

1988 Labor Day Road Race

Records tumble in fall-like air

5-kilometer marks take a beating

By Chuck Thompson
Macon Telegraph and News

Records fell Monday in the 5-kilometer portion of the Macon Labor Day Road Race.

Milledgeville's Sam Shirley won the men's race in 14 minutes, 44 seconds to carve 12 seconds off the record of 14:56, set by Robert Brooks in 1986. And Hapeville's Connie Robertson set a record in the women's division with a 17:31, five seconds faster than the 17:36 turned in last year by Kelly Cook of Atlanta.

A total of 638 runners participated in the 5-kilometer race.

Shirley, seeded second, pulled ahead of defending champion and No. 1 seed Shelly Cranford of Cochran about 1½ miles into the 3.1-mile race and never looked back. Cranford finished second in 14:57. He ran a 15:04 last year.

Robertson also was the leader the whole way in the women's division, but she had to sprint to the finish to hold off late-charging Susann Pierce of Mobile, Ala., who finished two seconds back with a 17:33.

Shirley was hard to find after the race. He gave his race number to a friend and quickly changed into blue jeans and an old t-shirt.

"To tell the truth, I'm a little embarrassed that I won," he said. "I enjoy running, and I like to run fast, but I don't take racing as seriously as some of these other guys."

Shirley said he used to put a lot of pressure on himself and had a tendency to burn out. But now, he said, "I'm just running to enjoy myself."

"I was in pain there at the end but I didn't really push myself. I feel I could have run a 14:15 or a 14:20."

His previous best time in a 5-kilometer race was 15:15. "I've been running in this race for years, but I've never won before," he said.

Shirley, 27, builds air conditioners for Rheem in Milledgeville. He is a native of Warner Robins and was the state 2-mile champion in 1979, his senior year at Warner Robins High School.

Robertson and Pierce, who also ran personal bests, were a bit more enthused about their performances.

"I'm glad I could hold her off," Robertson said of her narrow victory over Pierce. "I didn't realize she was back there until she almost caught me."

Said Pierce: "I waited a little to late to start my kick I didn't catch up to her until about two miles into the race. I waited to kick until I entered the park. I should have started sooner."

Robertson, 26, was second last year with a 13:57, losing a sprint to the finish with Cook. Cook, who also won the race in 1986, did not participate this year.

"This is one of my favorite places to run," Robertson said. "It's definitely the fastest course for a 5K. I always run 25 to 30 seconds faster than normal here. I really wanted to set a record here. I had hoped to run a 17:25, but I didn't feel real good. I was a little tired; I haven't slept real good the last couple of nights."

In the men's race, Dan Lassiter was third with a 15:26, James Finney fourth with a 15:29 and Jim Westmoreland was fifth with a 15:35.

Venable defends title; Bird returns a winner

By Steve Elkins

Macon Telegraph and News

Two former champions won the 10-kilometer portion of the Labor Day Road Race on Monday.

Steve Venable of Jefferson took the men's 10-kilometer for the second straight year, with a time of 30 minutes, eight seconds. Kim Bird of Newnan won her third Labor Day Road race in three tries, in 35:24.

Venable, a 29-year-old computer operator, took the lead at about the 2½-mile mark and cruised in, beating second-place John Devine of Albany by 35 seconds. Venable's time was 22 seconds off the men's record, set by Kevin Moats, who ran a 29:46 in 1982. Venable beat his own time from last year's race by 19 seconds.

Bird, 27, led from beginning to end and ran away from the women's field. She finished more than 1½ minutes ahead of second-place Karen Macharg of Tallahassee. Bird was 41 seconds off Shirley Silsby's 1980 record of 34:43. Bird won the 10-kilometer in 1985 and 1986 and skipped the race last year because the men's trophies were larger than the women's. This year's trophies were the same size, so Bird made a victorious return. Her run lowered her previous best Macon time of 36:37 by more than one minute.

Gary Jenkins won the men's masters division for runners 40 and over with a time of 32:25. Jeanine Hansen took the women's masters title in 43:26.

