

*** A lucky 7 in Striderland for 2009 ***

*** Saving the Best for Last ***

Dowling Catholic Girls won their third straight State Cross Country Championship, matching the Roosevelt Boys earlier this decade (2001-2003). Their senior leadership of Katie Flood and Ashlie Decker were one and two at the state, 3 seconds apart but then again they were used to close finishes all season. Katie now has 3 State titles, Ashlie took the 2008 crown. Their racing didn't stop at State as they competed at Nike Team Nationals where Katie took the national title and Ashlie followed in fourth. A week later they competed in the tough Foot Locker meet as Katie took 8th and almost expectedly Ashlie was 9th a few seconds behind. It was a season to savor, the best ever girls tandem in Striderland.

*** 2:38, 2:36, the Good Times just keep coming ***

Robyn Friedman had another stellar season. In April she set the Drake Half record, in May became the 3rd best woman ever at Dam to Dam, in June ran 2:38:03 at Grandma's Marathon, then took a well deserved break before a 2:36:42 at Twin Cities Marathon (Olympic "A" standard). A few weeks later Robyn won the DM Marathon in record time. Robyn is tireless; it seems as she quickly is becoming the all-time best female runner in Striderland. She also has directed Runablaze Iowa into a formidable Iowa Elite Running Club. Robyn is the pride of Lamb's Grove (pop. 208) and Striderland.

*** Dam, good time, Unbelievable ***

Seven have done every 20 kilometer while thousands finished the 30th Dam to Dam. 375 runners in 1980 finished the trek from Saylorville Dam to Downtown Des Moines but over 10,600 runners celebrated in fashion this year - it was a beautiful day in Striderland. The competition and post race party was the best ever, with record number of finishers in every race. It was the perfect race. Every community deserves a great race while few have it. Striderland has a dam good one every year at the beginning of summer.

*** 100th year, a Century of World Class running ***

Drake Relays honors Striderland every year. We're lucky to be in the shadows of one of the great track meets in America. The 100th year was no exception as the stadiums enhancements have not only given the Relays a great stage but have garnered USATF and NCAA top flight championships. The annual road race on Saturday of Drake Relays weekend boomed in year 41 with 2500 runners. Year 2109 should be another great celebration.

*** Who would have guessed? ***

Living History Farms now has a limited field and in 2010, so will Dam to Dam - races no longer are crying out for more runners. Runners are going slower but really want their time faster, so the advent of the "chip" in Striderland - does the chip time include potty breaks or not? DM (Half) Marathon entry fee is \$50 six months prior to the race - so much for the sport's accessibility for everyone. Many of the key Striderland race directors are hovering around 60 - who will keep races healthy in the future?

*** Men's Marathon Now and Yesterday ***

Striderland men had a banner year at the 26.2 mile distance late in the season. Jason Fogel ran a 2:22:29, Randy Bill (Drake Half and Farm winner) a 2:22:49, Skyler Nesheim a 2:25:42, Chan Yew Woo a 2:26:28 and Jacob Kaemmer a 2:26:44. Striderland Marathoning has a long tradition - 19 years ago Striderland legend Richard Kaitany set the Houston Marathon record in 2:10:04 that was broken this year. 40 years ago Jay Dirksen (now Nebraska coach) not only won the first Drake Relays Marathon but one month earlier took the National Jr AAU Championship in 2:24:36, held in Redfield, Iowa with frigid single digit weather.

*** It continues to be Amazing, Living History Farms ***

A long season in Striderland doesn't end with a whimper but rather a loud bang. The Farm race, as it's affectionately known is more than just a race. The community of runners from throughout the Midwest and beyond gathers on a day to say, "Thanks" for another great year, on land that was blessed by Pope John, 30 years ago. 2009 didn't disappoint as heavy early morning fog created a mystical setting for over 7,500 runners dressed up from head to toe or haedly at all. The 1000s who compete and 1000s who tour de farm were treated to the best in Striderland, followed by beef stew. What a day, what a year!

By Cal Murdock, observing Iowa Running for over three decades