

REMEMBERING TRAVIS LANDRETH 1976 - 2001

By DON SIKORSKI
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Former Newburyport (MA) High School and University of Connecticut Cross-Country and Track runner Travis Landreth was a special person to those who were acquainted with him. It was just over two years ago that Landreth, a young distance running prodigy training as a member of the Nike Farm Team, collapsed and died during the middle of a tempo training workout in Palo Alto, California near Stanford University. Landreth was only 24 years old at the time.

I did not know Travis Landreth on a personal level. We had met only once at the Nike Green Mountain Running Camp in Vermont in August of 1995. Landreth was one of about a dozen Camp Counselors at the Nike camp; I was a drop-in guest visitor for a couple of days at the camp with fellow runners Chris Hansen and Kevin Gallerani. The Counsel Staff was comprised primarily of current or former collegiate runners like Landreth. They would split into groups and each Counselor would be responsible to lead their respective groups of runners on the twice-a-day training sessions. Landreth was chosen to lead the "A" group, the fastest group of runners at the camp. It was evident why. He was to be Connecticut's ace distance runner; strong, tough, and always willing to do the work it takes to be good. Three years later, Landreth would qualify for the NCAA Division I Cross-Country National Championship as an individual, an outstanding accomplishment. That afternoon, our group hammered out a solid 6 miles over country roads, lead by Landreth, who casually conversed with just about everyone in the group from start to finish with a true sense of both confidence and modesty. Although the pace felt a tad quicker than my comfort threshold, we stayed with Landreth every step of the way and even added on more mileage onto the end of the run. I knew it was an accomplishment to hang in the whole run with Travis Landreth, and his company made it easier to survive the challenging training run. We felt that the majority of the Camp Counselors portrayed a certain sense of superiority based on their distance running accomplishments, yet Landreth seemed to be the most modest of the bunch. And with his running credentials, he had every reason not to be. Later that year, Landreth would become the USATF Junior National Champion at 5,000 meters and represent the United States at the Pan Am Games. Landreth would also go on to compete on the US Junior National Team at the World XC Championships in England. He became the first UConn runner to win the Big East Cross-Country title in 1997, he won the Division I Cross-Country Regional, and earned All-America status in cross-country by the time his career at UConn was over. But it was his positive energy and youthful enthusiasm that left me with an image of a runner with a true potential for the future. Unfortunately for all of us, Travis Landreth's future was cut way too short.

Reflecting back, I feel honored and privileged to have run with Travis Landreth. On days when I don't feel like getting out the door and doing the work it takes to run fast, I try to gain inspiration by reflecting back on the runners and the running experiences from my past. The memory of Travis Landreth is one of those inspirations for me.

Racing Roundup

- Aside from the annual New Year's Day Run/Swim at Groton Long Point (which isn't a competitive event), the winter road racing season in Southeastern Connecticut usually kicks off with the Kelley's Pace Frostbite Run on January 6th. Fortunately, the conditions did not live up to their race name, with somewhat mild temperatures for the first weekend in January. Lebanon's Peter Oviatt, who continues to show a return to his form of past years, hammered the field, cruising through the 5-mile race in 26:18. Mystic's Martha Merz, who will turn 40 this season to become one of New England's top Master runners, was the top female finisher in 29:15.
- That same day, Danbury's Phil Richey, New England Runner's CT Master (40+) Runner of the Year in 2001, won the 24th Annual Boston Buildup 10K in Rowayton (33:53). New London's Kevin Grant finished 4th overall in 34:50.
- The husband and wife duo of Wayne and Leslie Jolley made their recent Disney World vacation a memorable one. Wayne, a top local age group runner and past competitor at the Disney World Marathon, ran 1:24:59 in this year's accompanying Disney Half Marathon race to win his 50-59 age group. Leslie, tired of waiting on the sidelines for Wayne to finish races in past years, decided to seriously train for this year's half marathon as well. Her 1:53 finish was a personal best at the distance by 18 minutes.
- Killingly High School junior Meghan Owen won the mile race at the Yale Invitational on January 19th. Owen's win in a terrific time of 4:57.04 also earns her a spot in the prestigious Millrose Games event in the Girls High School Mile, scheduled for February 1st at New York's Madison Square Garden.

This month in history

January 1st, 1969 – Runner's World Magazine Editor and 1968 Boston Marathon winner Amby Burfoot, along with running companions Lee Burbank and the late Marty Valentine, had no idea about the magnitude of the tradition they would be starting when they opted to run 5 miles from Mystic to Groton Long Point and took a dip in the chilly ocean waters on New Year's Day. 33 years later, the event, now affectionately known as "Marty's Run", has grown to a crowd of over 500 runners and spectators taking part in a group 5 mile run from the Mystic home of John and Jessie Kelley followed by a splash in the chilly waters of Fishers Island Sound.

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