

Other Sports

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Drew Polley and Devon Yanko win the Rock 'n' Roll Seattle Marathon

Drew Polley takes the men's title, while Devon Yanko wins the women's race. Jonathan Lafler, Polley's teammate at Washington State, wins the men's half-marathon and Nuta Olaru took the title in the women's half-marathon.

By Ashley Scoby

Seattle Times staff reporter



Washington State University's cross-country program tallied a win, and the season isn't even in session.

Two of the program's alumni took home first-place finishes at Saturday's Rock 'n' Roll Seattle Marathon and Half-Marathon. Drew Polley, 28, a WSU graduate student in environmental engineering, won the full marathon by six minutes with a time of 2 hours, 24 minutes, 52 seconds. Jonathan Lafler, 24, of Seattle, and Polley's former Cougars teammate, finished first in the half-marathon after running 1:08:07.

The two ran together at WSU in 2008 and were training partners this fall.

"I can't wait to celebrate with him," Polley said. "I kind of started my road career here at the half in 2009, so that's kind of where it all started. Even then, Jonathan was always my most enthusiastic supporter and would train with me."

Polley ran cross country at WSU but didn't regularly run marathon distances until after he graduated. His first road race was the Rock 'n' Roll Seattle half-marathon in 2009. He had the chance to go to the national half-marathon championships this year, but chose to return to Rock 'n' Roll instead.

"I wanted to come back where it all started and try to pick up a win," he said. "Mission accomplished."

A South Kitsap High School graduate, Polley trained in Seattle for years before moving to Pullman for college, often running through Seward Park. He used that to his advantage, blazing through familiar territory and leaving the second-place finisher (and last year's winner), Yon Yilma, far behind.

At certain points in the course where there were 180-degree turns, Polley could gauge how far back his competitors were.

From early in the race, they all trailed Polley. As he widened the gap — in his hometown, no less — he thought it was almost too good to be true.

“I had a great view of Rainier, and I was like, ‘Man, this is amazing,’ ” he said. “I was almost thinking to myself, ‘It’s too perfect, and someone’s going to make a move.’ I almost wished it was raining or something.”

Lafler had a similar experience earlier in the day: He was neck-and-neck with second-place finisher Roosevelt Cook for the first couple of miles. As a hometown guy and the runner-up in last year’s half-marathon, Lafler was motivated. Saturday’s race was not just practice for him.

“I really wanted to win today,” he said. “I wanted to run a little bit faster than I did, but the whole time I was thinking, ‘Win, win, win!’ ”

Once he got through Mile 3, though, the only things behind Lafler for the remaining 10 miles were police escorts and open concrete. He finished 2:38 before Cook, an Oak Hills, Calif., resident.

On the women’s side, races were not much closer. Devon Yanko, 31, timed in at 2:51:18 in the full marathon, finishing 17:49 ahead of runner-up Sarah Getty from Des Moines.

Yanko, who has worked as a San Francisco-area bakery owner since 2009, grew up in Seattle’s Capitol Hill area. As part of the Rock ‘n’ Roll course, she ran past Seattle Children’s Theater where her mother worked for 14 years. She also reunited with some family she hadn’t seen since moving away.

“It was awesome. My cousin who I haven’t seen since my family moved down to the Bay Area surprised me on the course. I started crying,” Yanko said. “I was like: ‘Don’t cry. I can’t breathe if I cry.’ It was great.”

After that, Yanko didn’t have trouble breathing, and had even less trouble winning. A first-place finisher in “probably 20” marathons, Yanko is used to being on her feet. She goes into work at her bakery at 1 a.m., finishes in the midafternoon and finds time to train after that.

At least Yanko didn’t have the competition of running against last year’s winner, Nuta Oлару, 43. Oлару, who is preparing for the U.S. Mountain Running Championships in New Hampshire on July 6, ran the half-marathon this year to save energy. She won by nearly four minutes with a 1:19:58 time.

“It’s so easy,” Oлару said. “The miles go fast and I don’t feel tired like after a marathon.”

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