

Young Studs Hammer Retreads

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With an average age of nearly forty, the U.S. World Cup fifty kilometer squad proves that there is still some life left in the legs of former national and Olympic team members such as Marco Evoniuk, Carl Schueler and Eugene Kitts. Perhaps heartened by the graying of the fifty kilometer squad, several more former stars came out of the woodwork at the twenty kilometer trials in Monterey California, only to have their hopes dashed by a crop of emerging elites.

Most surprising, perhaps, was the resurfacing of former 1:25 walker Ray Sharp who vowed never to return to the sport after the 1991 season. Currently residing in Sedona, Arizona, Ray resumed racewalk training in November in the hopes of travelling with the U.S. team to Beijing, China in April for the World Walking Cup. Ray was joined in his pursuit by 1988 Olympic 20 kilometer trials winner Gary Morgan and four-time Olympian Marco Evoniuk.

A relatively pedestrian first loop of the flat, two kilometer course gave fleeting hope to the veterans as a large pack followed closely behind Evoniuk through a 9:02 first split. As the pace intensified, the old horses fell off one by one. Ray Sharp, the first casualty of a series of sub-4:20 kilometers, dropped out before the ten kilometer mark, followed by Evoniuk at the 12. After ten kilometers, Allen James, closely pursued by 1993 World Cup teammate Dave McGovern, pulled away from a tight second pack of Phil Dunn, Andrew Hermann, Rob Cole, Gary Morgan and promising newcomer Will Van Axen. Morgan fell off the pace by fifteen kilometers, leaving the four X-generation athletes to duke it out for the three remaining seats on the bus to Beijing.

The pack of emerging elite athletes traded places leading the pack into a strong sea breeze on a long uphill section of the course, as they each faced the realization that four athletes were now fighting for the three remaining spots on the Cup team. The pack broke with four kilometers to go as the inexperienced Van Axen stopped to tie a shoelace. A strong surge to rejoin the pack left the UW Parkside sophomore dead-legged for the final sprint to the finish line.

After shadowing James through 18 kilometers, McGovern was once again slowed by a weak stomach. After stopping briefly to vomit before the final loop, the NY Athletic Club veteran resumed his charge after 1992 Olympian James, closing the gap to 12 seconds. James emerged victorious in 1:28:21 followed closely by McGovern in 1:28:33. Hermann pulled away from Adidas teammate Philip Dunn over the final kilometers to take the third position with a 1:28:47 to Dunn's 1:29:19. Rob Cole, able to keep his Reeboks tied through the entire twenty kilometers, bought his ticket to China with a 1:29:21 to Van Axen's 1:29:40.

Hermann, Dunn, Cole and Van Axen, all under the age of twenty five, all set personal bests in Monterey. Also, in eclipsing the 1:30 barrier, each has qualified for the 1996 twenty kilometer Olympic Trials. Although not quite matching the lofty accomplishments of their predecessors yet, in trouncing the veterans at this important trials race the novices have shown that they will be a force to be reckoned with in the coming years.

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