

1993 Labor Day Road Race

Racers cool off at beer station

By James Mays Jr.
The Macon Telegraph

What's the best way to quench your thirst after an early morning 5K run through the streets of Macon?

For some, a cold cup of — Budweiser.

After completing the 5K of Monday's 17th Labor Day Road Race, **Marty Thompson's** first stop wasn't at the Gatorade, water or fruit stands. Instead, he stopped to rest along side a large Budweiser truck that housed eight kegs of beer.

The 32-year-old Thompson of Atlanta was the first road race participant to taste the beer at the station in Central City Park.

"It's free and it looked good to me," said Thompson, who has been running for 11 years. "I must be in pretty good shape to be able to do this."

He finished with a time of 18:29, 30 seconds better than his time last year.

"I getting older and I'm not worried about being totally healthy," said Thompson. "I just want to survive."

5K runner **Ed Krueger** of Jones County was the second person day to approach the beer truck.

"I have to replace what I sweated already," said Krueger, who finished with a time of 22:28 in his first road race.

TAGGING ALONG: Macon police officer **Mike Davis** took 10-year-old **Alicia Westberry** along for the ride Monday. It was a little rough a times, but for the most part, fun, he said.

Davis pushed his physically-chal-

Notes

lenged pen pal more than three miles, from Forsyth Road to Central City Park. It was his first time in five years running in the race that Davis had competed as a team.

"We met at her uncle's house, who has a swimming pool," said Davis. "I tried teaching her to swimming and we became friends. This is our first race together but definitely not our last, if I can get some cooperation from Alicia."

"The race was a lot easier than we thought. It was rough in some places because her chair is not designed for racing."

Westberry said she won't do it again "if I have to hold Mike's sweaty towel."

Pete Meyer of Valdosta made the 10k race a family affair. He pushed son **Mitch**, 3, and daughter **Megan**, 1½, in a three-wheeled stroller along the 6.2-mile course.

"I've pushed them in a lot of races," said the 28-year-old Meyer. "Other than an alignment problem, the race was a piece of cake. This year for the first time we tried to make this race a family affair."

(WHEELCHAIR WINNERS: In a way, 50-year-old **Leonard Johnson** of Lexington, S.C., thought he was doing nothing.

"I was sitting around the house, getting fat as my blood pressure went up," he said. "I was sitting there dying. I had to get up and do something."

So, on April 14, Johnson paid \$1,800 for a racing chair and entered his first road race. Since then, Johnson has tried to compete each weekend. Before claiming the

wheelchair division title on Monday with a time of 29:09, he had won two races.

"I won a race in Athens and I won a race in Hickory, N.C.," said Johnson. "This was a great course. The first two miles were the slowest."

Glen Munford came in second with a time of 52:24. **Tina Hopper** of Macon, the only women's entry, finished with a time of 1:04.43.

JUNIOR WINNER: Northeast's **Sherod Curry** took the first Junior Labor Day Road Race title after completing the 1-mile course in 5:02. Curry, 16, placed sixth in last year's Region 2AAAA mile run.

"The track was flat and that helped me run faster," said Curry.

INJURY UPDATE: According to officials of the Macon chapter of the American Red Cross who were at Central City Park, there were 21 injuries reported Monday.

Most were heat related and the runners were treated with cold water compresses. **Barbara Trevitt** of Forsyth sustained the most severe injury reported at the finish line. She pulled a hip muscle and passed out but was treated and released, the Red Cross said.

NUMBERS: There were 1,591 participants in Monday's race, an increase of 231 from last year.

Here's a breakdown of participants: Wheelchair (3); 5K female (335); 5K male (612); 10k male (455); 10k female (102); Junior male (47); Junior female (37).

Running to remember

Abraha wins 10K again; Johnson passes first Macon test

By Kamon Simpson
The Macon Telegraph

When Arega Abraha crossed the finish line of the men's 10K Labor Day Road Race, appropriately wearing No. 1, there were no tears like so many times before when he's won a race.

Too many victories for the Ethiopian runner to count. Too many tears to imagine.

"This race is special," Abraha said. "Now, for the first time, I can call home and talk to my mother and tell her I won and listen to her reaction. Sometimes when I finish a race, I have tears because I've won, but I have no family to see it. I have nobody to help me celebrate."

Abraha's winning time of 31:31, nine seconds ahead of 1991 winner Adam Pinkston, was worth celebrating. It was his second consecutive victory in this race, and the second time Pinkston finished second.

