

## Labor Day Road Race notes

# Olympians lend support to race

By James Tidwell  
The Macon Telegraph

With four Olympians on hand, the 1997 Labor Day Road Race champions weren't the only medal winners at Central City Park on Monday.

Ralph Boston of Peachtree City, a gold medalist in 1960, silver medalist in 1964 and bronze medalist in 1968 in the long jump, Jeff Galloway of Atlanta, a 10K runner and marathon alternate in 1972, Rocky Lane of Lawrenceville, who placed fourth in as a boxing welterweight in 1956, and Maconite Chip Minton, a bobsled team member in 1994, were all in attendance to help lend support to the road race.

"I was here for the first one and here every year since," Land said. "This is one of the best races anywhere."

Despite the merits of the race itself, the inclusion of events for children is one of the most attractive reasons for the group to attend the race.

"(The fun run for kids) is my cup of tea," Boston said. "To see the expression on their faces when they finish something they thought they couldn't do is great. No amount of money can compensate for that."

**All in the family:** If finishing the first week of school at Macon County Middle School after summer break wasn't enough of a challenge for sixth grade teacher Barrie Norton of Americus, Norton entered the 5K Wheelchair division and won with a time of 43:10.

"I just wanted to finish in under 45 minutes," Norton said. "I liked the four-mile downhill section of the course. The wheels were whistling and it was nice."

The language arts teacher, however, was not the only member of the family to go home with a medal from the race.

Stepdaughter Claudia Norton, an English education major at Valdosta State, finished won the 15-19 year old age division in the 5K with a time of 21:39.

"I just came to have fun," the Blazer track team member said.

**5K Masters winners overcome injuries:** Proving the Olympians are still in shape, Galloway won the men's Masters division with a time of 16:35.

Despite an injury to his left hamstring at the start of August suffered in a race against his son.

"I wanted to run a little faster," Galloway said. "But the hamstring I injured at the beginning of the month was still a little tender. The mind still remembers, but the body doesn't."

In the women's division, Carolyn Mather of Atlanta had to overcome an injured left knee to win for the third time in as many years with a time of 19:45.

"I pulled by knee in June and was out for three weeks," Mather said. "It is a good course and I feel great to break 20 minutes in just my second race back (from the injury)."

**10K Masters:** Ricky Silver of Cartersville won the men's division with a time of 37:33, while Sally Grey of Macon won the women's division with a mark of 42:50.

"I knew the course was fast and I was trying to meet my goal of 37.12 so I could qualify for the Atlanta track club's competitive team," Silver said. "I was running with the first woman for most of the race which really pushed me. But I guess she got tired of me and just pulled away."

**Middle Georgia High School teams run race:** While the road race may be one of many events for on a runner schedule for some, the cross country team from Jones County and the boys soccer team from

Mount de Sales decided to take advantage of it for another reason - to train for the fall schedules of each sport.

And with the Cavaliers' soccer season just getting underway and the Greyhounds' cross country season set to start up in a few weeks, the race could not come at a better time.

"We decided to enter the race have some fun and to get ready for the upcoming season," junior Jennifer McCounghing of Jones County said.

## Samples improves on last year's finish with 10K victory

By Chris Hughes  
The Macon Telegraph

A year later, Patrick Samples was one place better.

After finishing second in the 5K a year ago, Samples won the men's 10K in the Olympic Labor Day Road Race with a time of 31 minutes, 54 seconds.

"I'm extremely happy," Samples said. "That was a fun race. The course was great. That's probably one of my more favorite courses."

However, the course caught Samples, who runs with the Fleet Feet Adidas club in Atlanta, by surprise early on. After struggling through the first mile, Samples settled into a 5:05-mile pace and ran comfortably from then on.

"(The 5K) is a pretty decent course," Samples said. "So I figured the 10K would be similar. But I think the 10K is a little tougher due to the first mile - it's hilly. After that first mile, I was kind of worried."

Samples, a 24-year-old graduate assistant cross country coach at West Georgia, has been training for a marathon. He runs between 90 and 100 miles a week. Monday's race was his first 10K in eight months.

