

FAST TIMES AND FURIOUS FINISHES FEATURE DUO 2009

By Wes St. Riders & Al Tamont

Meet organizers of the 31st Annual Dynamic Duo were worried about this year's turnout because one of the bigger races in the area, a competition whose name suggests it's a race for fashion designers, moved its date back a week to correspond with the opening of the Saratoga Race Track. In fact, it was even rumored that the Duo would be a moved a week later to combat this occurrence. But old sage Ed Neiles suggested "you should go on as planned" so cooler heads won out.

No problem. Most of the people who usually run both races opted for our event although the Colonie Town Park course is significantly harder. But the Duo's unique format prevailed and our race was, as area road race expert Mark Mindel remarked, "way off the charts as far as excitement goes."

We always get many great athletes from area cross country teams such as Burnt Hills, Shenendehowa, Niskayuna, Shaker, Lansingburgh, Holy Names, Scotia, Guilderland, Colonie and U Albany running every year but this time we secured an extra element. Several members of Cortland's National Champion Division III men's cross country squad came to play as well as an All-American on the distaff side from Cortland.

After assistant race director Al Tamont gave pre-race instructions which nobody listened to, the men's race was begun by recently retired Colonie Recreation Department Superintendent Don Myers at precisely 8:30. The start was predictably furious and fast. A pack of men which included Cortland's Gerald Greenlaw, Niko Viglione, Josh Henry, Seth DuBois (Guilderland), and Seamus Nally (Burnt Hills) along with U Albany

bound Alex Leuchanka (Shenendehowa) and Corporate Challenge winner and Arizona State steeplechaser Ben Englehardt pushed the first mile under 5:00.

The pace never slackened as the group approached the bike trail when area coaching legend Matt Jones remarked, "I can't run a 440 as fast as they are running".

As the finish of the 3-mile race approached, Leuchanka withstood a late charge by DuBois, Nally and Englehardt to lead at the exchange with a 14:34 and a third best ever time on the Duo course. In a post-race New York Times interview Alex answered through his Russian interpreter, "near the end I started to open up and looked back and realized everyone else was coming. It seemed a little early, but I felt good, turned it on and said Dasvidaniya." The second, third and fourth place finishers clocked 14:38, 14:44, and 14:51 respectively. Ryan Pezzulo (Burnt Hills) and Yale bound Dimetri Goutos (Saratoga) were also in the mix. Trailing slightly in another pack were Louis Serafini (Niskayuna), Justin Bishop (Colonie), Nick Webster (Shaker), Otis Ubriacco (Burnt Hills) and Greenlaw and Viglione.

The women's race became as exciting and just as competitive as the men's when some great athletes were caught trailing significantly at the exchange. Most of those "heavy hitters" were not used to being in arrears. "This will make for some very interesting racing" quipped ESPN commentator Mike Greenberg of Mike and Mike in the Morning fame.

And interesting racing it was. DuBois' partner, Rachel Sweet (17:45) secured just enough of a lead to hold off Goutos' fast-closing teammate Lizzie Predmore (17:22) and win the 37-45 age group and the overall race

by a mere 6 seconds. Goutos and Predmore were victorious in the under 36 age group.

Road racing mainstay Emily Bryans made a "Rachel Alexandra-like" move, getting the "baton" in 22nd and making up 15 places to snare the 7th best time. Emily "torched" a 17:13 as she and partner Ben Greenberg (16:04) won their age group for the second year in a row and set a new standard in their initial foray into the 82-90 age group. The Greenberg/Bryan squad also broke the 73-81 age group record last year.

Cortland State's All American Andi Palen and former Scotia star Jillian King (Boston College) hooked up in a vigorous dual with Palen finally prevailing at the end to move from 12th to a 3rd place overall finish. Perhaps Jillian's participation in a 12-hour relay on the Colonie track last weekend "weakened" her slightly. Palen had the best female time of the day, a 17:05, and now ranks as the 8th fastest woman ever. When a USA Today scribe asked Andi what her future time goals were, she simply said, "Right now I just want to get nine hours of sleep." Jillian also notched a very quick time, a 17:18 moving her and Greenlaw from 8th to 4th place overall.

Former Burnt Hills' harrier Meghan Gregory held off another ex-Burnt Hills' phenom Sam Roecker by one second to garner 5th. Meghan teamed with Cortland star Shamus Nally as usual and Sam paired up with current Burnt Hills standout Otis Ubriaco.

Just emerging road racing star Justin Bishop convinced Colonie grad and U Albany bound Emily Finnegan to pair up and they won the 46-54 grouping and Aaron Knobloch joined with Diane Rodriguez-Tobon to escape victorious in the 55-63 division.

Sean Pezzulo didn't know how old his partner Ellen Predmore was when entering. "Since she runs with my mother, I thought she was 42 like my mom." Ellen only wishes she were 42 again. Anyway, Pezzulo/Predmore won the 64-72 age division. Ellen has probably won more Duos in the 31-year history of the race than anyone. She also might have surpassed Nancy Nicholson's record as the person with the greatest myriad of winning partners.

Perennial Duo participant Shaun Zepf, coach of the nationally-ranked Burnt Hills girl's cross country squad, remarked just before taking a post-race dip in the Colonie Town Pool, "I love this race" as he carted off his prize for winning the 73-81 group with last minute pickup Karen Hackenberg.

In the shall we say more seasoned age groups, Fred Hance and Theresa Hance won the 91-99 division and Howard Jones and Adele Pace were the victors in the 109+ grouping. And in the 100-108 world of Susie Wong and Frank Boscoe a "mild upset" occurred. The Wong/Boscoe tandem bested favorites Dale Broomhead and Mary Beth Steffen. After the race, Duo veteran Broomhead muttered, "It's a lot harder to be the heavy favorite, I think, mentally, than it is to be a little bit of the favorite or even to be the underdog. When you come in with a lead on paper like we did, it's kind of oppressive." At race time, Dale's partner was said to be suffering from a minor flexor hallucis longus injury but she promises to be better next August.

As former Guilderland coach and nationally renowned dance instructor Bob Oates was finishing reading out the final result of the day, he was approached by Jackie McMullen, a reporter from the Boston Globe. The

query was, "what was your team's record when you coached DuBois, Justin Wager and Jimmy Richburg", all members of this year's Cortland team. Bob's reply was, "I never took performance-enhancing drugs".

As always, we want to thank the volunteers who helped put on this year's Duo. They were Bob Oates, Sandy Morley, Don Myers, Brandon Myers, Diane Myers, Nancy Nisiewicz, Mary Beth Steffen, Leslie Archer Kassel, and Ellen Snee.

Next year we'll probably try to schedule our race around the other big race. If we don't, we'll have to give out bigger and better awards. How about self-loading PEZ dispensers with Duo legend Scott Mindel's bobblehead on top?