

Record Field Romps at Paddy's Pub Series Finale

At this year's sixth annual Paddy's Shillelagh Shuffle 3M, there were no gusting winds to make running under the balloon arch an adventure, nor did insulation fly off roof tops to delay the start. Sunny and a tad on the warm side in the mid 60s, the weather wasn't too bad for runners and it was great for spectators, of which there were many on both sides. After a record crowd in 2006, this year's race attracted over 1500 entrants with a record 1,331 finishers – not bad year to have implemented Chip timing.

After a tour in Afghanistan and another in Iraq, New Balance-Boston speedster Justin Lutz, 27, of Framingham, made a solo tour of the certified 3-Mile Paddy's course in 14:33 to win handily, but he obviously had John Mortimer's course record of 14:24 in the crosshairs.

"I'm a little disappointed," admitted Lutz. "I figured I was in 14:20 shape. I ran the first mile in 4:50, the next in 4:51 and thought, "oh well." It was just one of those days because this is definitely a quick course. The sun was a bit hot today but there was a nice cooling breeze. It's a beautiful day.

"Behind the runaway winner the battle for Pub supremacy was sealed as the Cambridge Sports Union's Terry McNatt registered a second straight Pub Series runner-up performance to maintain his Series lead. "I had a good race for sure," said McNatt. "Scollard was right on my heels. Knowing the course definitely helps." McNatt, 42, reached the Border Street finish in 15:33, just two seconds ahead of Kingston's John Noland, 44, on Elm Street as the course heads back past the park to Border Street.

As with the men's tete-a-tete, the women's race was for second as 37 year old former Villanova miler Kathy Fleming laid waste to the women's course record in 16:23. The previous standard of 16:41 was set in 2005 by Paddy's women's runner-up and now two-time Pub Series queen, Christin Doneski, 36, of Hopkinton, NH, who arrived in 17:22 – 10 seconds ahead of 2005 Pub Queen and Paddy's women's Master course holder Mimi Fallon, 42, of Walpole.

"I was going to run elsewhere but Barbara Wilson said this is such a fun race that I had to do it," said Fleming who, like McNatt, received a pair of running shoes and a shillelagh. "My kids will love this," laughed Fleming, who has three young children, as does Terry McNatt, whose wife, Sue, also ran while a friend watched the kids in the park. Terry later waxed philosophic on how to handle racing and parenting: "After thinking about the season, I would say to succeed at mixing racing with family responsibilities you need: A) The vision of Theo Epstein; B) The game day focus of Bill Belichick; C) The patience of a Dalai Lama; and D) The flexibility of a Rockette dancer. Add in our extended network of great running friends and it all can work."

For a third straight year, Senior stalwarts Ken Leinbach and Marge Bellisle cracked their own age-group marks. Leinbach, 52, of Belmont, sliced four seconds from his standard (15:56) while Warren, RI's Bellisle, 52, dropped her mark by two seconds to 18:46.

The Cambridge Sports Union Catherine Farrell, 62, won her division (at Paddy's and in the Pub Series) in 23:21, while Concord, NH's Brian Byrne, 60, ran 18:53 to clip Pub Series Veteran's champ Dave Cobb, of Stow, by 26 seconds. Having turned 60 mid-season, true-blue Publican Byrne earned the dubious distinction of having placed second in both the Series' Senior and Veteran divisions.

Dr. Bob Hillman ran at an 8:30 clip to place fourth in the 70-79 category but first place in the Pub Series. "Hey, I placed fourth but I had a good race," noted Marshfield's Hillman. "Look at the guys up front." We voiced our consolation to Framingham's Bob Tomassini, last year after he took it on the chin from Cape ironman Bill Riley. Tomassini ran 6:57 pace at age 71 but still got blasted by Riley, also 71, who was one tick off his own course record in 19:30 (6:30 pace!).

The oldest contestant, 79 year-old John DiComandrea – a top 20 Boston Marathon finisher in his day – ran 28-flat and quipped, "I'm just holding on and having a good time." That's a sentiment that could be expressed hours later by revelers who'd dined on dogs and chicken pot pie, met friends in Karl's VIP Alley, listened to the DJ, watched the Irish Step dancers, visited the vendors and were frozen solid by the brilliant array of free craft brews lining Paddy's oak bar.

Proceeds fro the festive event benefited the Newton Special Athletes, a Newton Parks & Recreation program overseen by Race Director Mark Kelly. Until 2008, Sla inte chugat.

Bob Fitzgerald
Paddy's Master of Ceremonies