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the BEA facility. The second runner carried the baton 4.9 miles to the Greater Lowell Technical High School. Continuing on 3A, the third runner sprinted to the U-Mass Lowell boathouse, a 2.5-mile journey and the shortest leg. Then the longest of the five began and carried 9.4 miles through Dracut and Methuen to the Griffith Industrial Park. The final runner took the baton into Lawrence and back across the river to the Elks Club on River Road, a 6.3-mile journey. The Mill Cities Relay is a 28.7-mile road-race relay. It darts downstream along the Merrimack with the river in sight during most of the event. The Women Senior teams run only the last three legs.

Gate City, after finishing third the past two years (they have finished third six times in 17 seasons), simply overwhelmed the relay competition in three vital areas: Speed, numbers of participants, and team organization. The Striders brought a balanced attack, scoring points in every single division. They organized the teams in such a way as to have enough speed in critical legs, spreading talent among the men's, women's, and mixed teams to post competitive times in all nine divisions. Gate City also won the participation award for the second consecutive year. They fielded 28 of the 100 total teams, a phenomenal number. In fact, the rules state that only one team per club in each division can score, which prevented Gate City from running up the score to record levels with over one quarter of the entire field.

In addition to winning the above divisions, many notable performances came from non-scoring GCS teams. Gate City Senior women entered four teams, and they won four of the first five positions--talk about dominance--there is no other club in New England that can do that!

The Men's Veterans remained dominant as well in their win (they won the New England USATF title this year), and the women's masters moved up from second last year to win the title this time. The GCS Male Seniors entered four teams and all four finished in the top 12--two of them, finished the 28.7 mile five-leg event within 56 seconds of each other. Two Strider Coed Masters teams entered, and both finished in the top ten.

In the Coed Open Division the Striders dominated with seven of the first 13 teams, including the number one group and three in

the top ten.

Gate City's Women's Open group included two teams and both captured places in the top eleven--excellent work for one club to take two individual teams that high among 13 competing clubs. The Striders entered five teams in the Men's Open Division, placing an incredible three in the top ten.

Gate City's neighbor, the Greater Derry Track Club, fielded three teams this year, and recorded their highest finish in the Coed Open Division, taking fourth place with only 25 seconds separating their total time from the third-place Greater Lowell Road Runners. Greater Derry finished 23rd overall with their top team; they also sped to two ninth place division finishes--Men's Seniors and Coed Masters. This was a really remarkable performance for a small club running among giants.

The other New Hampshire entrant, the



George LeCours to Joe Wheatley

Athletic Alliance, competed in four divisions, and they placed every one of the four in the top ten. Keith Kelly led the Men's Open team to sixth place and tenth overall. Jerri Clayton led the Women's Open team to fifth place. Jason Farr led the Coed Open group to eighth, while Tom Farrar led the Coed masters to sixth.

The running of the Mill Cities Relay was followed by a terrific party that included beans, chicken soup, pasta, salad, liquids, and music. Camaraderie was evident among and between all clubs in the end-of-season bash. Sharon Yu of the Winner's Circle Running Club won the Phil Quinn award for exceptional contributions to running in the Merrimack Valley. Phil Quinn, former Gate City President who now resides in Maryland, and Gate City Coach Dave Camire were the founding fathers of the event in 1984. Gate City's Warren Church of Dunstable, one of the chief organizers of the event,

and Jane Levesque of Nashua, one of the key participants in the Women's Senior Team, kept their streaks alive, as they each ran in their 17th consecutive Mill Cities Relay--never missing one. GCS Senior Virginia Mills and Camire have only missed one.

Gate City and Lowell share much more than his tory and Kerouac. They have also had the same coach. Dave Camire was with the GLRR green for many of those 17 years before bringing his coaching philosophy, expertise, and enthusiasm to the Nashua-based Striders in 1998. Camire was instrumental in founding the event, and has been instrumental in winning it--for two different clubs.

Following the awards ceremony at the Elks Lodge in Lawrence, Gate City Coach Camire expressed both surprise and excitement when the results came in, "It's hard to explain the feeling of euphoria I had when Gary Freedman handed me the results that showed we had won. I made poor Gary triple check them because it was so close."