In the women's 10K, Lisa Johnson — a member of the military police unit at Robins Air Force Base — won the first race she has en-

10K Top Finishers

MEN	WOMEN
1. AREGA ABRAHA 31:31.95	1. LISA M. JOHNSON 37:23.16
2. ADAM PINKSTON 31:40.10	2. SUNI W. HEATON 37:35.75
3. LAWRENCE WARRINER 33:16.01	3. JEAN H. LONG 39:38.64
4. JIM P. SCHECKEL 33:30.40	4. LOIS FAIRFIELD 41:18.45
5. BILL CAUSEY 34:37.50	5. BARBARA B. POLK 41:19.50
6. TODD D. TEPP 35:09.27	6. BETTY C. MCBRAYER 42:29.26
7. RUSTY B. JONES 35:51.46	7. LISA L. HUDSON 42:48.77
8. HOWARD SCHOMER 35:58.53	8. ALETA SPENCE 42:52.87
9. JAMES T. FINNEY 36:13.23	9. SALLY L. GRAY 42:56.02
10. LOU L. HARTLEY 36:22.29	10. DEB J. BABER 43:04.15

tered with a torrid pace of 37:23, 12 seconds ahead of defending champion Suni Heaton of Macon.

"I think I might be looking into racing a little more now," said Johnson, who's time was about two and one-half minutes slower than the course record set in 1980 by Shirley Silsby.

Abraha has at least 75 victories — including seven major marathons — since coming to the United States in 1981. He said that although the Macon course has sev-

eral hills, he didn't feel challenged on Monday.

"To me, this course is flat," he said. "Many days I run at Stone Mountain. I run 10 times up and 10 times down."

Abraha has finished 10K races in 23:27, which would easily wipe out the 1982 course record of 28:16 held by Kevin Moats. But Abraha said that he rarely pays much attention to his race times.

"I just wanted to stay ahead of the pack," he said. "I honestly

didn't know where the other guy (Pinkston) was. I don't notice anyone else when I run. I just want to stay in front. I didn't want to push myself too hard today because I wanted to celebrate Labor Day."

Abraha, who tries to race every weekend and logs more than 125 practice miles per week, had considered running in a 5K on Monday night after his morning race in Macon. Although he decided against the second race, it wouldn't have been the first time he's pulled double duty.

At the Heart Trek in Atlanta this year, Abraha won the 5K event, and, 45 minutes later, he started the event's 10K race and finished second. On July 11, he won a four-mile race in Decatur in the morning and a 5K race in Marietta in the afternoon.

The 31-year-old Abraha has been running at that frantic pace for 28 years. He says concentration, not speed or endurance, is his principal asset. But when he's on the course, he said he is not thinking about the other runners or the hills.

Please see ABRAHA, 8C ➔

Abraha runs with memory of family strife

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He is thinking about his native country, where a Communist regime recently fell. His brother, Berhane Abraha, was killed in a civil war, leaving three young children behind.

"When I'm running, I think about my brother," Abraha said. "I think about his children. I think about the future, and what's going to happen to them. I think about my freedom, and how much I want it for them. But mostly, I think about how they have to eat."

"I'll never forget my brother. I'll never forget my home country. I'll never forget everything that has happened there. I'll never ever forget."

Abraha has reached many off-course milestones since his last victory in Macon. When the regime fell, Abraha, once a political exile, was given the opportunity to return home to see his mother for the first time in 15 years. He's been home twice since, and was welcomed as a hero by thousands who wanted to see him run.

Abraha's running success is well known in his homeland, but the attention he receives hasn't always been beneficial. He uses each victory as a stump on which to crusade, spreading the message of oppression and starvation in Ethiopia. Once after a victory in France, Abraha says his remarks led to the arrest of his sister, who was kept in jail for almost three years.

"I ran from machine gun fire, honest to God," he says. "I was running away from Ethiopia across the border to Sudan with machine gun fire at my feet. I was 16 and I loved my country, but I couldn't live under the dictator."

Johnson, 28, was on the opposite end of the experience spectrum from Abraha and, for that matter, from Heaton. Not only had Johnson never competed in a race, but she also had never seen the Macon course. But she knew local runners Heaton and Jean Long had the experience she needed.

"It boiled down to staying with Jean Long and Suni," Johnson said. "They knew what they were doing and they knew the course. Suni was great to run with. Everyone on the course knew who she was."

Heaton, 38, had set a goal to break the 38-minute mark this year after winning with a time of 38:53 last year. But Johnson ended up increasing the pace.

"I wouldn't have run so fast without (Lisa)," Heaton said. "When we made the turn onto Walnut Street, she turned it on. I could tell by looking at her that she was still very comfortable and that she was ready to pull away. She's 10 years younger than me. I was happy to run well."

When the pair turned onto Walnut Street, bystanders kept telling Johnson that only one quarter-mile remained, when actually the final mile was still in front of her. Still, she maintained the pace and hoped Heaton was too far behind to make a last-chance move.

"They kept saying it was just a quarter-mile," Johnson said. "I thought, 'Gee, this is the longest quarter-mile I've ever run.' When we approached the finish line, I was scared. I didn't really know how much ground I had picked up."

Virgin sprints to 5K title; McWhorter a champ for third time

By Carroll Rogers
The Macon Telegraph

Craig Virgin doesn't usually drink beer in the morning, but on Monday he made an exception.

