

Past Champs Share Spotlight at Paddy's Celebration

Beautiful weather on Oct. 16 beckoned an overflow crowd to the 15th anniversary of Paddy's Shillelagh Shuffle 3M in West Newton. Over 40 vendors set up tents as youth activities took place in a park a block up the street. There were Irish step dancers on hand and a doubling of the Blocktoberfest Beer Garden. So, with an 11:30 am race start and 1:00 pm Patriots game start, how do you keep rabid football fans out of Paddy's for post-race festivities? Publicans Karl and John O'Hara are men of action, first proposing and then carrying through with the rental of six 55-inch flat screens, four of which were set up in the Beer Garden with two more positioned upstairs at Paddys.

With all systems go, the youth 1K that loops from Border St. around Paddy's and back saw a field of 233 runners age 6-under to 15, including many members of Newton Athletes Unlimited, the race beneficiary, taking part. Race Director Mark Kelly was happy to report that a very impressive \$50,000 was raised for NAU this year.

Following on the heels of the 1K, two past champions would tackle Paddy's flat and fast certified course with renewed energy. Newton North HS coach Shawn Wallace, 35, of Waltham, had run 15:29 to win here in 2009. He'd shown up running with a baby stroller since, but now was positioned up front (sans stroller) with the Pub Series speedsters, including two-time defending Pub Series and two-time defending Paddy's champion TJ Unger of the Hurtin' For Certain Striders.

In the race's first mile down Webster to Wolcott St. and turning right toward Waltham near Auburndale Square, the Cambridge Sports Union's Patrick Bugbee (just 2-points behind Unger in the Series) and past Pub Series champ Lee Danforth had already been shaken by the early pace.

When two miles on River St. had been reached, Unger watched Wallace surge ahead. "He waited until past two miles and then made a pretty solid move," said Unger. "He was good. He held it and I couldn't catch him. It didn't matter with Series points but I still would have liked to have won."

As it was, Unger had Wallace in sight on the long Border St. straightaway as "Coach" eclipsed his winning time from 7-years ago to log in at 15:04. Unger followed in 15:17 with a gap before Danforth arrived in 15:45. The first 40+ runner was last year's Pub Series runner-up Greg Picklesimer, 50, of the Somerville Road Runners, 6th overall in 16:11.

While comfortably leading the women's division of the Pub Series by 8-points over the BAA's Amanda Watters, Greater Lowell Road Runner Kara Haas, 46, admitted to some misgivings pre-race.

"I had this weird dream last night where Amanda beat me," confessed Haas. But that only brings her one point closer to you. "Yah, but there were eight other women that came in after Amanda and before me." This seemed fairly humorous to Watters. "To be honest, she's so fast that anytime I can keep her in sight it's a moral victory."

It had been 13 years since Haas crossed the finish line carrying two empty 12-packs from Wachusett's Brewery (her cousins own it). Fast forward and she again has two bundles with her, in the form of two daughters to be pushed in a double stroller by hubby Mike.

Watters kept Haas in sight for awhile, but the only woman to average sub-6s would arrive at the finish line alone (ala 2003) in 17:45 (5:55 average). Watters, 36, followed in 18:19 with Framingham's Acmae El Yacoubi, 32, copping third in 18:28. Newton's Erin Flynn, 37, arrived fourth in 18:51, with 17 year-old Taylor Pizzone, of Waltham, winning the 15-18 division for a third straight year.

A pesky wind may have kept any course records at bay, although Veteran course record holder John Barbour, 62, of the Greater Lowell RR, laid down a 5:39 pace that brought him within 5-seconds of his own record in 16:57. Placing second was former M60 record holder Bob Giambalvo, 67, of Delhi, NY, with Brookline's James Wilson, 64 (whose son David led the Pub Series early-on) in third and former Williams College track and xc captain Ken Leinbach, 61, of the BAA, in 4th. Pubster William Pine, 64, of Fitzwilliam, NH, was 5th while Veteran Pub Series winner George Braun, 62, had an extremely off day and could only average 7:03 per mile, good only for 6th and an indicator of the divisional depth evident on the day.

Per usual, copious chicken pot pie, hot dogs and brew were in plentiful supply. Shillelaghs, special awards and "thanks" to participants, volunteers and organizers were forthcoming and, to cap off our storybook day, the Patriots beat the Cincinnati Bengals, 35 to 17.

—*Bob Fitzgerald*