

Novato Man Aims for Record in 100-Mile Run

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Mark Richtman of Novato is the odds-on favorite in the over-50 age division in tomorrow's 32nd annual Western States 100-mile endurance run from Squaw Valley to Auburn. Richtman, who turned 50 this year, said he is "hoping to go sub-18 hours," which would break the age-group record of 18 hours, 44 minutes that has stood since 1988. Late storms have left snow on the first 20 miles of the course, however, which may hinder the times of the race's 425 entrants, many of whom have come from overseas.

The Western States is considered the premier 100-mile trail run in the world. The course begins at 6,200 feet at the bottom of Squaw Valley's big chair lift, climbs to 8,750 feet

over Emigrant Pass and follows the original trails used by the gold and silver miners of the 1850s, incorporating more than 18,000 feet of ascent and 23,000 feet of descent. Race director Greg Soderlund said the biggest danger is renal failure, "where you become so dehydrated that your kidneys stop working."

Richtman, who shattered the age-group record in April's 62-mile coastal Marin race, the Miwok, has trained frequently on the Western States course, driving in early-morning darkness from his Novato house to Squaw Valley, running for 10 hours on the mountain trails and then supplementing the drive back home "with plenty of caffeinated Mountain Dew."

He expects to be challenged by local runners Mike Sweeney of San Rafael and 1988 Open division winner Brian Purcell of Sebastopol. Seventeen other North Bay athletes have qualified for the race, an extraordinary feat in itself, since runners must have completed either a 50-mile race in under 10 hours or a 100-mile race in under 24 hours. Soderlund

said "being obsessive- compulsive helps," and that it normally takes the competitors six months to fully recover from the race.

Richtman is also a six-time world champion in the ultra-endurance sport Ride and Tie, which involves two runners and a horse. Once, he said, he was kicked by his horse during an event but managed to run 25 more miles before getting medical attention..

Overseas coach: Ex-Casa Grande boys basketball coach Jeremy Russotti is in Benin in West Africa, running basketball camps and working with local coaches to develop a training curriculum for 450 local kids. He hopes to eventually bring top youth players from Nigeria and Benin to U.S. high schools.

Russotti will also work this summer with Jacki Gemelos of St. Mary's of Stockton, who is considered one of the top girls high school players in the country, and with Casa alumni Josh Akognon and Angelo Tsagarakis, both now sophomores playing in the Pac-10. Tsagarakis, in 2003-04, set an Oregon State freshman

record for 3-pointers with 45 before a freak shoulder injury forced him to redshirt last year. Akognon, in a solid freshman season at Washington State, scored 12 points against Gonzaga and 15 against UCLA..

Tennis roundup: The best deal in North Bay sports this summer might be John Teran's One-Love Tennis Academy. From July 18 to Aug. 10, Teran and his staff will offer free instruction to kids 6-16 in Windsor, Healdsburg and Sebastopol. All equipment is provided. Teran, who was assisted by a similar program while growing up in Queens, N.Y., is reluctant to discuss figures, but Sebastopol Community Center director Kim Caruso estimates Teran has plunked more than \$20,000 of his own money into the One-Love project. For information, call (707) 823-1511 or (707) 478-5963.

Meanwhile, the tough USTA summer junior tournament circuit is under way, and several local players have achieved top-12 age-group rankings in the Northern California section, which extends from Oregon to Fresno. In boys'

play, they are: 10-and-unders -- Michael Guzman, Napa, ranked No. 2; 14s -- Sky Lovill, Fairfax, No. 3 and Chris Eriksson, Santa Rosa, No. 5; 16s -- Andrew Kells, Tiburon, No. 11. Ranked girls are: 16s -- Natalie Varnay, Tiburon, No. 7 and Melissa Bradford, Tiburon, No. 11; 18s -- Alexandra Borowicz, Santa Rosa, No. 2..

End of the line: For those who enjoyed the eight-year run of Bob Fletcher's Sonoma County Crushers baseball team, the empty stadium on Labath in Rohnert Park is a bittersweet reminder on a summer afternoon. Fletcher said this week he and his wife, Susan, "keep running into people all over the county who tell us how much they miss the Crushers." The team folded after the 2002 season, he said, because the Western Baseball League lost momentum "which was exacerbated by the fact that the city was eagerly looking for us to leave so they could put a shopping center there."

A group headed by longtime Crushers' fan Chris Lee has been maneuvering unsuccessfully for

two years to get a new Class A stadium built in Sonoma County. Fletcher is not optimistic and said that, in addition to numerous hurdles, constructing a good stadium today costs \$10 million to \$15 million. He said he is "quite proud that we entertained over 700,000 people in eight years" in a stadium that was "less than beautiful."

Fletcher said he is also proud of the high-quality radio broadcast crews he assembled. Roxie Bernstein is now the No. 2 play-by-play man for the Florida Marlins, Steve Bitker is with the Oakland A's and Dave Raymond is working Baltimore Orioles games this summer. Fletcher recalls a Crushers' game in Bend, Ore., where a migration of enormous moths overran the stadium and interfered with the game, while Raymond eloquently incorporated the event into his play-by-play.

Fletcher said he will stay retired as an owner but will continue to remember "the joy we saw on the faces of kids."

-by Ted Gross

Articles