

# WHERE ARE THEY NOW: BILL MARSHALL

By DON SIKORSKI  
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Bill Marshall's distance running future was looking bright. As a Norwich Free Academy junior during the fall of 1961, Marshall led his team to the State Open cross-country title. He had run under 14 minutes to break the NFA home cross-country course record, held by former state champion Clem McGrath. The Wildcats would return for a second consecutive State Open title a year later, with Marshall, now a senior, the team leader. A young freshman on that '62 team named Tim Smith would go on to make an significant impact on the New England running scene. But it was Bill Marshall who was earning all the headlines.

Marshall entered the University of Connecticut the next year and quickly made an impact on their cross-country team. In fact, he won 8 of the 9 races that he competed in that fall. And then he walked away from running completely. Quit cold turkey. The college fraternity life was more appealing that the hard work and discipline that distance running required. So for the remainder of his collegiate days and for the next ten years, Marshall smoked cigarettes and gained weight. Running was in Bill Marshall's past.

One day, his friend Chris Portelance invited Marshall over to the house for dinner and asked for company on his afternoon run. Marshall, who had always been a superior runner to Portelance, nonchalantly agreed, figuring he would be able to hold his own. "He buried me," Marshall fondly recalls of that afternoon. "After that, I quit smoking and started running." Marshall would compete in the 1975 Rose Arts Festival 10.6 Mile Road Race on a mere month of training. But he was hooked again.

Over the next few years, Marshall's return to running and racing got serious. And Marshall got fast. He posted a terrific 2:25:15 clocking at the 1975 Boston Marathon, a pace per mile that most of today's top area runners would be challenged to maintain for 5 or 6 miles, never mind 26.2. The time away from running also served Marshall's longevity well, as he became dominant as a Masters (40+) runner. His 15:23 clocking at the Danielson 5K in 1985 is still the race's age-group record. Marshall also currently holds the Master's course record at the prestigious Holyoke 10K, running 31:28. And his 31:20 effort at the Boston Milk Run 10K in 1985 ranked Marshall the 4<sup>th</sup> fastest Master's runner in the country for the distance. Clearly, Marshall had regained the form of his youth and was on the top of his game, consistently beating runners half his age.

At the age of 46, Marshall began to struggle a bit with some nagging injuries. Injuries can deter the progress of even the best runners, and Marshall decided it was time to retire from competitive racing. "I'd been running really hard for a really long time," Marshall recalls, "and it was time to find out who I was outside of running. It was my journey of exploration." Although Marshall attempted a few minor comebacks, all of which were cut short by injuries, he has recently returned to consistent running again, only this time, with a different perspective. Marshall's two children have also followed in his footsteps. Daughter Jessie is a junior at Norwich Free Academy and is one of the top varsity runners on the Wildcats cross-country team. His son David, a former soccer standout, will be a freshman at NFA this fall and has been running competitively as well. And at 56, Marshall can still hold his own against the younger runners out there, but he has developed a new appreciation of running. "I run for the enjoyment of it now," he explained. "I love it, whether running with friends or running alone. I like getting together with friends and the social aspect of running, and I like going to races. And I still enjoy that feeling of running long distances and being in that groove. Running is the best meditation I've found." Asked if he has any aspirations of a comeback and returning to the form of his past competitive days, Marshall's outlook is a familiar one for runners possessing his past credentials. "The effort that it would take to get fast again...I'm not willing to do that work. Marshall did re-injure himself last year in a 5-Mile race, limping to the finish line over the final mile and still winning his age group. He still races occasionally and has been running on a consistent basis. And it's good to see people like Bill Marshall still out there running.

## Racing Roundup

- Last year, Uncasville's Chadwick Brown may have set a record for most second place road race finishes in one season. While most runners would have been happy to be second in those races, Brown kicked off 2002 clearly in the winners' circle. His 25:06 clocking at the Leprecaun 5 Mile (or slightly short) Road Race in Madison last weekend was good enough for a 2 minute win and served as a solid tune-up for next month's Boston Marathon. Norwich's Mike Fusaro was 5<sup>th</sup> overall in 27:40, while Mystic's Martha Merz earned top female honors in 28:32.
- Chris Dickerson of Woodbridge (20:49) and Melissa-Perkins Banas of Norwich (24:01) were the top male and female finishers at the Warren Street Classic St. Patrick's Day Road Race in Fairfield on March 17<sup>th</sup>. Perkins-Banas was coming off a strong 1:24:09 win at a Half Marathon in Wakefield, Rhode Island a week earlier. Bob Stack of Gales Ferry, who has also competed in Wakefield (running 1:18:22), was 8<sup>th</sup> overall in 21:48.
- Rod Dehaven, the top American finisher at both the Boston and Chicago Marathons last year, will not compete in this year's Boston Marathon due to an achilles injury.
- Two notable performances from local runners in the NCAA Indoor Track Championships to report: Former E.O. Smith and State Open champion Hunter Spencer of Kentucky finished 3<sup>rd</sup> in the One Mile in a time of 4:02.93. Meghan Coombs, a former Griswold High standout now competing for North Carolina State, finished 16<sup>th</sup> in the 3,000 meter final in a time of 9:45.57.

## This month in history

March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1983 – Norwich's Jim Uhrig outdistanced a field of 160 runners to win the North Stonington St. Patrick's Day 10K Road Race. Uhrig' time of 30:54 put his well ahead of runner-up Dave Litoff, 2<sup>nd</sup> in 32:21. A gap of only 25 seconds separated the next five runners, lead by Ron Knapp of Storrs (3<sup>rd</sup>; 32:38) and four Norwich runners: Fran Houle (4<sup>th</sup>; 32:42), Joe Banas (5<sup>th</sup>; 32:42), Bill Marshall (6<sup>th</sup>; 32:55), and Tim Smith (7<sup>th</sup>; 33:02). Stonington's Pat Swim was the first female finisher, 30<sup>th</sup> overall in 38:24. Mystic's John J. Kelly, the 1957 Boston marathon winner, claimed top grandmaster honors in 37:24.

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