

Nelson turns 5K into sprint; O'Bryant never

By Chris Hughes
The Macon Telegraph

It was going to take a real kick to beat Alvin Nelson in the 5K race at the 20th Olympic Labor Day Road Race but despite battling with the leader the final 800 meters, Patrick Samples wasn't able to do it.

On a muggy Labor Day morning, Nelson outsprinted Samples in the final 10 meters for his first Labor Day Road Race victory with a time of 15:41.

After finishing second last year and placing more emphasis on training, the sprint might have been the best situation Nelson could have asked for.

"I had trained the last two months in that specific thing by doing 200 and 100s on the track," said Nelson, who lives in Waycross. "So just in case this happened, I'd be ready for it and it happened. This was my biggest 5K of the year, so this is the one I had really prepared for."

While Nelson's preparation for the sprint helped him to overtake Samples, there was little he could do with the other major factor in the race — the weather.

"The road was slippery, the humidity was high," Nelson said. "It was real sticky, but it was a good run."

"Patrick was leading the whole way. He led up to about the two and a half mile mark. I said either I go with him or I give it to him and last year I gave it away."

Said Samples, who came from Atlanta with the Adidas Retail Team, "we were dogfighting it out and he pulled up beside me and I knew I had no kick left. He had a really strong kick. I knew he was on me the entire race."

Nelson began running 14 years ago, when he was in college, and his hobby has taken him to the top of this year's class of runners.

"I had a shot at the Olympics, but I got injured and my job wouldn't let me off," Nelson said. "So I kind of settled to just running races. You get runners' high and you stay with it. You keep going and you don't know why you do it, you just keep running."

There was no sprint needed by the women's 5K winner. Emily O'Bryant blew away the competition, overcame the weather and used the win to top off a homecoming.

O'Bryant lived in Macon for 18 months before moving to Gainesville, Ga., four years ago.

"It's really humid out here, but I love the course," said O'Bryant, who finished with a time of 17:58 and represented the Atlanta Track Club. "The humidity was pretty bad. I was hoping to run faster."

Said runner up Jean Long, "From the start she (O'Bryant) was gone. I was hoping there was no one com-

ing up behind me."

While the humidity was able to slow down O'Bryant's time, her experience made her an easy favorite to win the relatively downhill course. Growing up in Knoxville, Tenn., and running at Tennessee-Chattanooga, O'Bryant has trained on far more hills than the Macon course offered.

"We ran a lot of hills there (Chattanooga)," said O'Bryant. "I like this course because it does have a lot of downhill. I'm used to the uphill and downhill."

O'Bryant, who finished third the only other time she's raced in Macon on Labor Day, was moving up in distance from her college days where she mainly ran the mile.

"I like this distance," O'Bryant said. "It's good for me."

Men's 5K top 10

1. Alvin Nelson	15:41
2. Patrick Samples	15:45
3. John Kirksey	15:55
4. Jeff Galloway	16:02
5. Billy Skinner	16:07
6. Jason Barker	16:08
7. Mike O'Donnell	16:35
8. Allen McAdams	16:35
9. Van Clark	16:45
10. Henry Wolfe	16:46

Women's 10K top 10

1. Jill Hargis	36:30
2. Susan Huff	37:48
3. Maggie Visser	39:06
4. Sherri Hintz	39:08
5. Jenny Kyle	39:25
6. Suni Heaton	39:31
7. Tracey Harrell	41:05
8. Lori Nowaczyk	41:10
9. Betty McBrayer	42:31
10. Gwen Wilkes	42:42

Men's 10K top 10

1. Adam Pinkston	32:13
2. David Mayo	33:55
3. Robert Gerrard	34:22
4. Bill Causey	34:46
5. Randall Roland	34:55
6. Ricky Austin	35:13
7. Alfie Cronin	35:23
8. Spencer Martin	35:28
9. Luther VerSteege	35:57
10. Chuck Howard	36:34

Women's 5K top 10

1. Emily O'Bryant	18:00
2. Jean Long	19:25
3. Kim Drosky	20:00
4. Carolyn Mather	20:06
5. Jennifer Clarke	20:15
6. Michie Pitts	20:25
7. Denise Cravey	20:42
8. Gloria Barron	20:42
9. Claudia Norton	20:54
10. Jennifer McClung	21:19

10K races

Training partners top 2 finishers in wheelchair race

By J.J. Cooper
The Macon Telegraph

They train together, and they know each other's strengths and weaknesses. So when Robyn Martin reached the Forsyth Road bridge over I-75 ahead of Leonard Johnson, he knew that the wheelchair race was his to win.

