

STRUGGLING IN THE SUMMER HEAT

By DON SIKORSKI
Special to the Bulletin

The dog days of summer have been here since mid-June and show no signs of disappearing anytime soon. Sure, we've had sporadic breaks here and there; a few clear and mild days with temperatures in the low 80's at best that begins with a cool morning and end with a crisp evening. But they don't last for long; soon the inevitable New England summer heat and humidity return for days on end, torturing us endurance athletes. Relatively inactive people who work in air-conditioned climates and return home to more of the same are less likely to notice. But runners are a different breed. We are constantly aware of what the weather conditions will be for even days down the road, even with no specific vacation plans in sight. For we are the ones who will be lacing up the shoes and braving the elements, mile after mile. Passers by in automobiles will stare, a few in admiration but most in disgust, as if to say "what's wrong with people these days"? Somehow the man mowing his front lawn on the riding tractor or the elderly lady weeding her flowerbed make their tasks appear as an accomplishment, while anyone exercising by choice in this brutal weather should have their sanity questioned. Can't argue there. The newspapers said that the Kenyan runners again dominated at Falmouth. It's no wonder; our New England summers are mild to them by comparison, as they were born, raised, and trained in warm weather climates at high altitude. They wear full sweats and warm-ups after summertime races, even when down South. Not a lot of Kenyan runners cranking up the central air conditioning of their living quarters. Maybe long-term adaptation is the key to beating the heat.

Not only do most of us feel much worse when trying to run in this warm and thick, humid air, but we undoubtedly look much worse than usual too. As I struggled up the hills of Mohegan Park during the late miles of a recent training run in very warm and humid conditions, a gentleman driving by in a pickup truck asks me if I needed a ride to the top of the hill. My initial response of a polite "no, that's OK, but thank you anyway" was suddenly replaced by the realization that I must have looked even worse than I felt at that point into my run. The mind also begins to play tricks on you in this heat. I see the Life Star helicopter flying overhead en route for nearly Backus Hospital. I think my wife must have sent the search party out looking for me. A car full of teenagers drive by and shout something juvenile at me; I fire right back with a quick expletive. Don't mess with us in this kind of weather; we are clearly not enjoying this arduous task at hand. My strength is completely gone as I stagger up the final half-mile climb home, blinded by the salt and sweat attacking my contact lenses and praying for the coming of September and cooler temperatures. Someone once said that whatever doesn't kill you will make you stronger. I'm not yet fully convinced of the logic there. Hopefully, the effort of putting one foot in front of the other for hundreds of miles in these conditions will pay dividends when fall road races approach. And to think we'll soon be running on snow-covered roads in the black nights of winter. I could use a training run like that about now.

Racing Roundup

- Canterbury's Chad Johnson finished 8th overall in 15:16.0 at the River Run Elite 5K in Hartford on August 1st. Kenya's Patrick Nthiwa edged countryman Leonard Mucheru 14:01.5 to 14:01.7 to win the race, a featured 5 lap, elite-only event run in conjunction with the Corporate 5K event. Wethersfield's Marc Robaczynski, competing for CIGNA Corporation, won the Corporate 5K race in 15:29.
- The John J. Kelley / Ocean Beach Road Race has had a storied tradition of race winners who were unfamiliar to the area. The race's national prestige, combined with no entry fee, allows for an unknown to enter on race day and steal the show. That was the case this year at the 40th Annual Kelley race, as Arizona's Greg Wenneborg, a 2:18 marathoner and Olympic Trials qualifier who was visiting in New England for a running camp, cruised to an uncontested victory in 61:30 under warm and humid conditions. Griswold High School junior Gavin Coombs ran strong to finish 2nd overall in 1:05:45. You should be hearing that name a lot this fall. Maura Danahy, a Connecticut College track and cross-country standout, easily won the women's title in 1:14:21. Defending champion Ben Smith, a former All-State runner at Fitch High School, was 4th overall in 1:06:52. 324 runners completed the 11.6-mile race.
- With names like Kelly and O'Reilly in the winner's circle, it was clear the fast Irish runners were in town, competing at the 13th Annual Deary Memorial 5 Mile Road Race on August 10th. Keith Kelly, the 2000 NCAA National Cross-Country champion while at Providence College, held off training partner Paul Reilly by less than a second to win the race in a course record 24:11. The quality of the field at Deary keeps improving each year, as Gideon Mutisya (24:59), Eric Bonnette (2001 runner-up and a Deary relation; 25:33) and Chad Johnson (25:43) rounded out the top 5 finishers. Stephanie O'Reilly was the top female finisher in 29:43.

This Month in History

August 3rd, 1991 – It wasn't a very good beach day, but most of the runners in the 29th Annual John J. Kelley / Ocean Beach 11.6 Mile Road Race didn't seem to mind too much. In fact, most welcomed the opportunity to race fast in an event usually known for its challenging weather conditions. Kevin Grant of Quaker Hill broke away from the field early and cruised to a win by a comfortable margin. A former distance running standout at Waterford High School and Southern Connecticut State University, Grant took advantage of the surprisingly cool weather, a rarity at the Kelley race, hitting the mile in 4:47 and two miles at 9:43, opening up a 23 second lead on his nearest competitors. Grant hit the tape in 58:59, with West Warwick's Glen Guillemette 2nd in 60:36. Mystic's Wayne Jacob claimed the 3rd spot in 61:30. Shelton's Joe Puopalo (61:58) and Colchester's Craig Eisman (62:07) rounded out the top five. Colchester's Kelly Pickney won her second consecutive women's title. Her 71:30 effort was over 2 ½ minutes faster than her winning time from a year ago and good enough to outrun 2nd place finisher Marty Lynn Pastizzo (72:44) by over a minute. Carla Dossett was the 3rd female finisher in 74:50, while Norwich's Tim Smith would finish 9th overall to claim the Men's Masters title in 63:47. The race was highlighted by a rare racing appearance from Kelley himself, a 2 time Olympic marathoner that would win the Men's Veteran (60+) division in 77:53, good enough for 119th place overall.

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