



Presented by USATF Pacific

## 2015 USATF National Club Cross Country Championships

### *Wrap-up of an Unforgettable Day*

By Mark Winitz

*Photos courtesy of Kathy Camet*

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Many running enthusiasts remember the 1989 U.S. National Cross Country Championships held in San Francisco's majestic Golden Gate Park where in a pouring rain and gale-force winds two U.S. Olympians, Pat Porter and Lynn Jennings, garnered wins. For Porter, it was a record-setting eighth consecutive national cross country championship victory.

The nationals returned to Golden Gate Park this year as the U.S. National Club Cross Country Championships, hosted and organized by USATF's Pacific Association. In 1998, USATF divided the cross country nationals into two separate events—one in the winter focused on individuals and the other in the fall focused on inter-club team competition.

The 2015 Club Championships, held on a bright and sunny (but mild) day, offered courses over Golden Gate Park's varied terrain: trails, grassy meadows, and a flat sprint finish on the Polo Fields' dirt track. Six separate races were held for more than 1,900 entrants. All-in-all, it was a very successful and memorable day.

"I want to thank the Pacific Association for one of the best USATF National Club Cross Country Championships I have had the privilege to witness (and I've been to all of them)," said Michael Scott who Chairs USATF's Cross Country Council. "Your thorough planning and flawless execution paid off with an amazing championships

experience for the 1,900 competitors. Even the weather was perfect (if maybe not quite so memorable as 1989).”

Here’s a short recap of each race, including quotes from the winners and top PA/USATF performances:

### **Masters Women 6K**



**Sonja Friend-Uhl** (age 44, Atlanta Track Club) went out hard from the start to the front where she was joined by Janet McDevitt (42, Club Northwest) and Chris Kimbrough (46, Team Red Lizard). Friend-Uhl, who holds the female masters (age 40-44) record for the world indoor mile (4:44.84) and the U.S. age 40-44 record for the outdoor mile (4:45.68), kicked over the last quarter mile crossing the finish in 21:59. She beat 2nd-placer McDevitt by 7 seconds. McDevitt led her Club Northwest-A women’s 40+ team to victory.

**Betsy Russakoff** (41, San Francisco, Impala Racing Team) was the top PA/USATF female master capturing 4th place and leading her Impala Racing Team to a 3rd place female 40+ team finish. The Impalas also captured 2nd place 50+ and 1st place 60+ team places. PA standout **Eve Pell** (78, Mill Valley, Tamalpa Runners) topped the 75-79 age group in 37:33 as Tamalpa was crowned the 70+ team winner.

#### *Quotes:*

Sonja Friend-Uhl (Atlanta Track Club) - 1st place

“My strategy coming into the race was to be conservative during the first two miles and really go to work over the last 2K. Especially once I saw the course, I reinforced that in my head. However, I’m a miler and half miler and 6K really isn’t my genre. I went out hard just to get settled in over the first 200. The first mile was 5:24 and I was in front, so I didn’t follow my strategy, but at that point I was committed and I said you’re just going to have to tough it out and go with it.

“I knew Chris Kimbrough would be tough. She won this a couple of years. And, I knew Janet McDevitt would be tough. And, sure enough, they were both there. Janet and I traded the lead and I just tried to stay close. I knew where the quarter mile to go mark was, and at that point I just put it out there, but it was tough. My coach, Andrew Bagley, has done a great job of getting me stronger, and kicking at the right time.”

### **Masters Men (age 60+age groups) 10K**

**Rick Becker** (61, Club Northwest) won in 28:58 in a close contest with **John Barbour** (61, Greater Lowell Road Runners) who placed second six seconds behind. Top PA/USATF overall 60+ finishers were 5th placer **Doug Steedman** (Asics Aggie RC) in 30:35, closely followed by 6th placer **Tom Bernhard** (Excelsior RC) in 30:41.

Several PA/USATF men captured age division wins in this race: 70-74: **Len Goldman** (71, Tamalpa Runners) in 34:26, 75-79: **Hans Schmid** (75, Tamalpa Runners) in 38:12, 80+: **Bill Dodson** (80, West Valley J&S) in 44:40. Goldman and Schmid led Tamalpa to the men’s 70-and-over team title.

PA’s venerable **Darryl Beardall** (79, Tamalpa Runners) finished in 1:01:34. Beardall has accumulated over 310,000 lifetime running miles during 62 years of running—a world individual record.

#### *Quotes:*

Rick Becker (Club Northwest) – 1st place

“My strategy was to go hard and fast, and if anybody tried to come with me I was going to make them pay. John Barbour (2nd placer) was right behind me the whole way. I really didn’t pull away until about 400 meters to go. I knew I had John beat when I was 5 meters beyond the finish line.”