He then summed up the memorable day beautifully, "To win Mill Cities takes competitive excellence, incredible focus on the goal and very good organizational skills. In all areas we hit a home run. For the next year we can call ourselves the 'Mill Cities Champions' -- I like the way that sounds". Ironically, Camire's expectation for Gate City this year was second place. He felt the top prize was inevitable, but would take one more year. Not so! It is a team effort, and an enthusiastic team spirit that was evident at the awards ceremony.

There are many reasons why road racing is intriguing for so many, and this event highlights many of them. With the phenomenal advances of technology there remains the pure athleticism of running. There are no mechanical or electronic aids. It's the runner, the road, the distance, the competition, and the clock. No excuses, no help. In this event team members could watch and cheer their teammates every step of the way, as the five-person teams have one runner on the road and four in support at any given time.

Gate City will hold the renown, hefty trophy until Mill Cities 2001. Appropriately it is made of wood and metal gears--winners must really be in gear. And for the first time, the name inscribed on top will read: "Gate City Striders", Mill Cities 2000 Champions. •

Upcoming Events

Boston Marathon Chartered Bus *Jim Belanger*

When: Monday April 16, 2001
 Leaves From: 99 Restaurant, Exit 7 in Nashua
 Time: 8:30AM (waits for no one)
 Price: \$35 (Unchanged since 96)
 Returns time: 7:30-8:00pm
 Post-race party, showers and refreshments at the
 Hotel Buckminster
 For more information see enclosed flyer or call
 Jim Belanger 595-1870

Freeze Your Buns 5K & 5 Mile

The Freeze Your Buns series has 2 races remaining. They are held at:

Talent Hall at Darrah Pond in Litchfield.

The races start at **9:00AM**, race day registration starts at 8:15AM. Talent hall is a large, warm, indoor changing and social area with complete restrooms. Plenty of off-road parking right at the hall. Call the race director for directions or visit www.gatecity.org

Steve & Judi Moland (882-2067) are the series coordinators. Please call these race directors to volunteer.

FEB 11 -- Tom Raiche 594-2416 & Annette Marchand 429-0453

FEB 25 -- Dave Salvias 673-0069 & Michael Dodge 885-2484

2001 Team Competition Preliminary Schedule *By Michael Amarello*

(Races in Boldface are Top Priority)

- March: Melrose (MA) Half Marathon - USATF NE Gran Prix
- April: James Joyce Ramble 10K in Dedham (MA) - USATF NE Gran Prix
- April: Boston Marathon**
- May: Bedford 12K - USATF NE Gran Prix**
- May: Foothealth 5K in Derry - NH RRCA Gran Prix**
- June: Pack Monadnock 10 Miler**
- June: Mount Washington Road Race**
- July: Hugh Holt 5 Miler in Raymond - NH RRCA Gran Prix**
- July: Stowe 8 Miler in Vermont - USATF NE Gran Prix
- August: Belmont 10 Miler - NH RRCA Gran Prix**
- September: Millyard 5K in Manchester - NH RRCA Gran Prix**
- September: Lake Winnepesaukee Relay**
- October: Rojack's 5 Miler in Attleboro (MA) - USATF NE Gran Prix
- October: Shirt Factory 5 Miler in Salem - NH RRCA Gran Prix**
- October: Cape Cod Marathon - USATF NE Gran Prix
- November: Jingle Bell 10K in Portsmouth - NH RRCA Gran Prix**
- November: Mayor's Cup 8K Cross Country in Boston
- November: USATF NE Cross Country Champi onship in Boston**
- December: Mill Cities Relay**



Pam (da grinch) Hall



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The Tilted Boards

By Bill Engle

As I stood at the starting line with four other runners on a 200 meter indoor track waiting for the starter's gun, I kept telling myself not to go out too fast. Sure, I was running the first leg of "only" a 4X1600 meter relay but at least for me it wasn't going to be a sprint all the way. The gun went off and the kid on the inside lane went off like a shot. I was in the fourth lane and had the advantage of a little downhill into the first turn. I soon found myself tucked into the first lane at the middle of the turn not far behind the "rabbit". I completed the first lap in 35 seconds! So much for my slow start strategy. The next lap or two consisted of my slowing noticeably and the other three runners whipping past me. One of these was a women's senior runner who ran like a gazelle.

