men's side, Ben Kimondiu of Kenya, who was paid \$5,000 by Chicago to act as the pacesetter, kept running for eight more miles after he was expected to stop and held off heavy race favorite and fellow countryman Paul Tergat down the home stretch by a mere 4 seconds to win in 2:08:52, which added \$75,000 to his paycheck.

## Racing Roundup

At the Stenger Farm Cross-Country 5K in Waterford on October 13<sup>th</sup>, Eric Blake (15:40) outran a strong field up front including Chad Brown (2<sup>nd</sup>), Peter Oviatt (3<sup>rd</sup>), and Todd Bennett (4<sup>th</sup>) to claim the win.....Kevin Grant of New London (21:02) and Oviatt (21:07) finished 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> respectively at Marty Schavoine's Pumpkin Classic 4 Mile Race in Trumbull on October 21<sup>st</sup>. Danbury's Tomix Costa lead a 1-2-3-4 charge of Danbury runners to win the race overall in 19:32 .....That same day at the Strides for the Handicapped Road Race in Waterford, Canterbury's Chad Johnson (25:43) outran Chadwick Brown (26:09) to win the 5 Mile Event. Heather Bessette (30:35) was the top female finisher in the 5 Miler, while Bobby Clarke (16:14) and Catherine Sikorski (18:59) won the 3-Mile race. The 25 year-old Brown continues to run very well and has a least a dozen runner-up finishes to his credit this year, most of them to either Johnson or training partner Steven Herrera of Waterford, who is out with a stress fracture suffered at the beginning of September.....The “Legends” Relay team, consisting of Frank Shorter, Jan Merrill-Morin, Jodi Richards (who won an open bid to join the team), Johnny Kelly, and Amby Burfoot, finished in 3:20:10 and was the top team in the Mixed Open division. Rumors of former Race Director Way Hedding bringing the Olympic Gold medallist Shorter on a tour of the Lyme Tavern the day before the marathon are still being researched.

## This month in history

November 12th, 1982 – The East Catholic (Manchester) High School Boys and the Montville High School Girls claimed team titles at the CIAC State Open Cross-Country Championships in Cromwell. East Catholic, lead by race winner Steve Kitteridge, posted an impressive total of 118 points to outrun Class “L” Champ Windham (2<sup>nd</sup> – 184), perennial state power Xavier of Middletown (3<sup>rd</sup> – 223) and defending State Open champion St. Bernard (4<sup>th</sup> – 284). Kitteridge, the state's top miler, has too much down the stretch and holds of Class “LL” winner Roy Mascolino of Staples (2<sup>nd</sup>) and Xavier ace Patrick Swift (3<sup>rd</sup>). Top locals include Ernie Ezis of Windham (4<sup>th</sup>), Shawn Bennett of Montville (6<sup>th</sup>), Class “S” champion Darrin Eisman of Bacon Academy (20<sup>th</sup>), Eric Roselund of Montville (21<sup>st</sup>), Dave Aitkenhead of New London (23<sup>rd</sup>), and Adrian Pelchat of St. Bernard (24<sup>th</sup>). In the women's race, Kevin Crowley's Montville squad is dominant, posting a 46 point total to best East Catholic (2<sup>nd</sup> with 182 points). Glastonbury's Leslie Wrixon fends off Vanessa Thompson for the individual title, with Montville's Kim Hawkes (4<sup>th</sup>) and Mary Bridge (5<sup>th</sup>) leading the way for the Indians. Other top local finishers include Montville's Chris Hennessey (7<sup>th</sup>), Debbie Sprague of Windham (9<sup>th</sup>), Kelly Hawkes of Montville (10<sup>th</sup>), Kathy Olsen of Waterford (12<sup>th</sup>), and Kelly Pickney of Montville (20<sup>th</sup>). Montville would go on to successfully defend their State Open title the following year, led by Kim Hawkes runner-up finish to St. Mary's Thompson.

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