

Seaside marathoner wins Portland's 2021 race

By R.J. MARX
Seaside Signal

When people see Matt Spear running, they sometimes yell, "Run, Forrest, run!"

While Spear didn't run across the country like Forrest Gump, the character in the classic Tom Hanks film, the Seaside resident ran and won this year's Portland Marathon.

Spear first entered the event in 2015. His most disappointing moment came in 2019 when he was part of the group of runners that went off course after following a biker who wasn't part of the race about 10 miles in.

"There wasn't someone saying, 'Go this way,'" he said.

By the time they stopped, turned around and got back on course, they had added several miles to the run. "We did the scenic route," he said.

While his chances for a win that year were gone, he still finished in the race's top 10 and eyed future marathons. "I felt a little disappointed, but it happens," he said. "You just kind of get ready for the next one."

A running family

Spear's parents were runners, participating in the Hood to Coast race in the early '80s when the relay finished in Pacific City.

Growing up, Spear went to Jesuit High School in Beaverton. He came to the coast in the summer to visit his grandparents, who lived in Seaside.

His first sport was soccer, which he said he knew he wasn't very good at, but he found he had endurance and enjoyed running.

He switched to cross-country.

Spear was influenced by the high level of coaching and performance. "The winter of sophomore year I kind of started ramping it up and increased each year, just trying to do a little bit more," he said.

The Jesuit team was so competitive Spear didn't even make varsity as a senior, he said, but ran the varsity track district meet, where he took fourth.

He ran as a walk-on at Santa Clara University during his freshman year, then transferred to the University of Oregon. He joined the club team, using his junior and senior years to get into running shape. He ran at Hayward Field — the university track — and up to Pre's Rock, the iconic memorial where the Oregon Olympic runner Steve Prefontaine died at the age of 24.

Spear started "adventure runs," running at Black Butte in central Oregon and other outdoor locations.

After graduating, he began a career in systems development in Portland, still running four or five days a week.

Training and a victory

Spear, 32, moved back to Seaside four years ago. He lives with his girlfriend, who is a nurse at Providence Seaside Hospital.

Long-distance running is part of his regimen. He has a few favorite routes, from his home on N. Holladay Drive across Tillamook Head to Indian Beach and back, the Fort to Sea Trail and a 22-mile route that includes six loops 2 miles each around the Gearhart Golf Links.



R.J. Marx

ABOVE: Matt Spear, a Seaside resident, is setting his sights on the 100K Black Canyon Ultras. BELOW: Spear runs the course of this year's Portland Marathon.



Portland Marathon



Portland Marathon



Portland Marathon

For this year's Portland Marathon in October, Spear started out with a decent night's sleep, an early wake-up and a good breakfast. The day was clear with little wind.

At the start, one runner took the early lead. Spear was among a group of five or six behind the leader.

He was feeling strong. "I just focused on what I was doing," he said. "I could kind of see the leader, so I thought that was a good position to be in."

Around the area of Reed College, Spear began gaining on the leader. "People would say, 'He's a minute ahead,' and we go another mile, 'He's 40 seconds ahead.'"

Another runner from the pack caught up to the leader, who was slowing down. "I held the pace, maybe picked it up a little bit. I didn't feel

tired. I just felt really energized," Spear said.

As Spear crossed a bridge, about a mile from the finish, he saw his father and brother along the waterfront. Spear got to the finish before the tape was up and kept running.

"You're pretty thrilled and excited about things, so I didn't feel the exhaustion that I felt on the other times, when I could barely move," Spear said.

His first place finish time? Two hours, 28 minutes and 47 seconds.

His family joined him for the celebration and interviews after the race.

Spear attributes his win to more training miles without overtraining.

Runners call it "the taper," referring to the reduction of exercise before the race.

"I think the taper is always hard the last

two or three weeks," he said. "You don't want to back off too much or you feel flat, but you don't want to overtrain so you're so tired at the start line you can barely run."

In February, Spear will be setting his sights at a longer run: the 100K Black Canyon Ultras — 62 miles — in Black Canyon, Arizona. Spear will be running at a minimum of about 4,000 feet above sea level in mountains between Flagstaff and Phoenix. Temperatures could range from the 70s to below freezing with snow.

He's run ultramarathons before, at Forest Park, Mount Hood and St. Helens, running for eight or 10 hour stretches.

"You take a bathroom break, but try to keep going. When you stop, it's always hard to get going again," he said.

North Coast runners compete at state

By GARY HENLEY
The Astorian

Cross-country teams from Astoria, Warrenton and Knappa were all busy last Saturday, competing in different races at Lane Community College in Eugene, home of the Oregon School Activities Association's state cross-country meet.

In the girls' race, Astoria junior Ella Zilli was 28th, and Seaside senior Elise Seppa placed 38th. Siuslaw was the team champion, winning by one point over Philomath.

Among local runners, the top individual finish went to Knappa junior Isaiah Rodriguez, who placed second in the 2A/1A boys race, covering the 5,000-meter course in 16 minutes, 28.8 seconds, just behind senior Colin Friend of St. Stephens Academy (16:23.5).

One of the top-rated teams coming into the meet, Knappa finished fifth out of nine scoring teams, with Union/Cove (39 points) winning the team championship ahead of Bandon (43).

Knappa scoring runners included junior Clay Keyser (29th), freshman Soren Brown (43rd), junior Ethan Smalley (47th) and junior Finn Corcoran (49th).

At the 3A level, Warrenton finished tied for sixth out of nine teams, as senior Zander Moha finished seventh in 16:49.3. Senior Phoenix Martin (33rd) was the next highest finisher for the Warriors. He was followed by William



Tim Peitsch

Knappa's Isaiah Rodriguez, right, battles for first with St. Stephen's senior Colin Friend, who eventually took first ahead of Rodriguez in the boys 2A/1A state cross-country meet.

Carruthers (35th), Erik Cooley (46th), Joshua Baker (62nd) and Mason Devos (64th).

In the 4A portion of the meet, the Astoria boys team finished eighth out of 12 teams with 194 points.

Siuslaw won the team title with 42 points, well ahead of second-place Sisters (88). Cot-

tage Grove and Valley Catholic tied for third with 93.

While Marshfield junior Alexander Garcia-Silver was the runaway individual winner in 16:02 (28 seconds ahead of the nearest finisher), junior John Clement was Astoria's highest placer, 32nd in 18:19.

"I didn't feel that good about the race, but I have a few more races to run fast at," Clement said. "(My goal for next year) is to be in the top 10 at state."

Junior teammate Tommy Laman was 34th (18:25), with junior John Colquhon (48th), senior Daniel Messing (55th) and senior Elias Harding-Coe (69th) rounding out the Astoria scorers.

"I had a great time competing with everyone at state," Zilli said. "The course was muddy, but I feel like it was a good race to end the season."

"We have a lot to feel good about with how we raced at state and for the season as a whole," said Astoria coach Andrew Fick. "(The Astoria boys) came in ranked 15th in the state and finished eighth. Being a top 10 team is a big deal, making it out of our league and representing at the state meet is a big deal, and it's always good to see Astoria near the top of the list in 4A."

It was the best finish for the Astoria boys since 2012, when the Fishermen also took eighth.

"We have some good momentum now with our top three runners returning next year as well," Fick said. "That kind of racing experience is invaluable and they're already starting to look at what they can do in the future, which is really exciting for our program."

Knappa will have all of its runners returning in 2022, with Warrenton returning the majority of its team as well.