

Tuesday, September 7, 2004

MISSOURIAN

Columbia, Missouri

Winning is just a bonus

Hard to beat St. Louis runner wins his fourth Columbia race

By **EZEKIEL GUZA**

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When Ronald Chislom enters the Heart of America Marathon, he doesn't lose.

For the fourth time in as many races, Chislom won Columbia's annual Labor Day race.

Chislom led the entire way, finishing the 26.2 mile course in 2 hours, 40 minutes, 14 seconds. His time was 15:47 faster than runner-up Larry Hennier, the second largest margin of victory in the race's history.

Chislom, a resident of St. Louis, said he started out looking to break the course record of 2:29:15 but realized at the halfway point that was not realistic.

"I wanted to be around 1:13 halfway but I was around 1:16," he said. "At that point I just relaxed and ran a good race."

Chislom, 43, said he runs marathons for fun and to stay in shape and winning is just an added bonus.

"Joe Duncan, the race director does a great job year in and year out of making this a fun event to run," he said, "and that's what it is all about."

Chislom had his best finish in 1996, with a 2:30:43, just off the record set by Dennis Hinkamp in 1977. In 1999, Chislom won in 2:35:30 and in 2000, he won in 2:44:08.

Andrea McGehee, from Kansas City, was the top woman finisher with a time of 3:21:03. It was her second Heart of America and the second time she placed first among women. She finished in 3:21:26 in 1999.

"The last time I did it, I swore I would never do it again because it's so hard," McGehee, 36, said. "It's those hills. They just keep coming."

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[see full size image] Joshua Giannini, left, and Alexis Bickel from Memphis, Tenn., approach the finish line in the 45th Annual Heart of America Marathon on Monday. (LINDSAY TEMPINSON/Missourian)

They just keep hitting you.”

The largest of the hills, known as Easley Hill, rises from the Missouri River valley and is nearly a half mile long.

Rick Roeber said Easley Hill is particularly troublesome.

“You’ll see a lot of runners walking up the hill because it is so vertical,” he said. “I always make it a goal to run the whole way.”

It was the third time Roeber, of Lee’s Summit, completed the Heart of America, but Monday was the first time he ran it barefoot.

Roeber, who finished in 3:57:41, said he slowed his pace while running on the rock and gravel.

“My feet feel good,” he said. “I have no cuts or blisters.”

Chris Cook, 33, who finished in 3:02:25, was the first Columbia resident to cross the finish line at the corner of Seventh Street and Broadway.

Daryl Simon, 56, from Rogersville, said he enjoyed the race but was upset with the structure of how the awards were given out.

“I am not planning to come back because of my age,” he said “Most marathons have an award for every five-year age group, whereas this marathon only has one for every 10-year age group. In an age group that would run 55-59 I would have won an award today.”

Hajami Nishi is the first runner from Japan to run in a Heart of America. He is in the United States to run six marathons in six states in two weeks.

It was the 357th marathon he has run and he has published a book titled Ecomarathon Databook in which he analyzes marathons based on their environment and runner friendliness.

“The country roads were very good,” he said. “They were pretty and peaceful. But on the main roads some drivers never pay attention and if you don’t warn them by putting up cones or signs I understand.”

The marathon was Mark Sherwood’s first. Sherwood, 34, of Normal, Ill., said he first became interested in running a marathon about a year ago.

“I lost over 70 pounds while training and I’m so happy to have achieved my goal of finishing a marathon,” he said.

Richard Hengst, 54, of Cape Girardeau ended his marathon in his typical fashion.

“I always do 10 pushups right before I cross the finish line,” he said.

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