Martin, a Lugoff, S.C. native, is smaller than Johnson and is quicker on the gradual inclines and level road. But Johnson's upper body strength and weight gives him the advantages on the steep downhill portions of the course. Martin finished two and one-half minutes ahead of Johnson with a time of 31:22 over the 10K course.

"We were close going into the first hill and he passed me," Martin said. "I got him back (quickly). From there on out, I pulled a little bit away, and then on the downhills he would catch me. There just wasn't enough hill for him."

Johnson said that he knew he wouldn't catch Martin when he wasn't even with him at the crest of the hill just past the bridge over I-75.

"I knew I just couldn't catch him. I was trying to get even with him there. If I had, I may have been able to catch him. I hung with him better than I thought I would," Johnson said.

Martin won the race two years ago. There were six wheelchair racers in the field this year, compared to only one last year.

The rainy conditions slowed the race for all of the competitors.

"Rain kills chairs. The gloves don't grip, you don't get traction with the gloves on the wheels," Martin said.

Tina Hawker was the only woman in the wheelchair race.

By J.J. Cooper
The Macon Telegraph

It seems there is only one way Atlanta's Jill Hargis will ever relinquish her Olympic Labor Day Road Race 10K title — she may switch to the 5K next year.

That would be good news for the rest of the 10K field and a nightmare for the 5K runners, as Hargis reaffirmed her dominance with her third consecutive Labor Day Road Race victory with a time of 36:30. Second-place Susan Huff finished more than a minute behind at 37:47.

Adam Pinkston of Asheville, N.C., won his fourth men's title with a time of 31:12. Like Hargis, Pinkston never was pressed, finishing more than a minute ahead of second-place David Mayo (32:16).

The humid morning slowed everyone's time. The women's race record of 34:43, set by Shirley Silsby in 1980 and the men's record of 29:46, was set by Kevin Moats in 1982.

Hargis ran a quick 6:05 first mile and then pushed her way through the nearly 95 percent humidity for the easy win. Her husband, Eric Hargis, was third in his age group in the 5K.

"My husband and I come down and he runs the 5K and I run the 10K. Next year I may run the 5K. Everyone says that it's really fast," Hargis said.

Hargis ran away from the rest of the women's field in the first two miles. Huff said she was unable to keep Hargis in sight for the last few miles.

"I went out real quick," Hargis said. "I didn't think there were any women around me after that. I tried to push it, but I was a little more tired than I was last year. This was a good effort."

The win was Pinkston's fourth Labor Day title, even though he said it was not one of his best races. Last season he finished second to Michael Strickland after leading for much of the first half of the race.

Pinkston, who grew up in Macon, hoped that it would rain to alleviate the humidity and mugginess. When it didn't Pinkston labored through the thick air.

"The humidity really got me. Being from Asheville we don't get humidity like this," Pinkston said. "I really wanted to go out good the first mile. It wasn't there today. Everything that could bother me, bothered me. I was breathing hard from the first mile."

Pinkston's time was 1:30 off his personal best.

The long run

Event, marking its 20th year, has become a reunion for some runners

By Amy Frazier
The Macon Telegraph

The Olympic Labor Day Road Race turned 20 on Monday, and a group of about 15 runners have been with it every step of the way.

Some of those 20-year race veterans have seen enthusiasm for the annual event increase through the years.

Edward Durham, 52, of Macon, said the spirit of the race didn't get in high gear until the event's third year.

"The first two years were a struggle," he said. "But that third year, everyone was really helping each other out. It's just snowballed since then."

When the race began in 1977, fewer than 400 runners took part. Gradually, more people joined the race — with 750 runners in 1978 and 1,100 in 1979. An estimated 1,600 runners competed this year.

The competition has changed, with the addition of the 5K race in 1985.

"I'm a slow runner, but there would always be plenty of people in back of me (during the 10K race)," said 71-year-old

Turner Gaughf from Macon. "But after they added the 5K, there didn't seem to be any more slow runners in the 10."

