

Cunkelman, Lowman earn top honors in Fools Run

By JED WEISBERGER
Gazette Sports Editor

Clarksburg's Dan Cunkelman, no fool, no siree. He wins 10-K races as easy as A.B.C.

And sometimes the course is so nice that he runs it twice.

Cunkelman, the area's top Olympic hope, celebrated his 28th birthday by running away from 338 other competitors in crisp, sunny weather during Saturday morning's 10-K (6.2-mile) Sixth Annual Fools Run.

To say that Cunkelman, who clocked 31:12 for the 6.2-mile run, outclassed the field would be an understatement. There was a gap of 2:29 between the winner and second-place finisher Gene Ruffner of Derry.

And did Cunkelman stop after 6.2 miles? Heck no. He ran the course in reverse.

In fact, several runners who finished later remarked that Cunkelman encouraged them to "push it" as he went by them on his return trip around the course.

"I like to run about 12-13 miles each day," said Cunkelman, who is admired greatly by all the other running enthusiasts in this area. "Running the course again allowed me to do that."

"I really enjoy this race," he added. "The people of Indiana have been very good to me."

Cunkelman's timetable now points toward the Olympic Marathon Trials, which will be held in Buffalo on May 26. A key stop before that will be a 10-K race in Monroeville in a few weeks that annually features top competition.

He originally hoped to break the 31-minute mark in Saturday's race.

"I was trying to run a faster time," said Cunkelman. "When I don't have a lot of competition I run against myself. There were a few other races this weekend and a lot of the good runners went to those."

But the Fools Run was certainly glad to have Cunkelman, who is to Indiana County distance racing what Abebe Bikila once was to Ethiopia. And he had to be satisfied with what he did, having finished fourth in 32:29 in 1983.

"He's (Cunkelman) just a great runner," remarked Saltsburg High track coach Kevin Judge, who finished in 45:12. "He's really something."

Cunkelman shared the spotlight with Marion Center High girls' track coach Suzy Lowman, considered to be Indiana County's top female distance runner.

Lowman traversed the course in 41:16, besting Sidman's Laurie Cummings by 19 seconds in the battle for the women's championship.

"This was a great day on which to run," Lowman remarked after her triumph. "I like this course because

I'm strong on the hills."

The long trek up Grandview Avenue usually separates the men from the boys (or women from the girls) in this race.

"I feel I can beat most of my competition on the hills," Lowman added. "If I'm ahead when it comes to downhills or level areas I think I've got them beat."

Did Lowman see Cunkelman on the course at all?

"Yeah," she answered. "I saw him after about two miles. He was way out ahead of everyone."

Both Cunkelman and Lowman received Dan McGinnis Trophies, named for the founder of the Fools Run who has since left the area.

In an event like this, many of the stories come from those who finish behind the leaders, runners who decide to compete for the first time or for the fun of it.

Jerry Traylor, a Clarksburg, W.Va., cerebral palsy victim, who has participated in the Fools Run several times, did not compete, but Gene Blue, a blind runner from Johnstown did.

Not only did Blue run, guided by friend James Huston, but he finished in 1:10.45.

"You find all kinds of things happening with the people who finish in 50 minutes or more," said Gene Bi-cego, one of the race's directors.

Shawn Mogle of Indiana, an 11-year-old, finished in 1:04.

"I just like to run," he remarked.

All of the participants seem to enjoy the sunny, 47-degree weather, which just about all pronounced perfect for running. After the flurries and rain of the previous days, the blue skies were quite welcome.

Race officials were hoping for about 500 runners, but seemed satisfied with the 339 that competed.

"We had over 500 last year," said Jim Johnson, another of the race's

directors, "but what we ended up with is good for a small town."

Johnson also seemed to agree with the opinion that not as many individuals are entering such races compared to the figures a few years ago.

"I'm still running a lot myself," said Johnson, "but I'm not always looking for a race. I don't think there are fewer runners, just that runners are being more selective about what races they enter."

One of the races in the Tri State Area that the Fools Run was in competition this past weekend featured Frank Shorter. That in itself would

draw numerous competitors.

And there was the weather. Certainly a lot of recreational runners have not wanted to battle the kind of elements seen around here throughout March.

"I really feel we did okay with the amount of runners we had," remarked Tom Knapp, another race director.

Cunkelman and Lowman may have been the big winners, but nobody involved in Saturday's operation would be fooling if they expressed satisfaction with their efforts.

No siree.

GRAFFITI — The race was sponsored by the Downtown Indiana Businessmen's Association and Indiana Recreation and Parks Department...The Indiana Road Runners Club conducted the race...Indiana High principal Dan Cilo finished in 57:24, while Indiana County United Way official Bob Derry was the top Indiana County finisher in the 60- above category...Johnstown's Steve Molnar won the 1983 run, in rainy weather...In all, 99 awards were given out...Saltsburg area people are looking to form a runners' club.



Clarksburg's Dan Cunkelman, left, and Chambersville's Suzy Lowman shared top honors in Saturday's Fools Run. Cunkelman hit the Philadelphia Street finish line first overall in 31:12, while Lowman was the first female, clocking 41:16. (Gazette photos by Bechtel)

FOOLS RUN RESULTS

Top 10 Men

Dan Cunkelman (Clarksburg), 31:12; Gene Ruffner (Derry), 32:41; Mark Gardner (Sidman), 33:50; Lee Foster (St. Marys), 34:00; Mike Gallo (Indiana), 34:53; David Gray (Johnstown), 35:07; Scott Hummer (Indiana), 35:16; John Horne (Expor), 35:22; Lance Williams (Ligonier), 35:39; Mark Griffin (Greensburg), 35:49.

