

# Running commentary

By Charlie Kanzig  
Correspondent

A national championship sporting event took place Saturday in Bend — and for other than a few diehard fans and faithful volunteers, it went largely unnoticed.

Bend hosted the USA Track and Field (USATF) national cross-country championships for the second year in a row at River's Edge Golf Club. The meet crowns the national champions and is the qualifying event for the world cross-country championships scheduled for March in Kampala, Uganda.

I can't blame people for not wanting to venture out into the ice, slush, and mud that greeted the runners, meet officials, and spectators, but at the same time it was a rare chance to see Olympic-level athletes right here in our own backyard.

The meet began with a four-kilometer community race that included local runners of all ages, followed by masters races and finally the elite runners.

The course, a two-kilometer loop, had been cleared over the last two weeks of deep snow by hearty volunteers from the local running

community using shovels to form the path. Saturday's warmer temperatures caused plenty of melting, making the course a classic muddy cross-country challenge.

The women's elite winner, Aliphine Tuliamuk, a former Wichita State University runner now residing in Santa Fe, New Mexico didn't mind the conditions whatsoever, streaking to a 48-second win in the 8,000-meter race with a time of 34 minutes and 24 seconds. Tuliamuk, who became a United States citizen last spring, will return to the African continent where she was born (in Kenya) to represent the United States team in Uganda.

The top six runners in the women's and men's races will represent the U.S. in Uganda.

The men's race turned out to be much more tactical as the leaders stayed together for much of the race, including two Olympians, Leonard Korir and Shadrack Kipchirchir, who placed first and third respectively. Korir finished the 10,000-meter race in 30:12.

A highlight for me was catching up with Melody Fairchild, 43, who won the masters women's race.



PHOTO BY CHARLIE KANZIG

Leaders in the men's USATF national championships navigate a slippery corner during the 10,000-meter race at River's Edge Golf Course.

Fairchild, who many consider the best overall female high school distance runner of all time, has worked at the Steens Mountain Running Camp in southeastern Oregon for the past few years, which is where we first met. I have always appreciated her passion for the sport as well as her dedication to helping coach and advise young female runners to be well-balanced, healthy-minded individuals.

She and her 10-month-old son Dakota live in Boulder, Colorado, near where Melody grew up. She

is planning on helping conduct a women's-only running camp in Tillamook in the future, thanks to her many ties to Oregon.

As a longtime coach myself, I am a big fan of her efforts.

Bend's most well-known runner, Max King, who does a lot of work with youth running in Central Oregon, ran very respectably on his way to 13th place overall in 31:32. Now 36, King has left his mark at the national level in track, cross-country and ultra-trail running. As one onlooker said Saturday, "If

Max steps to the starting line you know he's going to give 100 percent, and he beats a lot of guys much younger than himself."

Sisters resident Kent Boles, an avid runner, found the entire event inspiring, but particularly appreciated the masters runners, some who were in their 70s and still battling the course like the youngsters.

"It's impressive to see people my age and actually much older lacing up their racing spikes and doing this," he said. "I'm really glad I got to be here."