Gaughf had been in the 10K for the first 19 races. But this year, for health reasons, he dropped back and ran the 5K.

After so many years of running, he hated the thought of missing a race. "I still could have run the 10, it's just that it would have taken me so long to finish," he said. Not only have the crowds and race changed, but the runners have also adapted through the years.

"I quit chasing after time," said Allen Cornelius, 57, who nearly passed out during his first race.

Cornelius said that one of the best improvements in the race has been computerized clocks. In the past, times were shouted out.

While Monday wasn't the first race for these seasoned runners, it was another sort of first — temperature-wise.

"I don't believe it's ever rained before," said Felton Watson, 55, of Macon. "It's usually hot and humid.

This has been nice."

For some of the race veterans, the Labor Day Road Race is a sort of annual reunion with the people they've met running.

"This is like a homecoming," said 61-year-old Ronald Sharpe of Macon. "We can count on seeing one another on Labor Day."

So, after 20 years, will these runners throw in the towel?

"I hope to keep on while I have a string going," Watson said. "I plan on running as long as I can. I've done it for the past 21 years and have run over 46,000 miles."

Gaughf can never be certain if he's going to run again.

"I'm always asked every year, and I always say, 'I doubt it,'" he said. "I just can't answer that now. If I'm in the same health as I am now, I will run."

Cool morning weather provides some relief

By Chris Hughes
and J.J. Cooper

The Macon Telegraph

One of the major factors in the 20th Olympic Labor Day Road Race came in the form of a rainy mist which never reached a sustained downpour but turned the pavement slick and drove up the humidity up.

According to the National Weather Service office in Peachtree City, the temperature throughout the time of the race remained around 70 degrees with the humidity near 95 percent. The humidity not only slowed down the winners' times, but also it slowed down the number of participants visiting the Red Cross tent.

"There were less heat strokes than we normally see," Macon Red Cross director **Suzanne Hulette** said. "It was cooler, it was wet, we didn't have many injuries at all. It was great."

Hulette called the day "business as usual" as the volunteers attended to the usual sickness, cramps, blisters and overheating.

"After I did the warmup and was sweating, I knew

it was going to be humid," 10K winner **Jill Hargis** said. "It would have helped a little if it had rained."

MISSING SHIRTS: One of the more coveted prizes for runners after any race is the T-shirt. Not enough shirts were ordered for the 1996 race, leaving about 300 runners without the souvenir. More shirts have been ordered, race officials said, and runners who didn't receive T-shirts can call (404) 224-1569.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY: The 20th anniversary of the Olympic Labor Day Road Race didn't have quite the effect on the number of participants that the Boston Marathon had on its 100th birthday, but race director **Steve Corckery** still was pleased with the turnout.

"They (participant numbers) were good," said Corckery who estimated some 1,600 or more runners participated. "We probably broke even with last year. It's still a good number with the competition we have up in Atlanta."

Corckery also said the race's three-year relationship with the U.S. Olympic Committee, which receives one-half the proceeds from the race, will continue.

ALWAYS RUNNING: Politicians normally don't run away from a good race and the Olympic Labor Day Road Race is no exception. On Monday, the field included Macon mayor **Jim Marshall**, state representative **Robert Reichert**, and **Bob Rushton**, who is challenging Reichert.

"You'll see it every other year for election year," Corckery said. "You probably didn't see many last year. Give it two more years and you'll see it again."

Said Rushton, "I started doing it in 1978 and I wasn't running for anything then. Most of the years I haven't been running for anything. I like to stay in shape. I get a chance to see everybody. It's a Macon tradition."

BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS: Another tradition at the Olympic Labor Day Race is to replenish lost fluids with an unusual substance — a 10-ounce plastic cup of cold beer.

The Bibb Distributing Company typically sets up a

beer truck at the park and it is not a lonely spot.

"You don't ever drink beer in the morning unless you run a race," said **Ket Peacock** from Macon.

After the race, runners consumed 10 watermelons, 12 cases of bananas, nine cases of cantaloupes and approximately 1,700 sport drinks.

FUN RUN: Approximately 50 children competed in a one-mile fun run on the dirt track around the Central City Park softball fields. In the 8-under division, **Joseph Peake** won the boys race with a time of 7:50 followed by **Johnathan Godwin** and **Richard McClellan**. **Caroline Kellum** won the girls race at 8:50 followed by **Holly Long** and **Grace Oedel**.