Top 5 Women

Suzy Lowman (Chambersville), 41:16; Laurie Cummings (Sidman), 41:35; Sara Pickering (Indiana), 41:51; Kathy Folsen (Indiana), 43:22; Pat Garreff (Mt. Pleasant), 44:50.

Age Group Winners

Men

15-Under: Eddie Fitchek, 37:10; 16-19: Tom Shilling, 36:34; 20-24: Mike Hale, 35:54; 25-29: Robert Palas, 36:00; 30-34: Dennis Mizkar, 36:30; 35-39: William Lint, 36:26; 40-49: Bob Wilberbough, 37:44; 50-59: Harry Lyons, 41:51; 60-over: Joe Federick, 47:03.

Women

15-Under: Beth Peltus, 55:35; 16-22: Kathy Wright, 48:04; 23-29: Kathleen Pavlich, 45:01; 30-34: Gayle Maschue, 53:20; 35-39: Tina DeLuia, 49:30; 40-49: Barbara Hanley, 49:06.

INDIANA COUNTY WINNERS

Men

15-Under: Bob Welers, 20:24; Ray Gregory, 20:24; Edward Hoock, 35:39; 30-34: John Clams, 40:49; Robert Coy, 50:39; Charles Ryan, 60-over: Bob Derry.

Women

15-Under: Beth Peltus, 16:20; Sara Pickering, 30:34; Sharon Santos, 35:39; Kristine Melshen, 40:49; Anna Marchielli, 50:40; 60-entries.

A writer finds a companion — and success — in Run

By SHARON SANTUS
Gazette Staff Writer

I had been running for 19 months, but a race — well that was something else again.

Why did I enter the Fools Run? After all, I had never been in a race before and the 6.2-mile course was farther than I had ever run.

On the other hand, it seemed a shame not to take advantage of a race held in my own back yard.

So I got up my gumption and plunked down my \$3 registration fee two days before the race.

A half-hearted walk-run attempt in the Fools Run about five years ago ended at the three-mile mark at the house of a friend who found a groaning, sweaty, pathetic heap at the foot of his basement stairs.

I knew things should be different as I stood at the starting line a few minutes before 10 Saturday morning. I had run a good part of the course Tuesday, but had not done the leg inside Mack Park since I wasn't sure where to go. So I had run about 5.2 miles Tuesday in 52 minutes. I figured I could add another nine minutes for the Mack Park section and I hoped to finish the race in a little more than an hour.

The serious runners toed the starting line between Seventh and Eighth streets on Philadelphia and I made my way to the rear. The few seconds I would lose before crossing the starting line wouldn't make much difference.

I would be happy just to finish the race in my 60-plus minutes.

At the starting gun, the sea of runners moved forward, taking a left at the Book Nook and running down Eighth before taking a short right onto School and a left onto Pratt Drive.

It wasn't long before I had the disconcerting feeling that almost all 338 runners were ahead of me. I was afraid to look back for fear my suspicions would be confirmed and dejection would overcome me.

I fought the urge to surge ahead, trying to maintain my normal running pace. In some "So This is Your First Race" reading that Tom Knapp, a friend and member of the Indiana Road Runners Club, had

given me the day before, I knew that the urge to keep up with the leaders could prove disastrous at the end.

We headed down to Seventh Street and into Mack Park where I discovered that the route was longer than I had thought. It included a rather strenuous grade up Hospital Road before taking a left at the pool and heading back by the pavilion before exiting onto Carter Avenue. I figured my finishing time would likely be 62-63 minutes now.

A few turns later we were heading up Grandview, and I do mean up Grandview — a hill of about a half mile.

It was here that I first met Harry Nelson.

I had heard Harry clearing his throat and coming up on my right shoulder before I actually saw him. He wore a roll-up hat and his traditional gray sweat suit matched his short grey beard. I figured him to be in his mid 50s.

He said something about the sunny weather and I said something back about "Dead Man's Hill" coming up. I regretted it as soon as I had said it. I actually was trying to psych this man whose only fault, for all I knew, was making comments about the weather. And it seemed to work as Harry dropped back a few paces, but it wasn't long before we were matching strides again.

No talking now as we kept our heads down, shortened out paces, breathed hard and strained up the hill. Harry and I made the crest together and congratulated each other. As we headed up and down the back road to East Pike, I learned that Harry had been running for about two years. He also said his wife had told him he would do better in races if he didn't talk so much. I told him it was my first race

and he said I was doing very well. His comments seemed genuine and gave me an extra push.

At the top of the hill, Harry suggested we stretch our strides down the hill and I complied.

"See that guy in the green up there?" Harry asked.

I was feeling good about passing the runners and decided to treat myself by falling off Harry's grueling pace a bit.

"Come on!" Harry ordered looking back over his left shoulder. Startled, I responded and caught up. We were about at the three-mile mark and it occurred to me that Harry was determined that we finish the race together at his harsh pace.

Having run down Philadelphia Street, we turned left and ran up south Third Street for eight blocks, a steep grade and I was ready to slacken up when I hit four-mile mark at the top. Harry had other plans.

"You're doing good," Harry said. "Now let's leg out this last part."

We ran down Grant in what seemed to be an all-out sprint. I was drained and the grade ahead up to Pratt Drive looked like a mountain.

Harry looked at a pack of runners several yards ahead.

"Do you think we can catch them?" Harry asked.

"No," I answered in what was meant to be a terse response but was barely audible in my exhausted state.

We crossed Wayne Avenue and



A newcomer to road racing, Gazette staffer Sharon Santus looked strong at the finish in Saturday's Fools Run. (Gazette photo by Bechtel)

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