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Champions
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50th Paavo
Nurmi
Marathon

Wisconsin's oldest marathon runs today from Upson to Hurley

By JASON JUNO
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HURLEY — Ben Schneider has won more than 1/5 of all the Paavo Nurmi Marathons.

He won 10. That's how old the Paavo is. The oldest in Wisconsin, the small-town race is big in volunteers and is still going strong with the 50th running scheduled for this morning.

"It's really incredible that the Paavo is in its 50th year," Schneider said. "There's a number of really big marathons that are a lot younger. I'm really happy to be able to take part in a big anniversary.

"I remember spectating the marathon as a kid and I'm proud of being a participant 12 times."

The Friday night torch-lighting and today's event itself figured to be a who's who of Paavo history.

The marathon begins this morning in Upson at 7:30. The half-marathon starts at 8 in Gile. The finish line is located on Silver Street in Hurley. Awards ceremonies are planned there for late morning, followed by the Post-Paavo Party and a reunion of past champions at Riccelli Park from noon to 4 p.m.

Ben and his wife Candice — a five-time winner herself — will both planned to run the full marathon again after injuries ended their streaks in 2016 and then kept them out of the 2017 Paavo.

Eight-time winners Mary Bange and Ann Heaslett will both be here with Heaslett also running the half marathon.

The Paavo's first winners — Jay Dirksen in 1969 and Janice Arnez from the first women's race in 1973, are expected to attend.

Rick Stefanovic, who had won the most marathons in a row, four, before Schneider started running, will also attend and run the full marathon.

Several others are also planning on joining the anniversary celebration.

Mary Bange still holds two Paavo records.

She has the fastest women's time at 2:47:49 from 1979. She is also tied with Heaslett with eight overall wins.

The Paavo was her first

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marathon, her first marathon win and her first sub 2:50 time.

All but two of her eight Paavo wins checked in at less than three hours.

But none were quicker than 1979, her third Paavo win.

"It was a race where everything seemed easy," Bange said. "The weather was good for running. I felt comfortable from the start and do not recall any tough spots during the race."

The tough part came several months earlier when a stress fracture forced her to train on a stationary bike instead of running.

"The challenge was getting in marathon shape," she said. "In retrospect, the forced cross training actually helped me."

Bange still checks periodically to see if her record still stands.

She's surprised it does as she said there have been women capable of running faster in that time. If and when it does happen, she'll be OK with it.

"I would probably be a little bit sad, but I ran the best I could on that day and if someone runs faster, then she deserves the record," she said.

While it's a tough choice, Bange said she is more proud of the number of Paavo wins than having the time to beat.

"My record time is a very good time. In fact, it was the first time I ran sub 2:50. That could have been a one-time event. But I actually ran close to my record time again in 1983," Bange said. "Having won the additional years showed that I was consistently competitive at a high level for a relatively



Jason Juno/Daily Globe
BEN SCHNEIDER of Minneapolis won a record 10 consecutive Paavo Nurmi Marathons. His wife, Candice, won five straight.

long time."

The Paavo was a special race for her. Besides achieving so many marathon firsts, her parents were able to see several of her wins.

"They were there the year I set the record and the year mile 18 was named in my honor," she said.

The Paavo was also a reunion of sorts for a big part of her running community, part of which she remains in touch with.

She also thanked the many volunteers who make the race a success.

The fact the hilly Paavo is harder than most road marathons actually helped

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