In the 9-11 age group, **Thomas Treadwell** won the boys race with a time of 7:42, followed by **Joshua Thomas** and **Brandon Ballard**. In the girls race, **Sandi Brown** won with a time of 7:59 followed by **Becky Kellum** and **Rhiannon Bruner**.

1996

When it comes to running, you've got to hand it to their feet

If you want to find the unsung heroes of the Olympic Labor Day Road Race, you need to look down.

There they are, on the ground — those aching, bruised and blistered foundations we call our feet.

The runner gets the glory, the feet do all the work.

The racer competes with his head and heart. He must ask his lungs to support him, and his legs must keep pace with his intentions.

But he cannot win the personal battle without his foot soldiers.

They take the pounding and perform the grunt work beneath him.

So, there they were early Monday morning, hundreds of size-6 to size-12 heroes wrapped in Reeboks.

On a holiday when they should have been propped on an ottoman at home or, better yet, still buried beneath the covers at the foot of the bed, they were laboring out there on the asphalt, kicking a few Ks instead of catching a few Zzzzzs.

They splashed through the puddles on Vineville and punished the pavement along the intersections of Poplar, Plum and Pine. They pulled the big bunion at tall St. Paul and finally found the soft grass at Central City Park.

God bless their soles.

At the finish line, Adam Pinkston's feet were among the easiest to spot in the land of New



Ed Grisamore

Balance, Asics and Avia.

He was the guy in the pink Nikes. Pinkston pink. Oh, yeah, he also was most recognizable because he won for the fourth time in the 10K. Let's just say he is quite familiar with the thrill of victory by de-feet.

Pinkston leaned over as if to thank his heels but scold his shoes. He got the right result with the wrong selection.

When you are a specialized runner, like Pinkston, you adapt your tread to match the road conditions. Monday was slippery when wet, a bad fit for his set of pink wheels.

"I felt like I was skating on ice," he said. "I couldn't get a lot of traction."

Of course, even that was an improvement over Pinkston's first Labor Day run in the late 1970s. "I

wore a pair of Chuck Taylor Converse All-Stars," he said, laughing. He's long since slam-dunked those shoes. Now he trains up to 100 miles every week, slipping his feet into a new pair of \$60 running shoes so often he should join a shoe-of-the-month club.

"I've probably got \$400 worth of shoes sitting in my kitchen right now," he said. "After 20 years of running, and a lot of sore feet, I'm still looking for the perfect shoe."

Bill Causey, who has run in all 20 Labor Day races, finds himself looking for the perfect shoe, too. At least he can scratch Puma soccer cleats off the list of potential equipment.

"When I ran in the first (Labor Day) race in 1977, I had a choice of either the soccer shoes that I played softball in or a pair of high-top basketball shoes," Causey said. "I didn't even know they made running shoes."

He opted for the soccer cleats. "I'd run and those shoes would be going: 'Blllllpppp!' 'Blllllpppp!'" he said. "People watching would turn around and ask: 'What was that?'"

The finish line at Monday's race was more like a footwear convention, a combination of stripes and swooshes. It was a footfest of rounded toes, high-tech arches and Adidas so pooped, their tongues were hanging out.

"I've got a pair of Nike Air Wind Runners," said Marvel

Snider, one of 25 runners from Ikon Capital. "But I don't run like the wind."

Suni Heaton, one of the area's top female runners over the past two decades, admitted she always has been "picky" about what she puts on her feet.

"I don't get into 'air' this and 'air' that," she said. "I don't care about all those pretty running shoes. I want something that's lightweight, something that's going to fit my foot like a glove."

Jim Marshall, the mayor, isn't quite as choosy. His first pair of running shoes 35 years ago were like a cast-iron skillet — black and heavy with hard rubber. "You could never put them in the landfill," said Marshall. "They weren't biodegradable."

He clunked around in his first race, and life eventually taught him to break into a trot wearing everything from timber shoes to combat boots.

"Some people have to be careful about what shoes they wear," Marshall said. "Me? I can run in anything."

Ah, politicians. Always running.

So, remember, if you're looking for for the real champions of the Labor Day Road Race, take off your socks and give those feet a nice hand.