

AMERICANS WILL TAKE THEIR BEST SHOT THIS FALL

By **DON SIKORSKI**
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There's been a lot of talk about the resurgence of American distance running as of late. The fall season in road racing usually means marathons, and plenty of them. America has always been the land of opportunity, and that means that American distance runners will have plenty of opportunities to prove that they can run with the big boys over the 26.2-mile distance. Besides recent American citizen Khalid Khannouchi, however, the sightings of an American runner in contention over the final miles have been non-existent. Names like Shorter, Rodgers, Benoit, and Salazar and now in the distant past, but their standards still haunt the current crop of Americans looking to run comparable performances twenty years later. Here's a look at what Americans will be racing where this fall:

TWIN CITIES MARATHON (September 29th): The Twin Cities Marathon has earned the honor of hosting this year's U.S. National Marathon Championships, which was conducted in New York City last fall. Defending Champion Joshua Kipkemboi will return to Twin Cities this year, but U.S. fans would like to see him have some company up front in the lead pack. The U.S. Runners are led by 2-time New Haven 20K Champion Dan Browne, who will be making his marathon debut. Other American men expected to contend for the U.S. Championship include Peter DeLaCerde, Brad Hauser, David Morris, and Minnesota's local favorite Chris Lundstrom. On the women's side, top contenders include Susannah Beck, Christine Clifton, and Kim Pawelek, who have all been running well this season. Weather conditions in Minnesota during late September are always a bit risky, but Twin Cities is historically one of the best fall marathons for runners looking to take shot at a personal best. The Americans, specifically Browne and Morris, should be right in the mix.

CHICAGO MARATHON (October 13th): The LaSalle Bank Chicago Marathon has established itself as the country's best, and ranks right up there with London and Rotterdam as one of the best in the world. Recent increases in prize money have added significant depth to the field, which makes racing fast times a more likely scenario. It helps Chicago that both the men's and women's world records were set there. Khalid Khannouchi headlines the list of Americans that are expected to toe the line in the Windy City. His London effort this spring was enough to shave a few seconds off his own world marathon best and get past Kenya's Paul Tergat and Ethiopia's Haile Gebreselassie in what was considered one of the strongest marathon fields ever assembled. Tergat is also expected to return to Chicago, where he earned runner-up honors a year ago. Chicago has set up rabbits to hit halfway in 1:02:45 and a second group in the 1:04:00 to 1:04:15 range. Alan Culpepper will most likely opt for group two in his marathon debut, widely anticipated due to his 10K credentials, solo training ritual, and infrequent racing. Culpepper is looking to break 2:10, which would be a very impressive American marathon debut. Keith Dowling, the top American finisher at this year's Boston Marathon, is also expected. Speaking of impressive debuts, Deena Drossin, who won a national U.S. title by virtue of her 2:26:58 effort in New York City last fall, is also expected to race in Chicago. She could be challenged by 5,000 meter specialist Jen Rhines, ranked #2 road racer in the U.S., who will be making her marathon debut in Chicago as well. The spotlight should, however, be on the women's race up front, as Kenya's Catherine Ndereba, the defending champion and world record holder, is expected to battle Britain's Paula Radcliffe, the London Champion who just missed Ndereba's world mark. Look for Culpepper and Drossin to both run fast, although probably not fast enough to contend for the win.

NEW YORK CITY MARATHON (November 3rd): Last year's dramatic race was fueled by the memories of September 11th. New York is always a great event, and this year's race should again be one of the season's highlights. Scott Larson, last year's U.S. Marathon National Champion with his 13th place finish in a personal best 2:14:57, is expected back and said to be in top shape. He is rumored to be training in South Africa with Gert Thys, the 5th fastest marathoner of all-time (having run 2:06:33 at the 1999 Tokyo Marathon). His Coach, former World Marathon champion Mark Plaatjes, claims Larson is capable of a 2:08 marathon if all goes as planned. That may be a reach, but look for Larson to make some noise up front. Ireland's Mark Carroll, a 3,000 and 5,000 meter track specialist and frequent racer in the U.S., is also rumored to be making his marathon debut in New York this fall.

Racing Roundup

- Dan Browne of Portland, Oregon and Colleen De Reuck of Boulder, Colorado claimed U.S. National 20K titles in New Haven on Labor Day. Despite continuous rain and challenging winds, a number of Americans posted terrific performances. Browne and Kyle Baker broke away from the lead pack during the late stages of the race and were separated by a mere 1 second at the finish line, with Browne out-leaving Baker in an impressive time of 59:20. De Reuck was in control of the ladies race the whole way, running 1:07:52 to claim top honors. New Haven's Bryce Lindamood finished 32nd overall in 1:07:06 to claim top Connecticut finisher honors, followed closely by Waterford's Stephen Herrera, 36th overall in 1:07:35. Despite the unfavorable weather conditions, New Haven had nearly 4,000 finishers in the three races (20K, 5K, and Children's Race), with 2,142 finishing the 20K (12.4 mile) race.
- Colorado sophomore Dathan Ritzenhein will most likely red-shirt cross-country this fall after suffering a stress fracture of the femur. Ritzenhein, the 2nd most touted high schooler two years ago (behind Alan Webb), was 4th in last fall's NCAA XC Championship and was expected to provide the 1-2 punch with teammate Jorge Torres (2nd in 2001) that would lead the Buffaloes to an NCAA Championship.

This Month in History

September 8th, 1994 – 24 year-old Luis Molina, a former Naval Academy Cross-Country and Track standout, wins the 14th Annual Downtown Norwich Merchants 4 Mile Road Race. Molina, a virtual unknown in the area, uses that element of surprise to get past early leader and local favorite Wayne Jacob of Mystic with a mile to go. Jacob, 39, builds a solid lead through the first, two mile loop before Molina, a North Carolina native stationed at the Submarine Base in Groton, makes a decisive move to put the race away. Molina's time of 19:46 edges out Jacob, 2nd in 20:09. Norwich's Gui Ramos (21:19), Dave Williams (21:37) and Jim Gothreau (22:00) round out the top 5. Piper Faulkner is the top female finisher in 26:49, edging Junior Division winner and future Griswold High School standout Meghan Coombs by 10 seconds.

Don Sikorski writes a twice-monthly running column for the Norwich Bulletin. His "Coach's Corner" column can be accessed at www.moheganstriders.org. He can also be reached by e-mail at kdcsikorski@netzero.net.