

Watson Wins Camptown Races - by Wes Skillings and Pete Hardenstine - 9/14/2006

Canton's Garth Watson won the 40th running of the Camptown Races Saturday. Watson has been running in the event since the eighth grade. Canton cross-country phenom Garth Watson cruised to an easy victory Saturday at the 40th running of the Camptown Races—three minutes and 42 seconds ahead of the rest of the 79-runner field. Watson finished the run over the 10-kilometer course in 37:02, well ahead of runner-up Kevin Bullock, a former Northeast Bradford standout, who currently lives in Salem, MA. Bullock's time was 40:44. "I prefer this distance," said Watson, a junior at Canton High School of the course, which reverted back to its classic 6.2-mile distance. "This is the distance I train at."

The past two years, the course was longer because of flood damage on the original trail. The traditional PIAA-sanctioned high school course is 3.1 miles and may be one reason that local cross country teams don't regularly compete. In fact, Canton didn't run as a team and Watson was recruited as a member of the independent CraftMaster team, CMI. Rounding out the top five were Larry Bullock, Mike Hudyncia and Bob Moore. Hudyncia and Moore were also members of Team CMI, as were Chad Butcher, Leon Mosher, Bob Lantz, Joe Gallagher, Frank Deak and Valerie Simpson. Butcher and Mosher also finished in the top 15.

The other independent team was the Bobcats. Jerry Hildebrant was the highest finisher for the Bobcats, placing 19th. Northern Potter was the only high school team entered and, as Race Coordinator Karl "Tiger" Peterson commented when he handed out the trophies, "They are the gold, silver and bronze winner in that category this year."

Steven Kibbe was Northern Potter's top finisher, placing 10th in a time of 45:18. Other members of the squad included Derek Trowbridge, Jeremy Adams, Emily Hamilton, Casey Martin and Marrison Warriner. Watson did have a couple of notable Canton comrades running Saturday—his father, Frank, and his coach, Steve Williams. Both claim solid Wyalusing area roots. Although Frank Watson grew up in Canton, his father, "Buzz" Watson, was from the Herrickville area through his youth and young adult years. Williams is a Wyalusing Valley High School graduate and the son of its former principal, the late Ken Williams.

"Garth started out cycling with me when he was about 10 years old, and he was doing about 150 miles a week when he got into running," said the proud father. "It was Steve who suggested that maybe he should get into running." "This was really fun," Garth Watson said just minutes after the demanding race, which was run under sunny, comfortable conditions. He first raced at Camptown as an eighth-grader and raised some eyebrows with his ability then. One of his goals since that first race was winning at Camptown. Last year, at the age of 15, he placed second on the altered and lengthened course, which was the result of damage caused by Hurricane Ivan in 2004. This year's course, thanks to the Eagle Scout project of Keith Howard, was returned to the course used for 30 of the event's 40 years.

Watson said he was happy with the restored course. Other runners seemed to agree, though there was some mud and the last half of the race required special attention to footing. Several runners even made a point of congratulating organizers about the condition of the course. "Now if you could just get rid of all that pavement at the beginning, it would be perfect," said one competitor. The first two and a half

miles of the race follow Rt. 706, with the final leg following winding trails and old logging roads through the woods along Wyalusing Creek. Heather Bacon of Warren Center was the first female finisher, placing 32nd in a time of 51:46. The field of 79 runners who completed the race was 33 fewer than last year's race.