

BLASTING DOWN Broad Street

By *David Block*

One of the biggest races in the Delaware Valley is the Philadelphia Department of Recreations' Blue Cross Broad Street Run. Its twenty seventh running this past May 7th had a total of 13,549 runners, 6,144 females and 7,405 males who ran the ten-mile course from the Central High athletic field at North Broad Street and Somerville Avenue to the Naval Business Center in South Philadelphia.

Some participants have run this race over twenty five times, but for the winner, Nathan Kosgei who clocked 48 minutes and 18 seconds, this was his first.

Although winning the race had its challenges, they were mild in comparison to his adjustment to the United States. A native of Kenya, Nathan had never been to a city in his life until earlier this year when he traveled to Nairobi to attain his United State's visa, according to his manager, Lisa Buster. She explained that the part of Kenya he lived in was so rural that he never saw a bridge until he came here.

Kosgei said in broken English that he was confident about winning the race, but some people who watched from the media truck had some doubts because he was neck and neck with the second and third place finishers, Gurmessa Kumissa, (48:19) and Urgessa Woyessa (48:22). They both hail from Ethiopia and are currently living in Maryland. Kosgei said, "My plan was to run with them, and break away the last hundred meters. It worked!"

He was happy with his strategy, but Buster objected, "That was risky because they could have had a stronger kick." She told him from now on he needs to break away much sooner than the last hundred meters. Nathan agreed, but that wasn't the key thing on his mind after winning first place prize of one thousand dollars; rather, it was the reward of eating his first Philly cheese steak. "Since Nathan came here, he heard about Philly cheese steaks and wanted to try one, so I promised to buy him one if he won Broad Street," said Buster.

When asked to describe his training regiment, Kosgei said that he runs about twenty miles a day, five days a week. Sometimes he runs fifteen miles in the morning and five miles at night. Occasionally, his workouts alter when he runs inter-



vals on the Norristown High School track. Nathan also runs at the Norristown Farm Park and the Valley Forge Trails. "Valley Forge is good because you can go for two and a half hours and not hit the same trails twice," said Kosgei's coach, the Moroccan born El- Mustafa Nechchadi.

Kosgei lives with about ten other elite runners from Africa in Royersford, all of who are under Buster's management. She gets businesses to sponsor her athletes and she places them in races for prize money throughout the country and other parts of the world.

Other Broad Street Run participants prefer to train on traffic free courses as well; such as fourth place finisher, twenty-eight-year-old Ross Martinson (48:58) of Conshohocken, who was also the first U.S. runner to cross the finish line. Martinson runs eighty to one hundred miles a week and one of his favorite courses is the Conshohocken toe path.

In discussing the Broad Street Run, Martinson said that 48:58 was his fastest ten-mile time on that course. "It was definitely better than last year when it took me over fifty minutes to finish," said Martinson. He attributed his improvement to better weather conditions this year; and, that unlike last year, the Broad Street Run was not immediately after the Penn Relays, in which he also competes.

The Penn Relays takes place the last Thursday, Friday and Saturday in April and the Broad Street Run is always the first Sunday in May. With last year's Broad Street Run being on May 1, Martinson had no time to recuperate, so his one-week recovery this year paid off this year. Recovery is a key part of his training regimen because that helps prevent injuries. "I always make sure the day after I run hard, I run slow and easy," said Martinson. "If I start feeling sore or tight, I'll back off."

Running high weekly mileage isn't always the best thing. I used to try to run 120 miles a week, but that slowed me up in races. After I dropped to eighty to one hundred miles, my speed picked up."

For some runners, eighty miles a week is too much. Wendy Walsh of Gladwyne, the sixty-first woman to finish (1:08:48) only runs twenty a week at Valley Forge. "I found out that I started getting faster when I took up spinning," said Walsh. "Spin has a lot of aerobic capacity intervals." Twenty miles a week is all that the thirty-nine year-old Walsh has time for because she's busy raising three children. Walsh, like most of the entrants over forty, have no problem with getting older.

The first master to finish, forty four-year-old Fred Klevan of Merion Station, the 22nd overall finisher, (52 minutes flat) enjoys being competitive with the younger runners. "These races bring out the competitive side of me," said Klevan who runs about seventy miles a week, mostly at Haverford College. "I like the trails because of the softer terrain. When you get to be my age, you can develop knee and joint problems. So to avoid this, I run on soft terrain because it's less wear and tear on my body." At Broad Street, Klevan ran on the first place Master's Club Team, The Viagra Abusers. The closest team, the Chester County Running Store trailed by over four minutes. (At various races, teams of five, race against each other and the top three times of each team are added up. The team with the fastest time wins.)

Klevan's teammate, forty-seven year-old Bob Schwelm of Philadelphia, the third master to finish, (53:13) and 36th overall, was happy with his performance. "I won the 45 to 49 age group category," said Schwelm. "Since I've turned forty, it's been a goal of mine to never let any older runners beat me. No one older than me beat me at Broad Street this year." Schwelm also heads the Bryn Mawr Running Club, which is open to all runners. "On Tuesday nights we do track workouts at Haverford College and Wednesday nights we do social runs along the Main Line." Schwelm's training tips: "People who get injured, run too much too soon. That's the number one cause of injury. You have to increase your mileage gradually by ten percent a week. The more you run, the better you'll do, up to a certain point. The good runners train on softer surfaces because if you're going to increase your mileage, the roads will break you down."

Finally, one unique Broad Street Run entrant, sixteen year-old Kaitlyn Willard of Upper Darby, was the only female wheelchair competitor. She was 7th out of 11 wheelchair racers as she clocked 44:07. "I felt weird being the only girl, so I wondered how I was going to go against all these guys," said Willard. "I just concentrated on what I was doing and then I felt okay."

Willard competes on the Upper Darby High School track team. When her teammates run intervals, she participates alongside them, except she wheels herself a round the track shortly after them. In addition, Andy Carr, a personal trainer

comes to Upper Darby High School twice a week to do strength training with her. "He helps me focus on breathing," said Willard. Aside from lifting weights, Willard also stays in shape by playing wheelchair basketball.

The Blue Cross Broad Street Run is conducted annually to help raise money for the American Cancer Society.



David is passionate about educating the public and raising awareness about the challenges, abilities and accomplishments of blind and other disabled athletes. He promotes this in part by teaching Goalball, the international team sport for blind athletes, to sighted people. He is an inspiration to disabled youth in sharing ways he and others have overcome adversity. He has produced several documentaries, which illuminate the talents, strengths, and challenges of the blind athlete, the injured hero, and the forgotten veteran.