When Bill Spencer asked me if I could handle a leg of a 4X1600 meter relay race, I told him that I had never run on an indoor track before and I didn't know how well I could handle the banked turns. But I told him I would like to give it a shot. The other problem was—what kind of 1 mile shape are we in early in January?

It turns out that this was not to be just any old 4X1600 race. It seems that the world record for the Veterans age group was set back in 1981 (actually for the 4X1 mile, I believe, but why quibble over a few feet!), and the time of 27:30 seemed to be beatable. It should be noted that this relay is not exactly a premier event and is rarely

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Reflections on a Brief Coaching Career

By Kevin Beck

In October 1987, over the grounds of a small parochial school in Concord, New Hampshire, I collected the most significant individual title of my high-school cross-country career by winning the Capital Area Championship.

In August 1999, when I returned to Bishop Brady High School for the first time, my purpose was carved from the same block of inspiration.

Approaching a dozen boys and girls lounging on the grass, I introduced myself as their new

cross-country coach. I was, I felt, both superbly primed and hopelessly unprepared for the task. As a veteran marathoner and a writer for *Running Times* magazine, I could claim ample experience with the sport;

but would this translate into positive experience for these kids?

Fast forward one year. On the same patch of grass, I addressed a group nearly three times as large. The mellow ennui of 1999 had given way to expectancy. As I spoke matter-of-factly of our prospects, I reflected on the seeming absurdity of mentioning the words

this team and state championship in the same casual breath. Heading into 1999, only one kid in a marginal program drifting toward extinction had ever broken 20:00 for 5K. We had virtually the same core of ostensibly meager athletes in 2000 as we'd had the previous two seasons, losing no one to graduation in either year, but the equation had changed considerably.

Like coaches everywhere, I spoke of workouts and race strategies, of training

plans and motivational gambits; I plainly expected the pleasantly exhausting burden of summer training miles, the righteous goals tacked to kids' bedroom walls, and the raw desire bred of a newfound *esprit de corps* to bring

the team into uncharted territory. I was their coach and unwavering supporter, and used humor as a touchstone in all team affairs; but this was no fun-run club. I was their foremost fan and their harshest taskmaster.

And who were they to concoct far-flung aspirations of glory? They were senior captains Jeremy Huckins, Brady's best runner in years, a veteran of the Meet of Champions and an implacable training machine, and Mike Walsh, a workhorse whose incredible focus on team objectives would glow increasingly bright as the campaign wore on. They were juniors Tyler Matzke, fair-haired and ebullient, a fierce competitor stolen over the summer from an unlikely vault – the football team; Andrew Milne, the ultra-demure team oracle and spiritual anchor; and diminutive Eric Arnstein, who, in a protracted burst of inspiration, had converted much ambitious spring-time talk into a summer of fifty-mile-per-week action. They were junior cap-

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About the author
Kevin Beck is a contributing editor for Running Times magazine and a 2:26 marathoner living in Concord, New Hampshire. His yellow Lab Komen doubles as his training partner and the Bishop Brady team mascot.

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tain Alice Field, who loved to run and always had, but regarded competition as something of a wasp's nest – worries and pressure and scanty rewards. They were talented, vivacious freshman Ruby Weldon, who would rewrite team record books and push Alice to new heights.

They were also scholarship-caliber singers, award-winning dressage competitors, valedictorians, members of student government, actors in school plays, musicians, and mischievous cut-ups. And every day at three o'clock, they were all runners.

They had listened to me preach my endless sermons on the importance of year-round running. In New Hampshire this can be a thankless undertaking, with afternoon darkness, sub-zero temperatures, black ice, limitless mud, high humidity, and tenacious clouds of bugs presenting sequential challenges. Still, most of them had trained diligently in July and August; the seeds of desire had been sown, and tentative sprigs of self-confidence were poking through the soil of their newly dedicated selves. They read books like *Once A Runner* and plotted magical outcomes of their own, shared and secret.

We opened the 2000 season on a 92-degree day over a course ugly with hills: a race tailor-made for the implosion of the unfit. The boys, led by Jeremy's first career victory, placed second to Class L power Concord. Tyler's debut was impressive, as he ran fifth overall. The supporting cast did its job. And almost as impressive as the score was the unprecedented number of Brady uniforms dotting the landscape. We were a team with potential, but also with a presence, and this was evident in the way its members carried themselves in school. Ruby exploded out of obscurity to break up Concord High's formidable top five – the Crimson Tide would rank 11th in the nation at season's end – and Alice gutted out the race of her life to place ninth. The stage was set.

