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FPD's Tinkey challenges men at Labor Day Road Race

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Grace Tinkey knew that she was far ahead of the next female in the Macon Labor Day Road Race 5K. But she still had a challenge in front of her.

As Tinkey cruised to her fourth straight Labor Day win in the women's race, the only question left for her was if she could stay ahead of the two males she had been running with the entire race.

"Sam Martinez and Jim Mehserle had given me a great pace the entire race, said Tinker, a junior at FPD. "All three of us are very competitive people and we were all trying to run the best time we could in the race, and it worked out to where all of us had best times and that's really the most important thing. I feel like all three of us pushed each other to run a best time."

Tinkey, 16, did edge out Martinez and Mehserle. Her time of 16 minutes, 40.18 seconds was third-best among all 5K entrants, male or female. Martinez, 46, finished third among the men at 16:42.61, while Mehserle, 16, was fourth at 16:44.08.

With only one more Labor Day Road Race remaining for Tinkey before her collegiate career, she was looking for a strong finish Monday.

"I will probably be at college running cross country after (next year's race), so it looks like next year will probably be my last one for awhile," Tinkey said. "I have done these for so long, it seems kind of strange to know that next year will probably be it. It's such a great race; I know I will miss it. I definitely want to win it one more time, though."

The only close race for first place was in the men's 5K, where Michael Strickland of Marietta edged Gray Lindley by two seconds, 15:31.31 to 15:33.22.

"I think that my experience probably paid off," said Strickland, who won the 5k for the fifth time. "I know that I am 44 years old, and the guy chasing me was like 17, so I did not want to get into a sprint with him at the end. We were testing each other throughout the race, and neither one of us was giving anything until about the 2¾-mile mark. I thought that I felt him getting just a bit tired, so I decided to go for it right then and try to open up a little gap. Fortunately, I was able to get just enough of a lead to hold him off."

Lindley, who is actually 18, is also on the FPD cross country team.

"I am very pleased with my time," Strickland said. "It was really like the perfect storm for me because the weather was perfect and I had a very fast runner chasing me."

The men's 10K winner was Alan Black of Hillsboro, who won the 10K race for the fifth time.

"I have been training for a half Ironman, and that seemed to have taken away most of my speed (Monday)," said Black, 37, who finished in 33:55.16. "I knew after the first mile that I was not feeling great, so after that I just tried to make sure I was ahead of everyone."

The women's 10K winner was Deanna McCurdy from Peachtree City, who had finished second last year.

"I came here hoping to win, but you really never know until you get out here and run," said McCurdy, 37, who finished in 39:03.18. "I am still a very competitive person and I like to win, but I have learned to run for the enjoyment of the sport. I just love this course, and I thought my time was solid even though it was very humid.

"It's always a good feeling to win a race of this size."

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