The road race was designated as the state championship 10-kilometer meet, so Venable and Bird are the Georgia champs. Three state records were set — Don Mullins in the men's 50-54 division with a 35:01, Dick Benson in the men's 60-and-over division with a 38:14 and Mary Dennis in the women's 60-and-over in 60:00.

The race was run in 63-degree weather, which ties the lowest temperature in race history. A total of 730 runners competed in the 10-kilometer races.

Venable said he took a chance by jumping into the lead at 2½ miles.

"I ran the first mile a bit slower than last year. But I felt comfortable the whole way. I decided to take the lead and it worked out all right. I made the top of the hill at four miles feeling good. I took a look behind me, and at that point, I knew I had it made."

Finishing behind Venable and Devine were Todd Smoot of Marietta, Randy Hoyles of San Clemente, Calif., and former champion Adam Pinkston of Asheville, N.C.

Bird, who stayed undefeated in the Labor Day race, said the course seemed particularly fast.

"I'm not in really good shape. I'm more of an October runner. I know one thing. I'd like to run this course at the end of October and see how I could do," she said.

Bird was relieved that men and women finally received the same size trophies.

"When I won here the first time (in 1985), I saw that the trophies were bigger for the men. I made a point of mentioning it. I figured they would correct it. But I came back the next year, and the situation was the same. So I told them I wouldn't be back until it was changed. I've seen it a few times at other meets and I try to make a point of not running in races like that. Women train just as hard as the male runners."

Female age-group state championship winners were Molly Hudson (ages 15-19), Susan White (20-24), Amelia Haselden (25-29), Gina Hinton (30-34), Bonnie Koontz (35-39), Carol Fullington (40-44), Arnita Harris (45-49), Clair Mattox (50-54) and Mary Dennis (60-and-over).

Male age-group winners Joe Abercrombie (10-14), Matt Daniels (15-19), Jim McQuade (20-24), Todd Dixon (25-29), George Pierce (30-34), Al Aberson (35-39), Richard Boggs (40-44), John Toole (45-49), Don Mullins (50-54), Alex Benson (55-59) and Dick Benson (60-and-over).

Wheelchair victory caps Greene's comeback

By Kelly Villiers

Macon Telegraph and News

Early Monday morning, it didn't appear that conditions would be too good for the three wheelchair racers in the Labor Day Road Race.

"I woke up at about two o'clock in the morning and looked outside, and I thought 'Man, it's going to be raining,'" Jimmy Greene of Snellville said. "But these were perfect conditions out here this morning."

With a temperature of 63 degrees and dry roads at race time, conditions were optimal for the wheelchair racers. And it was a

near-perfect race for Greene, who was the first of the three wheelchair racers to roll into Central City Park. Greene's time was 27:44, nearly a minute-and-a-half faster than the previous record.

Coming in second was Eric Maxwell, a law student at Mercer University, with a time of 29:15. Macon's Phillip Mann was third in 31:31.

Greene, one of America's better wheelchair racers, hadn't competed in the Labor Day Race the past two years. He was one of 15 invited to the 1984 Olympic Trials, but didn't make the team. Afterward, he battled health problems and lost interest in the sport.

But recently, Greene rededicated himself to his sport.

Greene said the toughest part of the course was the first part of the race, which included a 115-foot climb near Wesleyan College.

"The scariest part was coming over that (1-75) bridge," he said. "There are a lot of bumps there."

Greene said he liked the Macon course, though it was a bit bumpy.

"It's a fast course," he said. "At Peachtree (Road Race), the roads are smoother. If they'd resurface some of the roads here, it'd be a lot better."

Mann, who has competed in the Macon race since 1979, was a bit concerned when he caught up to some of the runners in the 5-kilometer race, even though each wheelchair racer had a bicycle escort. A police car with a siren also was out ahead.

"Some of the 5K runners who had slowed down and were walking didn't hear us," he said.

Mann had hoped to break 30 minutes after finishing in 30:33 last year.

"I really thought I'd break 30 minutes," said Mann, a Bibb County Sheriff. "But that's something to look forward to."