"I was real happy with that time," Samples said. "I think I'm a bit more fit than I was coming into the 5K last year (ran in 15:40). That's a great time for what I want run in the marathon."

Samples wants to run a 2:25 marathon, which he believes would get him to the 1999 Olympic trials.

"I'm too slow of a runner to qualify in the Olympic trials in the 5,000 or 10,000 meters," Samples said with a laugh. "So I think the marathon is the only possible way that I would have a chance to qualify. I'm more of a distance-type runner. I like to do a lot of miles. I'm more suited for 15K and on up than shorter races."

1997

# Black survives

# dreams to win

# men's 5K

# Rose takes women's race

By C. Jemal Horton  
The Macon Telegraph

The weird dreams started about a week ago for Alan Black. Then, as the days went by, they turned into all out nightmares.

Black would be in the thick of the pack, running hard at the Olympic Labor Day Road Race. But just when he wanted to make his move and separate himself, he couldn't, as if he were "running in quicksand."

"It was pretty wicked," Black said of his dreams. "Whew! I was up all (Sunday) night."

But by the time dawn smiled on Macon Monday morning, Black had survived his bad dream.

And dominated the 5K portion Olympic Labor Day Road Race.

Black, a native of Eatonton, won the men's 5K race in a time of 14 minutes, 55 seconds.

Tracy Rose of the Atlanta Track Club won the women's portion in 17:03.

Instead of the problems in his dreams, Black had no problem leaving the pack around the 1.3-mile mark. He came sprinting through Central City Park for the last 25 yards with his right arm raised, signifying his victory.

"This race kept me up all night," Black said. "But it was great. I felt great. Next year, it's the 10K."

The fact that the 23-year-old Black even runs now may shock folks in Putnam County. When Black was in high school, he never ran for the track team, and he rarely ran for fun.

Black didn't do much of anything after graduation, either, other than go to his job as a floor supervisor at Patrick Industries. That's when his father, James, put his foot down.

"You got to start doing something," James told Alan.

So Alan began to run. He started out with short distances, but learned he had a gift and ran farther. He entered a local race in Putnam County and did well, and had no problems Monday.

"I owe it all to my dad," Alan said. "He wanted me to do something with myself."

Rose, the women's 5K winner, was a little concerned going into the race. The self-described "mom" has been training for a Chicago marathon next month and hasn't focused on shorter distances.

"I don't have much speed right now," she said.

But once Rose got on the course, she knew the day would have a happy ending.

"It's a nice, fast course," Rose said. "It's pretty much downhill. I did surprise myself."

Rose, 34, ran in the 10K race two years ago and finished second. But since then, she has been dedicating her mornings to longer distances after her 7-year-old daughter heads off to school.

"I feel good about this race," Rose said. "Hopefully, this will get me going for the marathon."

# Sweeney overcomes first mile to coast to win in 10K

By Chris Hughes  
The Macon Telegraph

Mary Sweeney has had a storybook past five months, starting with a marriage and ending with a win in the Olympic Labor Day Road Race.

Sweeney, who is from Atlanta, took the top place in the women's 10K race with a time of 37 minutes, 32 seconds in her first Labor Day Road Race.

"There were a few little hills, but, overall, I just felt pretty strong throughout," Sweeney said. "It's the best time I've run in a while. It's not a (personal best), but I felt good about the time."

A marriage and honeymoon in Florida in May didn't keep Sweeney out of training for long. But the 37-year-old admits there's more work to be done.

"Now it's time to get back to some serious training to work on the Olympic trails for next year," Sweeney said. "That's my next big goal."

Sweeney, who considers herself a "marathoner at heart" and ran the marathon at the 1996 Olympic trials, had to overcome the first mile and running a shorter distance.

"We came into town yesterday and drove the course, so I was familiar with that first hill," Sweeney said. "I think the first mile was a little slower, but it paid off today."

"The 10K is always a mystery."

Sweeney, who runs with the Atlanta Competitive Women Club, was 25 seconds off her ideal pace over the first mile, but still grabbed the lead over teammate Maggie Visser between the second and third mile. From then on, Sweeney would not be caught. Visser finished second with a time of 38:59.

