

# WEBB MAKES IT OFFICIAL

By DON SIKORSKI  
*Special to the Bulletin*

Michigan Freshman Alan Webb has ended months of speculation by announcing that he will be leaving the University and Coach Ron Warhurst to turn professional. For those who thought that these kinds of things only happened in the world of football or basketball, guess again.

It had been announced that Webb has signed with Flynn Sports Management and will train under his former high school coach Scott Razcko while attending classes at George Mason University. For those not familiar with Webb's story, here's a bit of background: while competing for South Lakes High School in Reston, Virginia last Spring, Alan Webb shattered Jim Ryun's 36 year-old high school mile record on 3:55.3 (set on June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1965) by running 3:53.43 at the Prefontaine Classic in Eugene, Oregon. That race propelled Webb into the national spotlight, and it's been a series of ups and down for the now 19 year-old college freshman ever since. During his first year at Michigan, Webb ran well in the fall cross-country season, capping the season by posting an 11<sup>th</sup> place finish at the NCAA Championships. But an achilles injury forced him to redshirt the indoor season, and the lack of quality training hampered his effort during this past Spring's outdoor season. Still, Webb had enough to win the Big Ten mile championships. But after finishing a disappointing 4<sup>th</sup> in the NCAA 1500 meter final (a race Webb led until the final 100 meters), Alan Webb announced his decision to leave Michigan for the world of professional track and field.

Critics of Webb's decision are numerous. Citing a lack of strength, big race experience, or the pure leg speed to match the world's top milers, many say that Webb's decision will only lead to the disappointment of American Track and Field fans, desperately searching for the next great American miler that virtually has been non-existent over the past 10 to 15 years. Others claim that Michigan was simply a bad fit for Webb, as he struggled with injuries and the conflicting training philosophies of Warhurst and Razcko. But those who truly understand the sport of international Track and Field are more supportive of Webb. Charles Barkley posed some stinging commentary during the recent NBA Draft regarding the collegiate athletic system in America versus the methods of athletic development overseas. With an increasing number of foreign basketball stars being drafted into the NBA in the first round and the diminishing fundamental skills displayed during the NBA's regular season, the outspoken Barkley may have a valid point. Distance running is not much different in the fact that college runners are forced to race frequently and compete in three full seasons (cross-country, indoor and outdoor track) each year, leaving little time to build a solid foundation of base training or peak for a single championship season. College coaches are also expected to get the maximum production out of their athletes in a short four year time frame, at an age where distance runners usually make their strongest progressions. It's no wonder so many quit the sport all together after the days of collegiate racing are over.

Whether Alan Webb succeeds or fails in his quest to become a world class track athlete remains to be seen. The media pressure on Webb has been tremendous, ever since Ryun's historic mark went down. Webb has handled the pressure well, considering many expect him to be the savior of American middle distance running. If Alan Webb stays injury free and continues to carry the same drive and determination with him, his potential on the world class Track and Field stage is unlimited.

## Racing Roundup

- Speaking of fast high school runners with superb potential, Killingly junior Meghan Owen earned All-America honors by finishing 4<sup>th</sup> overall in the 1600 meter run at the Outdoor Track and Field Championships in Raleigh, North Carolina. Owen finished in a time of 4:50.44, a personal best by three seconds.
- Canterbury's Chad Johnson finished 9<sup>th</sup> overall and was the top American at the Fairfield Half Marathon on June 23<sup>rd</sup>. Habassa Abdelhadi, currently training in Pennsylvania, battled high temperatures, high humidity, and a chase pack of seven Kenyan runners to claim the overall win in 1:04:25. The Fairfield race, which represented the 4<sup>th</sup> race on the USATF Open Team Championship circuit this season, Johnson has claimed all four USATF individual titles this season.
- The Cannonball Run in Preston remains one of the best small-time races in Connecticut. Despite warm, humid conditions and a headwind along the point-to-point course, the one mile Thursday evening race attracted 187 finishers this year, and looked to have enough raffle prizes for just about everybody in attendance. Stephen Herrera (4:40) outdueled Todd Bennett (4:46) for the overall win, while Preston's Kris-Anne Kane (5:20) claimed her 10<sup>th</sup> title to remain undefeated at the Cannonball race.
- President George W. Bush recently ran a very respectable 20:29 in a 3 Mile Road Race at Fort McNair Military Park just outside of Washington, D.C. The 56 year-old Bush runs nearly every day, and went into the event with a goal of breaking 20 minutes. If the President of the United States makes time to run, other Americans with a less demanding schedule should have no excuse.
- Sad news to report the passing of my fellow co-worker and corporate running teammate Joel Patingre. Patingre, 42, of Groton, had recently competed at the Lawrence and Memorial Spring Stride race in May and was a veteran marathon runner and long time member of the local running community.

## This Month in History

July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1994 – Waterford's Liz Mueller makes a rare road racing appearance at the New London Sailfest 5K Road Race. Mueller, the former Waterford High School All-America in both cross-country and track, makes the most of her last minute decision to race, claiming an impressive 9<sup>th</sup> place overall in 16:39. Mansfield's Tony Martin, fresh off his 2<sup>nd</sup> place finish at 10,000 meters in the New England championships during his sophomore track season at Southern Connecticut State, runs away from the field in 15:16, besting runner-up Ed Zubrisky by 24 seconds. Jason Bratty (15:54), Kevin Grant (16:06), and Jeff Kotecki (16:22) round out the top five finishers. Carla Thompson (17:45) finishes 20<sup>th</sup> overall to claim female runner-up honors.

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