

CATCHING UP ON RUNNING NEWS AROUND THE GLOBE

By DON SIKORSKI
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A lot has been happening on the roads and on the track over the past few weeks. Just when many thought that world-class distance runners in the U.S. were a dying breed, new hopes have stepped up to the plate and produced home runs. Names like Khannouchi, Broe, Drossin, Webb, Meffezighi, Browne, Ritzenheim, Dowling, and DeReuck have all breathed new life into the lungs of the United States distance runners. With our national high school and collegiate track times making a comeback to the glory days of the late 70's and early 80's, the future of distance running in this country is beginning to look bright again as well. Locally and around the globe, here's a look at a few of June's developments in the world of running:

- Ethiopia's Haile Gebrselassie failed in his recent attempt to break the world record in the 1 hour run. Gebrselassie, the world record holder at 10,000 meters with 2 Olympic gold medals and 4 world 10K track titles to his credit, was forced to drop out 40 minutes in the rarely contested event due to a nagging calf injury. Gebrselassie had recently finished 3rd in his debut marathon in London this past April and was expected to challenge Arturo Barrios' long-standing record of 21,101 meters, set back in March of 1991.
- LaSalle Banks Chicago Marathon officials have announced that Khalid Khannouchi has committed to race in Chicago this fall. Khannouchi, the defending champion at Chicago and world record holder in the marathon by virtue of his London performance this past April (2:05:38), will vie for his 4th Chicago Marathon title on October 13th. He had previously won his 1997 debut there in 2:07:10, then followed up with a world best time of 2:05:42 in 1999. Great Britain's Paula Radcliffe, the female winner in London with her 2:18:56 debut effort, has also committed to racing in Chicago, posing a potential showdown with women's world record holder Catherine Ndereba of Kenya, who ran a world best 2:18:47 at Chicago last fall. With a total prize purse of \$500,000, including a record high \$100,000 for each winner, Chicago can continue to promote it's marathon as the country's best and should easily fill it's 37,500 person limit again this fall.
- The Eastern Connecticut Conference was again a dominant force at the State Open this spring. While there were a number of terrific performances from the conference's sprinters, jumpers, and weight athletes, the distance runners clearly shined on the state level. Highlighting the area's All-State performances were Killingly's Megan Owen (State Open record win at 1600m in 4:55.67), Griswold's Gavin Coombs (photo finish win over Danbury's Andre Laboy at 3200 meters in 9:21.07), Abbey Sadowski (runner-up to Owen at 1600m in 5:04.37), and Mike Charron (2-time All-State 1600m and 3200m), John Mandelburg of NFA and Mark Oliver of Fitch (4th and 5th at 3200 meters respectively) and Griswold's 4x800 relay team (posting a school record time of 7:57 at the New England Championships).
- Chad Johnson deserves to win the Rose City Challenge Race one-day. Johnson, 26, a former 2-time state cross-country champion while competing at NFA, has posted two terrific performances at the race over the last two years, finishing 3rd in 2001 (55:32) behind Kenya's Nelson Hdereva's course record 52:25 and Danbury's Sergio Ribeiro. This year, Johnson ran a terrific 54:04, nearly a minute up on Ribeiro, but had to settle for 2nd behind 2-time Rose City champion Mike Slinsky of New York. The fact that the race offers \$500 cash for the win as hosts the Connecticut USATF Championship means that the competition will continue to be top notch up front and runners like Slinsky, a past Olympic Trials qualifier at the marathon distance, will find a trip to Norwich to be worth their while. Johnson is running as well as anybody in Connecticut right now and has shown strong potential at the longer distances over the past two years.
- Sad news to report that Ethiopia's Mamo Wolde has passed away at the age of 70. Wolde was the Olympic gold medallist in the 1968 Olympic Games. Wolde also earned a silver medal in the 10,000 meters in Mexico City and was considered alongside Abiiba Bikilla and Haile Gebrselassie as Ethiopia's greatest distance runners of all time.

Racing Roundup

- Waterford's Stephen Herrera (32:25) and Carolyn Verdon (42:01) were winners at the Niantic Bay 10K on June 14th. Herrera showed now signs of fatigue from his strong 5th place showing at the previous week's Rose City Challenge, slicing 15 seconds of his own course record from a year ago and outdistancing Uncasville's Todd Bennett (2nd in 34:50) by a comfortable margin.
- The June 15th Mount Washington Road Race, a unique 7.6-mile climb up to the mountain's 6,288-foot summit, was shortened due to inclement weather conditions. Race Officials were forced to alter the race course to finish only halfway up the mountain due to 50 mile per hour winds and 17 degree temperatures at the summit, with concerns for the automobile traffic on the way back down. Simon Gutierrez (28:02) and Anna Pichtova (32:32) were the top finishers in the shortened 3.8-mile race. Todd Brown of Rocky Hill (67th overall in 36:29) was the top Connecticut finisher. Mystic's Anthony Fossa finished 75th overall (36:56) to claim 6th in his 45-49 year age group. Chaplin's Rebecca Stockdale-Wooley, competing for the Central Mass Striders, won the Women's Grandmasters (50+) division in 41:01.
- Today's Fairfield Half Marathon will represent the 4th race on the USATF Open Team Championship circuit this season. The Norwich-based Mohegan Striders currently lead the team competition with 24 points after the first three events (5K, 12K, and 10 miles). Canterbury's Chad Johnson is the state's top individual runner, claiming top USATF honors in all three events to date.

This Month in History

June 13th, 1993 – Thomas Gnabel of Poland shakes off the stubborn challenge of New Haven's Mike Cotton in the final miles to win the 27th Annual Rose Arts Festival Road Race. Gnabel, who resides in Colorado and travels the United States to compete in road races, crosses the finish line in 54:18 to claim the \$500 1st place prize purse. Cotton, a former distance running standout at the University of Virginia with a 2:16 marathon best to his credit, goes step for step with Gnabel through 9 miles before settling for 2nd place, 10 seconds back. New Britain's Kevin Pigeon runs a strong race for 3rd (56:13) to outdistance both Mark Millitello and Peter Oviatt, who round out the top 5. Mary-Lynn Currier is the top female, running a record setting 61:16 to claim 16th place overall. Heather Dawson (64:21) fends off Carla Thompson (64:54) for 2nd lady. Leading the "Where Are They Now?" category up front are Waterford's Paul Mosca (13th, 60:29) and Norwich's Aguinaldo Ramos (14th, 60:59). Tim Smith of Norwich, the only person in the field to compete in all 27 Rose Arts races, wins his sixth straight Masters division title, finishing a strong 8th place overall in 58:22. 574 runners complete the challenging 10.4-mile course, with the top 11 runners finishing under the prestigious 1-hour mark.

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