"We're pretty close usually," Sweeney said. "When she wasn't right there with me, I knew I was in the lead. Mostly, it's just getting in a rhythm and getting a good pace going."

## Blind runner's only handicap is slow partner

By Chuck Thompson  
The Macon Telegraph

Don't read this article.

Give the paper to someone else, close your eyes, and let them read it to you.

That's what Tim Willis must do.

Imagine running down the street, your eyes still closed. You have only the pull of a string to guide you as you dodge potholes and manhole covers, with a dozen or so runners right around you and another several hundred just behind.

Imagine running this way for 6.2 miles, up and down hills and around corners, and finishing in less than 33 minutes.

That's what Tim Willis does.

He is a runner, and he doesn't let the fact that he is blind slow him down.

Only a slow partner can do that.

"Tim's a good runner and fast. We were a little slower today than we had hoped, but that was me," said Phillip Riggins, Willis' guide, after he and Willis finished Monday's Labor Day Road Race 10K in 37 minutes, 45 seconds. "It's a good course, but it was hot today, and that was the best I could do."

Said Willis: "We were hoping to be a little faster, but it was a good race. Phillip's never run a 10K under 36 minutes, so that was our goal, but we never could get the pace quite low enough for that."

A native of Tucker, Willis has just started his first year of law school at Mercer. He was running in his first Labor Day Road Race, but by no means his first 10K. He set the world record for a blind runner in a 10K in Phoenix, Ariz., a couple of years ago with a 32:27. That is just 33 seconds slower than what Patrick Samples ran (31:54) to win Monday's race.

"I'm not that fast right now because

I'm not running as much as I had been," Willis said. "My focus now is on law school. I'll keep running and racing as much as I can, but it's time now to concentrate on school."

Willis has been running competitively for 11 years.

"I was on the wrestling team at Shamrock High School my freshman year and running some to stay in shape and the coaches suggested I try entering some races," Willis said. "So I started cross country and other races and liked it."

He attended Georgia Southern on a cross country scholarship, and he participated in the Paralympics in Barcelona in 1992 and in Atlanta last year.

"I graduated from Georgia Southern in 1994 and decided to spend the next two years training for the Atlanta Paralympics," he said. "Now it's time to get on with my school. I've wanted to be a lawyer since I was in high school, so this is a really exciting time for me."

The Paralympics were pretty exciting, too.

Willis had fourth- and fifth-place finishes in Barcelona, but he stepped up a notch in his back yard in 1996. He won a silver medal in the 10,000 meters and three bronzes - in the 1,500, 5,000 and 4x400 relay, respectively.

"I'm not a sprint guy," Willis said. "I'm a distance runner. The 1,500 is usually the shortest distance I run. I was on the 4x400 relay team only because someone else was injured and they needed me to fill in."

To participate in running, Willis must run with a guide, using a shoestring. Willis and his guide each holds an end to stay connected.

"I've been running with Tim for about 10 years, since he was a sophomore in

high school," said Riggins. "We don't do many races together because I'm not fast enough. But we train together and have been running with each other once or twice a week since he finished college."

"Guiding him is pretty easy. He's run enough to be able to pick up your pace and run with you. Most of the time he can tell just by the pressure on the string which way to move when its time to change directions, and you don't even have to say anything."

Willis and Riggins ran the entire race together Monday, but often on long races, when he's intent on going fast, Willis will use two guides, swapping midway through the race so that a fresh partner can keep up a fast pace to the finish.

"The switch is pretty easy," Willis said. "The first guy just drops the string and the second one runs up and grabs it, so I only have a couple of strides when I'm running without a guide."

Riggins, who graduated from Mercer in 1984 before attending the University of Georgia law school, is pleased that Willis is attending Mercer to begin his quest for a law degree.

"That gives us something else to talk about when we're running," Riggins said.

Besides a balky intercom at his new apartment, the one challenge Willis still has since his move to Macon is finding running partners to guide him.

"I've found a couple of people here," Willis said. "Ben Leonard, who ran in the 5K race today, is in the same section in the law school class with me. And (Mercer cross country coach) Cam Oetter and I have run some."

"But if anyone else would like to run with me, tell them to give me a call."

Willis' number is 750-9092.