

Running and music the perfect mix

By Josh Bakan
Times Herald-Record

Chris Benson decided not to bring along his funeral tunes after leaving home with his kilt.

Benson, one of several musicians along Crystal Run Healthcare Classic course, correctly assumed runners at the three-mile mark would want a different bagpipe melody.

"I had to watch peoples' steps," Benson said. "Everybody has a different stride. Some people have a fast stride; some people have a slow stride. So you play slower songs or get them to speed up a little bit."

Benson played several patriotic sets, such as "Yankee Doodle" and "Grand Old Flag." Upon completion, he could not feel his lips.

Kathleen Davis, who organized the music for the road races on Sunday in Middletown, spread musicians throughout.

They included a boy band, a jazz band and a rock band. Per tradition, the Middletown High School marching band followed the final 5K finisher along the school's track.

But bagpipes blasted at The Classic for the first time in about 20 years, said race director Frank Giannino.

Benson first picked up the pipes seven years ago so a difficult instrument could keep him close with his brother.

"He can pick up any instrument and play it in an hour — violin, piano — it doesn't matter what it is," Benson said. "He was looking for something that was challenging."

Benson plans to make bagpipes part of Classic tradition again, hoping he and/or his brother can keep playing.

Finisher total down

The 10K began with a clear, 55-degree day. But not quite as many runners got to enjoy it as last year.

The 5K and 10K totaled 1,035 finishers, which dips slightly from last year's 1,054 mark. But Giannino backed up his optimism with concrete plans to grow the race.

The finisher total does not include runners from Saturday's inaugural Classic Mile. He also plans to increase the program's community connection with an



Liz Mazany and her friends from Minisink Valley high-five Danielle Kelly at The Classic races in Middletown on Sunday. ALLYSE PULLIAM/FOR THE TIMES HERALD-RECORD

ambassadorship program.

And this race ran swimmingly, Giannino said.

"There haven't been any major complaints. Usually I get a lot of them," Giannino said of how it compared to other races since the Classic began in 2006 as an offshoot of the Orange Classic. "As far as how this race compared to the last nine, I'd have to say this was the smoothest one we've had."

A family affair

Runner Thomas Letizia planned to let his friend watch his nearly 3-year-old son during the 5K. But working the water stand kept his friend busy, and his son got cranky.

So Letizia brought Thomas Joseph with him.

Thomas Joseph appeared calm when he crossed the finish line in a stroller. The Letizia family finished 190th overall in 29:47.

"About five minutes time difference," Letizia said of how his son

affected his time. "But it's worth it. My son gets to see Middletown and be involved."

This was the first, but not last, race Letizia will run pushing his son.

"I (knew I) could do it," he said. "You already have that mental state before you start the race."

A friendly competition

John Monchak, 64, didn't run until late in life. But his burst of speed toward the finish line looked like one of the fastest runners in the race.

He and Susan Plocharczyk hold a friendly competition, and he couldn't let her win. So Monchak zigzagged through a few runners like he was late for a flight.

Monchak recorded a 55:27 clocking in the 10K before Plocharczyk followed a second later.

"I kept looking back and said, 'I'm not going to let her get me,'" said Monchak, who began running in 1998.

The 40-year-old Plocharczyk started running two years ago. Now her competition with Monchak stands relatively even.

She anticipates pulling away soon.

"This is the first year I was good enough to beat him," Plocharczyk said. "... I ran this two years ago in an hour and six minutes. And now I'm down to 55 minutes."

Shorter goes longer

Frank Shorter, the 1972 Olympic marathon gold medalist who grew up in Middletown, listens to his body on race morning in deciding whether to run the 5K or 10K.

It told him to run the 10K. The 67-year-old clocked 1:01:53, a 9:58 mile pace.

"I ran even-paced actually and probably finished the second half quicker than the first," Shorter said. "Actually I thought I was going to run slower. I started out very slowly, but it was fun."

Shorter and Bob Beamon, the 1968 Olympic gold medalist in the long jump, shook hands and took pictures with runners who placed.

Age just a number

The six runners behind 81-year-old James Dugan each represented a different age group. Dugan finished the 5K 286th overall in 36:02.

Members of the 70-and-older age group received an extra-loud ovation at the awards ceremony. Raymond Leduc Sr., 72, finished second in his group with a time of 38:28. John Singer, 74, clocked 41:23.

James Friedman, 71, won the age group's 10K at 50:44. Lorne MacDonald, 70, placed second in 51:19. Bill Rosenburg, 74, took third at 57:09.

Rochelle Marshall, 74, won her 5K age group in 33:40. Erika Abraham, 77, finished second in 39:40 and Ann Singer was third at 41:26.