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NEWS

Irish Guys, Holland take the Rock

By Allison Goldsmith
I&M Sports Editor

Fifty miles of running on the beach wasn't enough for Courtney Anderson. After completing the 20th annual Rock Run as an individual, nearly nine and a half hours after she started her day at First Point on Coatue, Anderson, accompanied by her sister Aimee, kept running past the crowd of supporters at the finish line at Jetties Beach.

It was a rookie mistake for the trained triathlete, who thought she had to finish at Children's Beach. When she heard the news that she had finished, a look of shock and relief passed over her face before she took a celebratory dive into the water.



Photo by Bevin Bixby

Irish Guys' Kieran O'Mahony tags teammate Dan Bryant at the Sconset checkpoint during the Rock Run Saturday.

"It gets to a point where one foot in front of the other is a chore, but I kept saying forward motion," she said, grateful for the support of her sister on the last three miles. "I thought I had to go to Children's Beach."

Tom Holland won the individual competition, but starting with the teams later in the morning, he finished later in the day after Anderson in 8:32.10. Lauren Spósito finished third overall in 9:48.54, with Jeff Allen in 10:58.56 and Don Johnson in 11:38.00.

In the team competition, the Irish Guys team of Kyle Higgins, Kieran O'Mahony, Dan Bryant, Peter Jusseaume and Chris O'Day won their first-ever Cobblestone Cup in 6:08.33, dethroning the Lifeguard team that had won three of the last five Rock Runs.

Last year the Irish Guys, with most of the same runners, took second behind the Lifeguards.

"We were hoping this year to come back and try to take it," O'Mahony said.

The South Shore Raiders, who were penalized 10 minutes for a wrong turn at Great Point, finished second overall despite the misstep, in 6:23.58. Verde's Footprints finished third in 6:30.30 and the Lifeguards came in fourth in 6:31.44.

Eight soloists and 14 teams started from First Point on Coatue Saturday morning for the 20th anniversary Rock Run. The approximate 50-mile relay runs along the north shore of Coatue 12.5 miles around Great Point to a checkpoint on the eastern shore. The second leg is a 12-mile run along the Galls south to Sconset. From Sconset, runners are sent on a seven-mile run around Tom Nevers to Surfside Beach, where they touched off for the fourth leg, an eight-mile run along the south shore around Smith's Point to Madaket. The home stretch from Madaket included a two-mile road run and an eight-mile beach run to the finish line at Jetties Beach.

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"It keeps me in shape all summer long, running on the beach," 12-year Rock Run participant and Team Crossfit runner Keith Mansfield said. "We don't do it to win, we do it to finish."

"It is always good, not only the competition, but also the camaraderie among the teams. That is kind of the main idea, not to mention the charitable cause," Lifeguard runner Chris Gatto said.

The race, which is sponsored by the Hackett Family Foundation, benefited the Nantucket chapter of Autism Speaks.

And they're off

It was a confusing start to the first leg for some competitors. Irish Guys first-leg runner Higgins opened up a decent lead over South Shore Raiders' Ted Noon, but it was Noon who made it to the checkpoint first.



Photo by Bevin Bixby

Scene from last week's race as runners passed Brant Point during the Coatae leg of the Rock Run.

were already off down the beach.

Noon, who won the first leg the last two years for the South Shore Raiders, took a wrong turn after asking people for directions on the beach. Two teams also followed Noon, but were rerouted by volunteers before tagging off on the next leg. The South Shore Raiders

"I just kept running and found my team. I didn't see any tracks, so I might have DQ'd us," Noon said at the Sconset checkpoint waiting for teammate

Adam Northrup.

The low tide on Coatae gave runners a great head start with more beach to work with and a decent patch of seaweed to run on.

"I started off slow, and when I got to the good sand I started pouring it on and opened up a three-minute lead," Higgins said.

On the second leg from Great Point to Sconset, runners dealt with softer sand and low tide.

"The tack I take is to run right at the tip of the shoreline, which is as packed as it gets. I was wearing shoes, but the last 15 minutes they got wet and turned into weights," South Shore Raiders' Northrup said.

"I got a good lead and tried to keep it up the whole way," O'Mahony said before being told that the South Shore Raiders were in front. "No one passed me on the way. I stuck to the water where the sand was more solid."

Thrown Together got a solid leg out of Tim Hendricks, a 15-year-old high school cross country and track runner competing in his first Rock Run at the request of his father J.P., a 12-year Rock Run competitor.

"I think I passed four or five teams right off the bat. The first four miles were fast, the sand was hard and it was low tide, so I had nice, firm sand. Then I was real lonely for the rest of the race," Hendricks said.

"He probably started five to 10 minutes after me. I was on the heels of some guy and he just passed both of us with a head of steam," Lifeguard competitor Jon Bateman said after finishing fourth at Sconset.

The low tide continued to benefit the runners from Tom Nevers to Surfside. South Shore Raiders captain Peter Goulding was the first to Surfside, now only four minutes in front of the surging Irish Guys.

"There were a lot less waves than last year," Goulding said. "I was trying not to stop. Last year there was enough heavy surf that knocked you down in places, and I didn't have to stop this year."

"At first there wasn't much of a slant, but when you got into the third mile there was a huge slant and it was awful," Irish Guys third-leg runner Bryant said.

The Lifeguards took over third place on the leg, passing Thrown Together.

"Our goal is to win. This year more than half our team is all fresh guards, so it is pretty new to them, but

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It is pretty new to them, but we are all in good shape," third-leg runner Mike Toran said at Surfside. "Last year we lost a lot of experience in the Rock Run, but this year we felt an obligation to make another team and try at it. It is a long race, there are still two hours left."
 "(The Irish Guys) are good competition. They are all pretty good athletes. Sand might not be their terrain of preference, but they seem to be who we are going against right now," Toran said.

Verde's Footprints made a push at the top spot with a fourth-place finish at Surfside, 22 minutes back.

"The sand was fine, but the grade was really tough on your ankles. It wasn't my cardio or my leg strength. It was my ankles," said Christina Barrett, who still managed to take six minutes off her best time. "It is a real challenging event. It pushes you from your normal road running. It is a mental race."

The home stretch

Along the south shore between Surfside and Madaket, the Irish Guys finally retook the lead. At the final checkpoint, they held a slim two-minute advantage over the South Shore Raiders for the first time since Great Point.



Photo by Jim Powers

Scene from the annual Rock Run around-the-island relay and solo race on Saturday. Female soloist Courtney Anderson.

"I started out strong. I knew they had a big lead. I tried to get him in my sights. Once I saw him, I got closer. When I passed him, I put a surge on and just tried to maintain speed and not die," said Irish Guys' Jusseaume, whose father Gary is the head coach of the cross country and track teams at Assumption College, for which four of the five teammates run.

Verde's Footprint 16-year-old runner Zach Silber put pressure on the Lifeguard team, making up 10 minutes of time by the Madaket checkpoint.

"At the halfway mark I started to push and then I kicked it in at the end," Silber said of his first Rock Run. "It is very challenging. The beach feels good, but it is a little different than a lot of races."

Irish Guys' O'Day crossed the line at Jetties Beach just over an hour later to earn the victory. John Birkett crossed second for South Shore Raiders six minutes later before being penalized 10 minutes. Jules Embry Pelrine put Verde's Footprints in third place with Pete Smith bringing the Lifeguards into fourth place, one minute back.

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