

YATOR AND DESTA DOMINATE THE PVI RUNFEST 5K OKEMWA AND HARVEY BOTH SET NEW MASTER RECORDS

By George Banker

“I thought I was going to get Jynocel (third place) but I ran out of room. It was cool doing the loop almost like a track. I went out 4:37 for the first mile a little fast for me. The leaders started to break up before the second loop”, stated Steve Meinelt, a 2005 graduate of Georgetown University. His best outdoor 5K in 2005 was 14:18.5 and 2006 best indoor was 14:20.6.

Meinelt was making his debut at the 7th Annual PVI Runfest 5K on September 17, 2006 in Fairfax, Va., the most competitive 5K in Northern Virginia. The USATF certified two-loop course starts and finishes at the Paul VI Catholic High School. The top open and master runners (male and female) were going after \$4,900 in a cash purse.

The 2006 race was dedicated to Paula DeAvies a friend and PVI parent.

The lead pack included Kenyans runners Jacob Yator, Wilson Chebet, and Jynocel Basweti (5K PR of 13:48). Going into the second loop Yator and Chebet pulled away to gap the trailing runners. The two began to match stride and down to the last 200 meters it was a kicking contest. Yator had the stronger kick and took first in 14:21 (the two had the same time and Yator was awarded the win). Basweti held off the challenge by Meinelt to take third in 14:38 to 14:40. The event record was set in 2003 by Mohammed Amyn of Morocco in 13:54, the only runner to have gone under 14 minutes.

“I thought the level of competition was great. It’s good to see that many elite runners in one race. I didn’t have a specific strategy in mind. I really just wanted to go out there and see what I could do. I lost the lead pack early on (800 meters in) and ran the rest of the race by myself. I am happy with the performance and I really felt strong. The course was more challenging than I had expected. The location of the hill makes it really tough especially on the second loop when you have to go up the hill again with less than a half mile to go”, stated Dave Berdan of Baltimore, Md., the sixth place finisher in 15:12.

There was a heated three-way contest in the women’s division; Jennifer Chesinon of Kenya was going head-to-head with Alemgana Desta of Ethiopia and Philles Moriti of Kenya. Chesinon has a marathon best time of 2:31:35 (2003).

Into the second loop Chesinon and Desta pulled ahead to gap Moriti. The trailing runner was the lead master, Alisa Harvey of Manassas, Va., the winner of the first PVI Runfest in 2000 (17:35 at age 35).

The real battle started in the last 200 meters between Desta and Chesinon as the two entered the school yard. Chesinon was trying to close the slight gap but ran out of room. Desta captured the win in 16:45 (\$400) to 16:46 (\$300). Moriti captured third in 16:51

(\$200). This was the closest win in the history of the race. Also, the first time the top three females were under 17 minutes.

The men masters division saw a local match up of David Berardi of Baltimore, Md., top master in 2003 (16:26) and Chris Chattin of Columbia, Md., the top master in 2004 (16:27). The challenger this year was Albert Okemwa of Kenya. The event record was set in 2001 (15:38) by John Tuttle of Douglasville, Ga.

Into the first mile, Okemwa proved to be the runner to watch as a gap formed early as he trailed the leaders in fifth place. He maintained place and time to capture first master with a record time of 15:07 and collected \$200 for the win and the \$200 bonus for the record. Berardi finished in second with 16:43 (\$100) followed by Chattin in third place with 16:44 (\$75).

The women masters included the former two-winner and former record holder, Maria Spinnler of Hagerstown, Md., (2003-18:35, 2004-18:53), and current record holder Alisa Harvey of Manassas, Va. (2005-17:48). The added attraction was Martha Merz who has relocated from Mystic, Conn., now living in Annandale, Va.

Harvey was off to a fast start as she maintained distance off the leaders and slightly ahead of Erin Swain of Clifton, Va., a graduate from North Carolina State University. She has a 5K best of 16:56.

Harvey not only captured the \$200 master's win but another \$200 for the master's record of 17:27. Merz was the second master in 18:37 (\$100) followed by Spinnler in third with 19:12 (\$75).

“The level of competition was impressive, the Africans, former Georgetown runner, and top masters. I was pretty pumped-up just knowing that there were fast women to chase. The race was wonderfully organized, professional and a pleasure to compete in,” stated Harvey.

She adds, “My tactics were the same as always. Tough course, had to conserve on first loop, but I was more confident this year than last year since I have been training harder. My first mile was 5:33. I knew I was being stalked by Erwin Swain. I did have a touch of fatigue in my legs from last weekend's Fair Lakes 8K.”

“The competition based on times was very high class, especially with the top four runners that were in the field. The top three were sort of in their own race, but gave the race a high level of competition. I wanted to run under 18 minutes, since I mostly have been running 8Ks and 10Ks mostly this year. I wanted to try and go out and run evenly paced (which I didn't but hopefully next time)”, stated Erwin Swain of Clifton, Va., finished in fifth with 17:59.

Swain adds, “I went out pretty hard to get a position in the race and I think stayed in fourth place the whole race. I wish I could have been closer to third place and run more

like 17:45. The course was great and wish I would of taken advantage and run more evenly paced. My first mile was 5:37. I enjoyed the race, excellent food/drinks afterwards (especially the Panera bread!!), liked how the t-shirts were lime green instead of just white as at most races, great prizes!”

Congressman Tom Davis (Virginia) completed the event in 29:40. He is a regular supporter and runner of the event.

There were new age group records set for the following:

Females- 25-29 by Alemgana Desta (16:45), 40-44 by Alisa Harvey (17:27), 45-49 Win Persina (19:59). Males – 40-44 Albert Okemwa (15:07).

The PVI Runfest is sponsored by Clarke-Hook Corporation, Pohanka Automotive Group, emblemax, Ruby Tuesday, The Business Bank, and others.