

Surf's Up, Grab Your Boards

While boasting 1700 entries, only 1,015 runners finished the 8th annual Paddy's Shillelagh Shuffle 3M on Oct. 18. The amount of 'no-shows' can be tied to the excruciatingly accurate weather forecast of an all-day Nor'easter that would start early and gain strength as the day wore on. So with Paddy's starting at noon, and the rain starting shortly after the 8:00 am start of the Bay State Marathon up the road in Lowell, the Grand Finale of the NER Pub Series just wasn't its usual family-friendly self. Those in the Pub Series and those seriously bored were running, regardless, but what about the folks entering Paddy's the day before to sign up—an occurrence that prompted co-proprietor John O'Hara to comment, "OK, I realize we have to be here tomorrow, but these people don't."

By noon, it was raw, windy and pouring buckets, making the cozy environs of Paddy's—with its music, food and post-race ambience—all the more inviting. Pounding the puddles at an alarming rate, Watertown's Shawn Wallace, 28, hydroplaned along at a 5:10 pace to arrive back at Paddy's first in 15:29. Two-time Pub Series silver medalist Lee Danforth, 31, of the Hurtin' For Certain Striders, was next in 15:35 followed by teammate and former Series champ Jason Cakouros, 44, in 15:37. Defending Pub Series champion Terry McNatt, 44, of the Cambridge Sports Union, logged in fourth at 15:50 with adidas frontman Mike McGrane, 39, rounding out the top five in 16:04.

Series leader Joe Navas wasn't exactly MIA. The Cape speedster had succumbed to Whirlaway coach McGrinch's exhortions to help score for the team at the USATF-NE Marathon Championship (Bay State) and Joe did exactly that with an impressive 2:34:33 showing good for eighth overall. Navas quickly came to his senses and abandoned his previous goal of also competing at Paddy's. "I figure if I run 2:30, then hop in the car and it takes 45 minutes or an hour to get to Newton, I can do it," Joe had said with a smile...but that was pre-Nor'easter talk.

Running in preferred weather conditions (well, maybe minus the torrential rain) Liverpool native Chris Teague arrived in a leisurely 16:15 to place sixth overall and clinch the 2009 Malt & Hops Tour top position. A dead-on winner through four races of two bygone Series, the Saucony ace finally had luck (and the points accumulated duking it out with Navas) on his side. Amazingly, Navas still wound up fifth overall in the standings.

The women's "Big Three" in the Series—BAA teammates Lara Johnson, Mimi Fallon and Sarah Healy—were separated by only four points entering the finale, but with no one able to displace any of the troika, the standings remained the same. Rounding into form late in the season, Newton's Healy, 33, won her third straight Series race in 17:29 but with Pub Series leader Johnson (17:36) and defending champion Fallon (18:32) placing

2-3, Sarah finished third—one point behind Fallon in second and three behind 2009 Pub Princess Johnson.

Newton's Beth Coughlin, 30, and Sudbury's Sarah Krause, 20, went 4-5 ahead of Brighton's Meredith Leenhouts, 23, in 19:35 and Warren, RI's Marge Bellisle, 54, in 19:49. Leenhouts and Bellisle finished the Series in the 4-5 positions.

While the women's contest was extremely close, there were two Series ties broken at Paddy's. The men's Senior gridlock between Thirsty Irish Runner Dave Wessman and Hurlin' for Certain's Paul Corcoran went to Wessman (17:56) who has now defended his 50+ title for a fourth year. The women's Senior tie between the Cambridge Sports Union's Catherine Farrell and Quincy's Joanne Morris went to Farrell (23:55), who has now defended her title for a third straight year.

Race organizers and volunteers came through amid dire conditions, and those runners not so waterlogged that they headed straight home, were treated to the usual Paddy's hospitality. In reflection, much of the 2009 Pub Series took place in 'less than ideal' conditions, so throw some peat in the fireplace, survive the winter and we'll see you at the starting line in 2010.

—**Bob Fitzgerald**