

Elite 8 for Olympia's Stevick; women's champ is first-timer

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By Meg Wochnick

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If you know Jesse Stevick well, you know that his pre-marathon preparation 24 hours before the annual Capital City Marathon can be hectic.

He's on his feet all day coaching Olympia High School's distance runners at the 4A Narrows League track and field championships, like he was Thursday and Saturday at Shelton High School. And on the morning of the marathon, he hauls around a duffel bag, scouring a place to change into his racing gear minutes before the start, like he did 13 minutes prior to Sunday's 7 a.m. marathon began.

That's the norm for Stevick.

"It's fairly standard," he said.

It was all just part of another Capital City Marathon victory Sunday morning for Stevick, an Olympia native, teacher and coach. Wearing the signature '1' race number reserved for the previous year's winner, he clocked a winning time of 2 hours, 35 minutes, 47 seconds on the 26.2-mile course. He's now the Capital City's all-time leader in victories with eight.

With the exception of 2010, Stevick has won every marathon dating to 2006. Local product Karen Steen won seven between 1996 and 2005.

Stevick, whose win was 7 minutes faster than runner-up Bret Withers of Seattle (2:42.43), said he never felt comfortable with the lead, given recent races. In the previous two years, Stevick was challenged late — by Lacey's Josh Klimek (2012) in what was the closest finish in the marathon's now-33-year-history, and last year when Capital High graduate Jordan Swarthout kept pace with Stevick through Mile 22.

"The last two years have been really freaky," Stevick said. "I did not feel comfortable in any way. I assume the whole time they're closing (in)."

He, Withers and Klimek were the clear front-runners early on approaching Mile 4 at the water station near 36th Avenue and Gull Harbor Road Northeast. Stevick began to separate from the pack after 9 miles.

Mercer Island native Caitlyn Olson, 27, was the women's winner (3:21.47) as a first-time marathon participant. She described herself as a recreational runner after her cross-country days at Mercer Island High School, but has prior experience in half-marathons. Olson chose Capital City as her inaugural marathon because of the end-of-semester timing at Harvard, where she's studying for a doctorate in Middle East history — plus wanting her first marathon to be in her home state.

And Olympia didn't disappoint.

“My brother and I had the chance to drive the course, (Saturday) and I was blown away with how beautiful it is,” said Olson, who plans to study in Jordan this fall and hopes to be a college professor.

Mandi Risler of Eleva, Wis., had a similar experience as the women’s half-marathon winner. When she booked her trip out west to visit friends in Tacoma, she also got the urge to run a half-marathon, experiencing similar terrain but in a new part of the country.

“I liked the rolling hills because that’s where I’m from,” Risler said. “What got me was the hill between (miles) 9 and 10.”

Expect a return trip for Risler.

“Definitely,” she said.

One of the more inspirational stories came from 34-year-old Ryan Kelling of Wenatchee. Kelling, competing in a wheelchair, became paralyzed from the chest down in August 2012 from a construction accident. Figuring he’d give marathons a try on a handbike with the hopes of qualifying for an upcoming Paralympics, he’s on a journey to race one marathon a month. Capital City was his second; his inaugural race was the Yakima River Canyon Marathon on April 5.

“Step one is going to a few marathons to see if you love it or hate it,” said Kelling, whose time was 1:58.45, good for a 4:32 per-mile pace.

Lakewood’s Brandon Myers (1:12.56) won the men’s half-marathon. The 5.2-mile winners were Puyallup’s Rick Bogatay (27:05) for men and Olympia’s Lauren Coleman (34:04) for women.

Marathon notes

In conjunction with the 30th anniversary of the 1984 U.S. Olympic Women’s Marathon Trials, held on the streets of Thurston County, Lacey resident Angela French gave a pre-race speech and was the honorary starter for the marathon. French participated in the inaugural women’s marathon trials in ’84, one of six total Olympic trials she participated in. The Capital City Marathon course was used for the ’84 trials. ... The marathon’s youngest finisher — 17-year-old Olympia High junior John Teters — ran a personal-best time of 4:04.01 to place 111th overall. ... Sunday marked the 30th Capital City Marathon for Olympia’s Jim Thatcher (7:14.30). ... A total of 274 men and women finished the marathon, race officials said; 1,005 runners finished the half-marathon.

Meg Wochnick: 360-754-5473; mwochnick@theolympian.com; @MegWochnick;
theolympian.com/southsoundsports