In the coming weeks, a juggernaut-in-the-making slowly picked up steam. While both teams had shown great improvement over 1999, this was to be the boys' year. They ground up the state's lower-echelon teams with patience and precision, jumping out the blocks 22-0, including invitationals. Jeremy won four of his first five races and made it look easy. We hadn't faced the Class I elite, Con-Val and Hano-

ver, but could not be dismissed out-of-hand by anyone. *On any given day...*

The pink cloud finally dissolved two-thirds of the way through the season, when Jeremy, whose IT band had been slowly breaking down under the strain of sixty-five mile weeks, finally and reluctantly took to the sidelines. In his absence, despite solid individual efforts by the others, we were shut out by Con-Val. There was nothing we could do but watch it happen.

Any team with its first taste of success will inevitably face internal conflicts. Mike had begun to sense a subtle slippage in the attitude of some of his mates and he called them on it, not without cost. Once everyone was reminded of the seniors' particular emotional investment in the season, the ship stopped listing. But Jeremy's health was a continued question mark that threatened to drive us out of contention. Realistically, we lacked the depth to tackle the championship season without him.

One week before the state meet, we arrived at the Capital Area Championships with an outside shot at unseating Concord. But a cloud of disaster enveloped Brady that afternoon, as Jeremy, running among the leaders, took a nasty spill in the second mile and faded badly. Later I would learn of his internal injuries. Others struggled in his wake. We, humbled and despondent, wound up a distant fifth. Though we'd matched our team place from 1999, the taste in our mouths could not have been different.

Five days before the state championships, I was faced with my greatest challenge of the season: restoring team morale. "I told you this sport can be cruel," I said. "Unfortunately, the Capital race proved that. But the great ones don't just race the hardest or train the most; they bounce back the strongest. You guys are still fit, get it? Be confident, fire it up and the rest will fall into place." We then ran one of our best workouts of the year.

The New Hampshire Class I State Championships were held on the foulest day of October; howling winds swept though Manchester's Derryfield Park with enough force to level teams' tents and drive spectators into team buses. Meanwhile I flitted around in jeans shorts, half out of my mind with the gravity of the day. *We were here.* I hoped my excitement was contagious. Our stated goal was to finish in the top five and advance to the

Meet of Champions, a race whose waters Bishop Brady had never sampled.

I had no climactic words for the boys as they stripped down and threw themselves before the mercy of the elements and the task at hand. "You know how to race by now," I intoned, my words swept away by the gale. "But that feeling in your guts and the crazy stuff in your head? Just remember that no amount of money can buy that! Live and love the race."

Moments later, a gunshot dispatched a hundred and forty trained soldiers toward the maw of destiny and their own ill-defined limits. I scampered off toward my preferred watching posts. *Who wants it today?*

After two frantic kilometers we looked good. Up front, a glorified dual meet between Con-Val and Hanover was unfolding, while Jeremy, laying it on the line in a final desperate effort at redemption, and Tyler, a competitive zealot impervious to distraction, ran stride for stride in the top twenty. *Pushing, always pushing. Don't settle.* Andrew, exquisitely focused on this one endeavor for months, clung to the tail end of a tight, swarming second pack. Mike zipped by not far behind. But Eric, not for lack of effort, was struggling. Tightening up too soon. *Arnie, you're killing us!* But I could not scream those words; could never motivate from a platform of fear. We were here to succeed, not forestall failure. Regardless of the cost, I wanted the kids to grasp the difference.

I darted to the finish to await the inevitable. The string of runners appeared. *two in yellow!* With a quarter mile to go, Tyler, the ex-running back with the boxer's choppy, chest-first style of gobbling up turf, and Jeremy – a mess of battered tendons and such but too deep into this mess to lie down – bobbed and crashed along in a large pack of runners. Con-Val's front four were grouped together just ahead. *Too many Cougars, where do these guys come from?* With fire in their eyes – Tyler's fueled by instinctive competitive spirit, Jeremy's by angst and relief – Brady's top guns fell across the line strides apart in 13th and 15th. *Welcome home.*

My eyes groped up the stretch again; an eternal waiting game lasting no longer than ninety seconds was underway. The trickle of finishing runners was becoming

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