

Paddy's Shuffle Hits Stride

The flower baskets adorning Paddy's Pub were glistening with dew as the early morning rays greeted the first arrivals for the Grand Finale of the 2004 NER Pub Series. Formerly Paddy-O's - "We cut that out when people kept asking for the patio," explained Publican John O'Hara - Paddy's in just its fourth year of ownership under the O'Hara brothers - Karl and John - whose generosity, combined with Race Director Mark Kelly's vision, has coalesced into an amazingly popular athletic and social endeavor.

In its first year, the race drew 420 participants; in its second year and first as a Pub Series entrant, the numbers swelled to 741. The 2004 tally stretched to 1,054.

A huge tent across from Paddy's, replete with vendors, welcomed runners while a giant arch of green and yellow balloons framed the new start on Border Street adjacent to the Pub. For decades the course was used for the Troubadour Trot (the Troubadour now being Paddy's) and was also used by a bar up the road called the Cherry Tree for the "Cherry Tree Three."

One of the numerous tasks proposed during the "wee" hours of Paddy's infamous Tuesday night "organizational" meetings, was to finally certify the flat and fast route. USTA New England Director Steve Vaitones did exactly that, coming up with a three mile course from the former, measured for the first time at between 2.88-2.89 miles. The only change was the new start on Border Street.

"I heard it was in the Pub Series and that the course had just been certified," said Olympic steeplechase trialist John Mortimer. "I had to be in Pennsylvania the day before but I knew if my flight didn't get delayed I'd be here."

At the gun, Mort took an immediate lead along with 18 year-old W. Newton resident Preston Decker, a member of the Newton North HS basketball team. Standing 6'4", Decker was easy to spot: "I didn't tell anyone that I was going to run up front, but I knew a lot of the basketball team was running so I figured I'd raise some eyebrows." Decker expanded his 15 seconds of fame into two minutes 24 seconds for the first half-mile. "That guy was flying, I was dead after that," commented Decker. "I heard he was at the Olympic trails so I'll be sure to bring that up in conversation."

Mortimer, who'd run a PR 8:24.92 in the finals of the steeplechase at the US Olympic Trials, streaked along at a 4:48 per mile cadence to gain the finish line by Paddy's in 14:24. A spirited battle for second ensued between native Brit Andy Keith, 32, a 3:55 miler while at Providence College, and three-time Cape Cod Marathon and three-time Pub Series champion Eric "The Keg" Beauchesne. Although in lockstep on the final turn onto Border Street, the miler's kick did the trick as Keith finished in 14:55 with Beauchesne, 34, locking up his fourth Pub Series title in 14:58. Inaugural Paddy's winner Keiron Tumbleton, 39, of Hopkinton via Dublin, placed 12th in 16-flat.

The Auld Sod was well represented on the women's side as Greenville, RI's Trish Hillery won the Paddy's Shillelagh and her fist Pub Series crown in 17:28 (a 5:48 avg.). The

Hurtin' For Certain Striders' Meaghan Shaw, 23, of Reading, placed second in 17:51 followed by perennial Pub Series runner-up (at least in 2004), Joann Mathews, 38, of N. Dartmouth, who logged in at 17:53. Hurtin' For Certain's Brenda Egizi, 45, of Westwood, clocked 17:56 for fourth overall and first master.

Pelham, NH ace Tom Doody, 42, clinched the Pub Series Master title with a fourth place showing in 15:14. Age group aces responded in droves as Dudley's Geary Daniels, 50, scorched the course in 16:04 while beating the bejeebers out of local Auburndale speedster Kevin McNamara, 56, who ran a commendable 18:16 for second Senior and deserves ink as one of the many contributing sponsors who helped allay race costs and benefit Newton Special Athletes.

The aforementioned Preston Decker wasn't just a flash in the pan, recovering enough from his mad sprint at the start to finish just 11 seconds behind McNamara. Newton's Eileen Troy, 50, led a solid women's Senior set in 19:46 and Brookline's Colin McCardle, 60 (Yes, the Colin McArdle who beat Bill Rodgers over 3000m indoors a few years back), would have placed second among Seniors with his scintillating 17:39 – although he readily admits that 67 year-old former Hawaii Ironman age-group world record holder Bill Riley of Centerville (2nd Vet in 19:07) ran the better age graded time.

Marshfield Road Runner Dr. Bob Hillman, 70, averaged sub-8s to win his division in 23:37. “This is one of the better races I've been to,” allowed the good doctor while the post-race music resonated, the chicken pot pie soup and hot dogs were served, the malt and hops were poured, and Irish Tom Hurley finally arrived from the Boston waterfront after a cruise to Bermuda, soon to be seen wearing one of Paddy's classic race t-shirts. “This is just marvelous,” commented the sage one. I was worried about parking but I just moved a sawhorse and got the exact same spot as last year.”

Does it get much better?

Bob Fitzgerald
Editor New England Runner
Paddy's Master of Ceremonies