The three-time United States Olympic team distance runner, who retired from what he calls competitive running 1½ years ago, can afford to kick back and relax.

The 38-year-old from Lebanon, Ill., had reason to celebrate after sprinting past Macon's Ken McLeod as he entered Central City Park to win the 5K title at the 47th Labor Day Road Race. He finished the 3.1-mile race in 14:58. McLeod came in second with a time of 15:00 in the field of 612 runners.

The men's 5K record is 14:19 set by Marty Flynn in 1989.

Marietta's Susan McWhorter became the first three-time winner in the 5K women's division since the race began in 1985. She won with a 17:05 time, which was five seconds faster than her previous personal best and 15 seconds faster than last year's winning time.

Linda Lisska of Lawrenceville came in second in 18:27.

Virgin, who was sponsored by the Sports Medicine Center and the Macon Tracks Running Club to run as well as to conduct a pre-race seminar, registered for the race last week and was the favorite to win.

"I don't normally go into races to win them, not anymore, and I didn't today," said Virgin, who has decreased his workouts from as much as 105 miles per week to a maximum of 40. "To me competitive racing is one-third physical training, one-third natural ability, and one-third mental focus. I don't think I've had much physical training and I've lost that mental focus."

But he stayed focused enough to spoil McLeod's chance for an upset by two seconds.

"I ran at my pace, and he stayed on my heels," said McLeod. "I didn't notice him too much but for the last half-mile, I figured he'd make his move going into the park, and he did. I tried to go with him, but I didn't have enough energy."

Virgin showed on Monday what

5K Top finishers

MEN

1. CRAIG S. VIRGIN 14:58:66
2. KENNETH A. MCLEOD 15:00:44
3. JOHN C. KIRKSEY 15:12:84
4. BILL R. MACKAY 15:26:13
5. PETER A. HEIDBREDER 15:41:49
6. PERRY M. THOMAS 15:47:90
7. LEE W. FIDLER 15:55:33
8. GARY C. JENKINS 15:58:34
9. BILLY SKINNER 16:09:12
10. SHERMAN E. ELLER 16:13:12

WOMEN

1. SUSAN M. MCWHORTER 17:05:56
2. LINDA R. LISSKA 18:27:50
3. PATTI PATTERSON 18:54:83
4. TRACI M. ROBINSON 19:28:60
5. LYNN E. TAYLOR 19:38:21
6. CINDY M. KIRKSEY 20:11:31
7. LINDA F. MCDUFFIE 20:14:43
8. MARY A. WILLIAMS 20:19:13
9. JESSICA D. KIRKLAND 20:20:85
10. AUDRA B. CREVIS 20:23:33

he taught at his seminar on Sunday.

"I showed them a video of my (1980) World Cross County Championships when I moved from third to first in the last 100 yards of a 7½-mile race," said Virgin, who is the only American male to win the World Cross County title, which he won in 1980 and 1981. "It was like that (Monday) in that right at the three-mile marker, it was now or never. I knew if I could stay close

for the last quarter-mile, my instincts would take over."

Virgin qualified for the 1976, 1980, and 1984 Olympics in the 10,000-meter run and still holds the U.S. Olympic Trials record of 27:46 in that event. In 1980 he finished first in the U.S. Olympic Trials but did not compete in the Olympics because of a U.S. boycott.

"It's better not to dwell on it. I think about what could have been in 1980," he said. "And I think I

could have been better in 1981. I started to have injuries in 1983 which made a difference in being a medal contender versus an Olympian. But I accomplished more than most and less than a few."

Virgin competed for 23 years in cross country, track, and road racing and is a three-time winner of the Peachtree Road Race.

"I had my day in the sun," said Virgin, who runs a sports marketing company in Lebanon and puts on running seminars. "Now my mission is to enjoy the sport and to help others get interested in it. I'm in the second phase, putting something back into the sport. I used to get all my thrills from competitive running, now I have fun doing it and running and being healthy and promoting the sport."

Virgin was running in Macon for the second time. In 1989 he set the course record in the 5K at the Run for Missions race.

Of the 34 other women 5K runners, no one gave McWhorter a challenge as she took the lead in the first one-half-mile and kept it

throughout the race.

"Today there wasn't really anybody (competitive) in the field," said McWhorter, who won the Run for Life 5K in Marietta last month. "So I just wanted to make sure I ran a good time and stayed focused. I ran a really strong first mile, and I knew if I just got up the second hill to the church, I'd be home free."

McWhorter said she has changed just the focus, not the distance, of her weekly workouts.

"It's more focused on practicing the race than just going out and doing intervals without thinking about the race," said McWhorter. "It's more mental, it's paid off because I've had a great season."

Even with the three consecutive Labor Day wins, McWhorter still wants to improve her performance in Macon.

"Next year I want to come back here and get the course record," said McWhorter. "When you know

a course, you're not as nervous. Your legs just know what to do."

The women's record is 16:58, set by Marcia Wentworth in 1989.