

Locals enjoy marathon experience

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ON ROUTE 128 - It's early evening and the bus carrying the Wampanoag Road Runners is steering back to North Attleboro after Monday's Boston Marathon; back to where it all started 12 hours earlier when the day was full of promise.

At 6:30 a.m., Monday morning, the temperature was 30 degrees as 55 marathoners congregated in front of DB Sports in North Attleboro, ready to board the bus to Hopkinton for the 10 a.m. start. Don Burke summed up the general consensus about the bracing start of the day.

"The weather is going to be fine," predicted the Mansfield resident. "Cool temperatures. Can't use the weather for an excuse."

Local runners carried different goals, causes and aspirations into the Patriot's Day classic. Some like Mansfield's Ray Greco were after a qualifying time.

"I'm looking for a 3:15," he said. "I need a 3:20 but I've been sick for two weeks. I'll be okay." Greco's training partner for the past year, Attleboro's Sean McNamara was also targeting the same time. The duo's attempt to qualify last fall was stymied by weather.

"Richmond didn't work out," said McNamara. "It got a little warm down there."

Others were contending with injuries or making amends for prior year disappointments. "We're going to finish at least a minute faster this year," said North Attleboro's Mark Young.

In 2006, Young finished thirty seconds over five hours and he was seeking a finishing time that began with the digit four.

Attleboro's Ann Gagnon and Norfolk's John Curran both had hip injuries that had them tenuous on marathon morning. Gagnon had four consecutive chiropractor sessions last week to get her on the start line.

"I feel okay. He said I can do it." Curran, who once was told by an orthopedist that he should give up running, was stoic about his prospects. "There's lots of people with worst injuries than me."

When the race started, American hopes for Boston laurels were buoyed with Ryan Hall and Kara Goucher in their respective lead packs during the first half of the race. Hall fell out of contention past the 15K mark when Ethiopians Deriba Merga and Solomon Molla surged to the fore. Merga soloed the last six miles to win easily in 2:08:42. Hall placed third in 2:09:40.

Goucher forced the pace until the last 600 meters when Salina Kosgei and Dire Tune powered past her. Kenyan Kosgei nipped Ethiopian Tune by a second in the closest and most exciting Boston finish ever in 2:32:16. Goucher placed third in 2:32:25.

Down the road, locals were gliding, lurching and trundling to the finish line banner. The first area runner to make an appearance there was Norton's Matt Ditrolio with a sterling 2:56:13. Other notable male finishers were, Attleboro's Sean Hanley (3:03:18), Scott Boisjolie (3:06:21) and Harry Pino (3:11:59), Norton's Chris Cappellini (3:07:55), Wrentham's Roland Desrochers (3:14:59), Mansfield's Greg Lowe (3:13:15), Plainville's Ron Farkash (3:15:21) and Norfolk's Ken Beaulieu (3:15:59).

For the second consecutive year, Plainville's Lauren Farkash was the top local woman with a personal best 3:26:57. Other top local women were North Attleboro's Catherine Servant (3:40:05), Sandy Sheehy (3:40:24) and Kim Ashworth (3:47:22), Foxboro's Wendy Nelson (3:43:42), Wrentham's Linda Liljeberg (3:43:54) and Norfolk's Jan Sylvestre (3:49:36). "I had my nutrition figured out and I think I did better training," Farkash said of her break through performance.

Greco and McNamara both had solid efforts but didn't make the qualifying grade.

"I reigned it in," said McNamara of his 3:32:46. "I decided 3:15 wasn't going to happen."

Greco had issues with his illness. "I was good till the half," he said. "After that I got tired and fatigued."

Young was tracking towards a 4:59:59 at 35K but his day also went awry late.

"I felt great for 22 miles," he said. Cramps sidetracked the sub five drive and he had to settle for 5:11:04.

Gagnon and Curran navigated their hip injuries to an injury free finish.

"I did fine," said Gagnon. "I took my time, stayed consistent. I was able to keep myself motivated. I had fun..." but in the next breath added, "I'm not looking to do another marathon for awhile ... or ever."

Curran perhaps had the most successful day of all, attributing his 26.2 mile journey to "better living through ibuprofen."

"It was a tough day, I'm very happy to run," he said. He also qualified for next year's Boston with his 3:52:55 but an incident late in the race may have been the most fortuitous. Coming through Kenmore Square, he tripped and fell but miraculously received only a scratch as he "got up on one bounce and gained a second."

It doesn't hurt to have luck on your side, too.

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