### **Masters Men 10K (age 40+ and 50+ age groups)**



**Kevin Castille** (43, Unattached, Louisiana) led from the gun and never faltered, crossing the finish line in 31:00, a comfortable 36-second gap over 2nd-placer Gregory Mitchell (42, Bowerman Track Club). PA/USATF’s **Neville Davey** (age 40) turned in a very solid race, capturing 3rd in 31:47 as he led the **West Valley Track Club** to a 2nd place 40+ team finish behind Bowerman TC.

*Quotes:*

Kevin Castille – 1st place

“I haven’t raced since the Peachtree 10K (7/4/15), so I just wanted to get up there and run my own tempo pace. I was a little worried about the hills and trails because we don’t have that at home. But the course was actually easier than I thought it would be. So, I had fun. I kind of did my own thing. No pressure. No stress. I love running in California. Every time I come here, I run well.”

**Open Women 6K**



**Amy Van Alstine** (Hoka One One Northern Arizona Elite) ran a tight race alongside defending individual champion Laura Thweatt (Boulder Track Club) and Van Alstine’s NAZ Elite teammate Rochelle Kanuho, keeping things neck-and-neck over the last 3/4 mile. The trio barreled to the finish, but Van Alstine surged over the final 200 meters to edge Thweatt—the ‘13 and ‘14 U.S. National Club Country Championships Women’s Individual Titlist—by a second, 19:51 to 19:52. Kanuho was right on their heels, crossing in 19:53. In the team race, the Boston Athletic Association defended their women’s team title with an exceptional 28-point performance courtesy of three top-10 finishes from Emma Bates, Sarah Pagano and three-time Olympian Jen Rhines.

**Kaitlin Gregg Goodman** was the top PA/USATF open woman, placing 7th in 20:05, leading her Strava Track Club to a 7th place top PA team finish.

*Quotes:*

Amy Van Alstine – 1st place

“I just planned on sitting in the front pack today and see how it went—just stay with the lead people and see what happens. Kind of what I do in a cross country race. There were a bunch of us together until about 1K to go where everyone separated a little bit more. At that point I was kind of surprised about my position because my last three races didn’t go real well. But cross country is a little different, so I went into this thinking anything can happen. With about 400m to go, I just went for it.”

Laura Thweatt – 2nd place

“This was my first race coming off of the New York City Marathon, and obviously quite a different genre of racing. I knew the field would be pretty deep as it always is, so I just wanted to be comfortable for the first mile. Kind of sit back and then really start to press towards the middle and end. Amy (Van Alstine) and Rochelle (Kanuho) gave me a real run the entire way and made it really tough. It came down to a sprint finish.

“I came onto the (Polo Fields cycling dirt track with about 800m left in the race) kind of falling off of them. But then I said, ugghh, I really want this so bad. I found another gear and was able to pull ahead, but Amy just got me at the finish.”

### **Open Men 10K (“A” Race)**



**Garrett Heath** (Seattle, WA) continued to prove his dominance on the cross country circuit, taking the men’s individual title in 29:06. Heath, who took the Bupa Great Edinburgh Cross Country individual crown in early 2015, battled with Boulder Track Club’s Jonathan Grey, who finished just behind Heath in 29:10. Scot Fauble’s third place finish in 29:26 for the Hoka One One Northern Arizona Elite men proved to be the catalyst for their victory in the team race.

**Phillip Reid** (Asics Aggie RC) was the top PA/USATF man, finishing 13th in 29:46. He led the Asics Aggie men to a 4th place team finish.

#### *Quotes:*

**Garrett Heath** (Brooks Beasts TC) – 1st place

“10K cross really isn’t my animal for racing. I love the 4K cross. The 8K cross I can handle. But the last 2K today was...oh man! Jonathan (Grey) ran a heck of a race. He got out early and I thought he was going to slow up a bit, but he never did. It just came down to the last 800m on the (Polo Fields cycling dirt track).

“Honestly, I was kicking up the hill with about 1K to go. Not all out, but just trying to ramp it up. But the tank was empty. Even with 200m to go, I didn’t think I had much of a shot. So, congratulations, to Jon. He did all the work.”

**Jonathan Grey** (Boulder Track Club-A – 2nd place

“I wanted to be aggressive and take the lead early because I know I’m fit. In the beginning everyone kind of settled in a little bit in a pack, so I said, okay, I’m going to make people hurt. I was in the lead for pretty much the whole race.

“With 800m to go, I knew I was in trouble because I knew Heath has a kick. Right now, I’m in marathon training for my marathon debut at the U.S. Olympic Marathon Trials, and still working on my kick, so I really don’t have one. At the end of the day, Heath got me coming down the home stretch.”

**Open Men 10K (“B” Race)**

*Quote:*

**Steven Grolle** (Unattached, sophomore at Stanford) – 1st place

“I woke up after my last final at Stanford this morning and ran well here. So, this has been a fantastic race. I was a little sluggish coming off of finals and resting up for this race. I caught the leaders about halfway through. I stayed with them and the pack dwindled. I took the lead in the last half mile. I haven’t won a race in two years, since high school (at Sonora, Calif. High School).”