

Puddles & Pints at Paddy's

This Oct. 14 there were no sheets of roofing insulation borne aloft by strong winds to delay runners gathered on Border Street, nor was there a Nor'easter whose lashing ribbons of rain would give way to gently falling snow outside the suddenly romantic confines of Paddy's Pub in West Newton; no, there was only the familiar drenching that had previously visited four of five Pub Series outings this year.

There were puddles on the street and pints in the pub ("a soft day in Ireland") and the rain let up for the race before commencing again afterwards, a precipitous stop-and-go if you will. Following the new Kids 'K' over 1600 hopefuls lined up at the far end of Border Street and were off in the 11th annual Paddy's Shillelagh Shuffle 3M, the Grand Finale of NER Pub Series XV.

Not surprisingly, Pub Series leader and Paddy's defending champion Lee Danforth, 34, of the Hurtin' For Certain Striders, was up front through the first 5:05 mile as the course turned right in Auburndale and headed to the Waltham border. Danforth held the lead with Nick Ryan, 23, of Arlington, and 2011 New England Masters XC champion, Pete Hammer, 45, of Needham, in tow.

Hanging a right by the Waltham border and heading back to Paddy's, Danforth kept up the pace. Then, on the final turn off Webster St. and the brief downhill to Border St., things changed dramatically. "We came around that last turn and they got a glimpse of the finish line and surged ahead," relayed Danforth, who was well aware of the length of Border St. "I was surprised but I wasn't going to go from that far out so I figured I'd hold on and wait until we got closer and see what I had left."

Danforth had just enough to dust his rivals—Ryan by a tick in 15:14 with Hammer another second behind Ryan. Somerville Road Runner teammates Rob Cipriano and Chris Klucznik placed 5-6 to place 3-4 in the Series while Whirlaway's Paul Hammond limped home at Paddy's in 19th place but retained the second rung in the Series.

The women's race saw the return of course record holder Kathy Fleming (16:27 – 2007). The former Villanova 1500m flash (while Kathy Franey) is now 44 and a mother of three, but she still knows how to motor. "I've been out of the loop so I have no idea of pace," admitted Fleming. "I wanted to run 6's and when I got a 5:43 split for the mile I got psyched and surged ahead a little. I felt good."

Keeping an eye on Fleming while several seconds in arrears was Pub Series women's leader Lyndsay Willard, 33, of the B.A.A. The 4th American woman at this past April's Boston Marathon, Willard had posted up third at the ING Hartford Marathon the previous day in a PR 2:53:51.

"For a race this distance I'd usually go out at about 5:23, but the day after a marathon it's a lot different," said Willard. "There was this girl with blond hair and black bike shorts just ahead of me. When she was still right there at two miles I moved up on her shoulder and she didn't move. Then I moved a bit ahead and she didn't move so I was, 'OK, just maintain.'"

Willard ran to the finish line unpresed to place 19 seconds ahead of Fleming in 17:20. "When she moved ahead I couldn't go with her," said Fleming. "I didn't know who she was or how good she might be. I heard later that she ran a marathon the day before. I don't know how she did that. I was happy with my race. This is a fast course with some good downhills."

East Walpole's Emer O'Shea, 31, copped third in 17:49 with this issue's cover girl, Holly Madden, 46, of Scituate, taking fourth in 17:56 to win the Pub Series 40+ crown and register as the last female cracking 6-minute pace. Somerville Road Runner Jessica McGarty, 36, arrived next in 18:29 to cement the runner-up spot in the Pub Series behind Willard. Of a possible 300 points available in the 6-race Series, men's winner Danforth accrued 297 with Willard just two points short of a perfect season with 298.

Two records were eclipsed in the female age brackets: Jan Holmquist, 68, of Burlington, placed second in the 60+ Pub Standings to Stowe, VT's Patty Foltz, but with a good excuse. She missed a Pub race to run in the US 5K Masters Championships where she ran a single age (68) world best 21:18 (6:52 pace). At Paddy's she took down her own 60+ record by a whopping 2-minutes, running 20:30. (Foltz placed 2nd in 21:45 with NER nutrition columnist Nancy Clark of Newton copping bronze in 22:44 while biking to and from the race. Rain, what rain?)

One age group above, Regina Wright, 70, of the Marshfield Road Runners, became the first 70+ women in the 15-year history of the Pub Series to finish the Series. She did so by dismantling the previous 70+ record set in 2009 by close to 9-minutes in 28:37.

Post-race, the DJ and vendors kept the crowd entertained outside while a band played upstairs at Paddy's. Despite the damp milieu, Race Director Mark Kelly, Paddy's publicans John and Karl O'Hara, and all the volunteers did a great job of providing a quality event and fun afternoon for all involved.

Bob Fitzgerald
Paddy's Master of Ceremonies