

## Rob Rose Column - 1/10/08

I was sitting in a school bus last November waiting to depart from Falmouth Heights to Woods Hole for the Falmouth in the Fall race. As the runners boarded, I couldn't help but notice something that warranted a comment to my friend Mark Young, who was sitting next to me. "It looks as if there are twice as many women on the bus as men", I said. He responded, "I think it's 3 to 1." No doubt we were out numbered. Even the bus driver was a woman. At the conclusion of the race, it was announced that 53% of the field were women. So, what can we read into this?

Whenever I need to decipher what is happening in the running world, I always turn to the 'Oracle'. Fortunately, the 'Oracle' isn't in Nepal but in North Attleboro at DB Sports. Kevin Downing holds court there and as the DB Sports savant, he has the answers. So, 'Oracle', why were all these women on the bus in Falmouth?

"There are definitely more women running these days," the Oracle decreed. "I've seen our sales at DB Sports increase significantly in ladies running shoes over the past year. There are a few reasons for this trend."

"There are many more women first time runners than men. Quite a few of the women are running for fitness only. But I think many of them will go on to competing in road races also. This age group has a range of about 20 - 40 years old."

"Another significant factor is the running organizations that are available such as Team in Training. These organizations coach your training for a particular running event while the person raises money for a certain charity such as the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. The greatest percentage of these participants are women."

This trend may have caught some by surprise but if one looks closely, the tell tale signs have been there for some time. Four years ago, a woman, Kim Thalman, almost won the Run For Humanity 5K in Attleboro. Then in 2005, Trish Hillery won it. It happened again the same year at the Mansfield Boosters 5K when Heather Capello scorched the competition. Four or five years ago, North Attleboro's Mike Renzi alerted us when he said that women were the predominant running presence on Landry Ave. The 'Bettys', a dozen local women strong, won the Reach the Beach 200 Mile Relay in 2004. Personally, I have seen the Wampanoag Road Runner Sunday training runs go from an all-male presence a dozen years ago to where women now sometimes outnumber the men.

Although the Oracle brings us a viewpoint steeped in wisdom, clarity and trenchant thought, he is still a male. Let's look at a woman's perspective on this.

There are few women who have the breadth of running experience of Joyce Barrett. The North Attleboro resident ran the first Bonnie Bell 10K (now the Tufts 10K) in 1977 and will be working on her 32nd consecutive one in October. She spans the running boom and if anyone has seen a noted increase in women running it is she. "Women runners are out there probably more so because they follow a personal commitment that they will have this time for their health, emotionally and physically," she said. "It's more of a thing women can do together, the camaraderie. Rather than having a cup of coffee, they can go for a run." She has seen the Tufts 10K change by seismic degrees over the years, which has filtered down to every day activity. "The numbers have increased immensely," she said of Tufts. "The variety of the field has increased immensely. The women you see in races are there more so because they have this to prove to themselves and to the world they are in. The number of women in races has increased over the years. They want to be visible and continue to support each other."

On New Year's at the Wampanoag Hangover Run, I overheard several of the women talking about the grueling Boston Prep 16 miler in Derry, NH. That race is coming up later this month and they were discussing their plans on carpooling north that day. Another vehicle of women heading for a race. No one should be surprised anymore.

Footnotes - Locals who were selected in the Wampanoag Boston Marathon lottery were Attleboro's Dave 'Double D' Donnelly, North Attleboro's Kim Averill, Sharon Cooper and Roger Stebenne, Foxboro's Jack Martin and Nancy Rue, Wrentham's Brian McGowan and Don Jackson and Mansfield's Kathie Schaaf, Keith Purrier and Barbara Mahoney .... the Runners of the Year Banquet will be on Thursday, Jan. 24 at 7 p.m. at Tom's Tavern in Wrentham; this year's honorees are Attleboro's Chris Elgar, Foxboro's Paula Bishop, Plainville's Ron Farkash, Milford's Larry Olsen, Mansfield's Keith Purrier and North Attleboro's Roger Stebenne and Nancy Watters; call (508-643-9168) or e-mail (LSXPLRER@comcast) if you want to attend .... the Sensata 5K is moving; per race director Doug Strott, the former TI/Dana-Farber 5K is relocating to June 8 from mid October; June was the traditional month for the TI race in Attleboro but the Sensata acquisition was still in process in early 2006, posing a problem for the race committee; they were uncertain whether they could effectively put the race together in the event of a change in their organization and all that entails; after the Sensata deal was completed, they went with an October date just to keep the race alive; after two years it's back home in June ...