

At The Races: TD Banknorth Beach to Beacon

Perfect Upsets

By Candace Karu

As featured in the November 2006 issue of Running Times Magazine

Runners who flock to this coastal Maine town have come to expect perfection from the 10K founded by native daughter and Olympian Joan Benoit Samuelson. Since its inception, Samuelson and the other organizers have eschewed quantity for quality, limiting the field to a size they felt could be provided with the best racing experience possible. The ninth annual TD Banknorth Beach to Beacon did not disappoint. Even the weather, the one element beyond the control of the organizers, cooperated this year. On a gorgeous summer day with temperatures and humidity hovering near the almost-perfect level, thousands of spectators were treated to upsets in both the men's and women's races.

Fresh off intense training in her native Russia, Alventina Ivanova smoked the competition, breaking Catherine Ndereba's five-year-old course record of 31:33 by seven seconds. After the first mile Ivanova pulled away from a pack that included Edna Kiplagat, Luminita Talpos, and last year's winner Susan Chepkemei. Running alone in the dappled sunlight along the rocky Maine coastline, Ivanova made the win look easy, finishing in 31:26. Second place went to Kiplagat, followed by Talpos.

Chepkemei, who was favored going into the race after her win the previous week at Bix, came in a distant fourth. She complained of being tired after cancelled flights extended her trip from Denver to Portland to some 20 hours, including an 11 hour wait at Washington's Dulles airport. "I got a phone call at 1 a.m. Friday from Susan, saying she'd just arrived at the airport," Samuelson related.

On the men's side, 34-year-old Tom Nyariki of Kenya doggedly pursued a lead pack that included Evans Cheruiyot, Lawrence Kiprotich, and his training partner and three-time Beach to Beacon winner Gilbert Okari through the first four miles of the race. His patience and persistence paid off as he passed Cheruiyot and Kiprotich in mile four, with his sights set on Okari, who had spent much of the early part of the race weaving from side to side on the road, in an effort to lose his pursuers. "It is one of the tactics," said Nyariki of Okari's moves, "but you use a lot of energy. I could see that he was getting tired." Nyariki overtook Okari in the fourth mile, then pulled away to break the tape in the shade of the Portland Headlight in 27:48, followed in quick succession by Kiprotich and Okari.

Nyariki's victory could be considered the stuff of made-for-TV movies. In 2003 he was carjacked in his native Kenya and sustained life-threatening injuries, eventually losing the sight in his right eye. The spirit and determination he showed in his recovery is reflected in his training and in his demeanor. Though he has some residual difficulty with his balance, it's obvious his speed has not been affected. "I was not expecting to win," he said. "I came to better my time. As you know these guys are young. I'm the oldest [34] in the field."

The post-race festivities and awards ceremony were held on the crest of a hill overlooking Casco Bay. On this particular day runners, spectators, friends and family all agreed with the state motto: Maine — the way life should be.

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