

North Country Athlete Club Mixes Fun With Competition

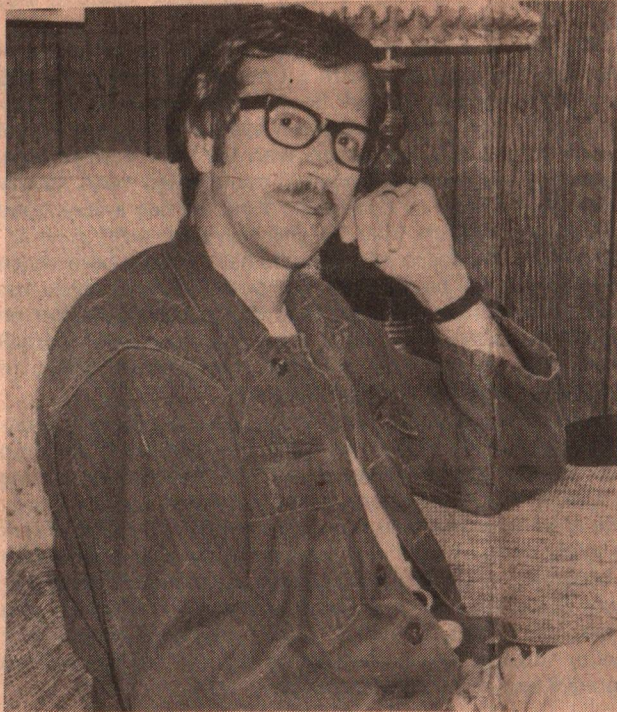
By Peter Fernandez

Bob Murphy, 39, a civil engineer, is the secretary-treasurer of the North Country Athletic Club. The organization of amateur runners originated in Littleton, N.H., but migrated to the Green Mountain State when a number of its runners decided to make the central Vermont area their home. There are about 180 members in the NCAC and 100 of them are Vermonters.

Having members spread throughout New Hampshire, central and northern Vermont is both a good and bad situation. First the good news - the club runners get to race in many more New Hampshire based races than other clubs. With friends down in Littleton or Tilton, N.H., the convenience of an overnight stay and familiarity with the course is a plus. You get to talk to more friends while you're running and exchange long distance news during the perspiring trek.

Now for the bad news - with each member living such a distance apart the whole club never really gets together during the running season, loosely fixed between May and October. The NCAC has one club gathering in October where members forget one another's names but remember their jersey numbers.

Local runners who are members of the NCAC include Chris Baldwin, Donna Raymond, a sophomore at UVM from Barre who ran the fifth fastest half marathon for women in the United States last year, Jeff Anders, Dick Millar and, of course, Bob Murphy.



Murphy

There are 20 female runners in the NCAC. According to Murphy, all the members are active in the high number of races held throughout New England. Some of the runners even chance the Woods Hole to Falmouth Road Race (6 miles) in August. If you don't mind being lined up with a thousand runners, packed in like sardines, then this is a good race. Bill Rodgers won it last year and Frank Shorter took the laurel crown two years ago.

"Some of the most popular races for our club," said Murphy, "are the Montpelier Road Race and the Caspian Lake Run-Around (7 miles). The 10 mile Montpelier race is popular because it is mostly flat terrain, over a good dirt and gravel course." NCAC member Donna Raymond holds the course record for women at 60:35. Chris Baldwin holds the course record for the Caspian Lake Run-Around at 37:16 set in 1978. Tony Bates of the NCAC holds the Montpelier Fun Run two-mile course record at 9:55.

Bob Murphy said he has only been running for two years. Bob's knowledge of the sport hasn't yet helped him win many races but he is athletically trim and healthy which sure beats winning races by bloodletting or putting ballbearings on the bottoms of your opponent's running shoes.

Will long distance running become more and more of a jockstrapping fad or will it die out along with miniature golf? "It certainly seems to be the in thing," said Murphy. "There is a big push for fitness now, people are very health conscious and this has been at least one catalyst in developing running into what it is today."

Murphy doesn't feel that the running fad has yet reached its apex. "People are just starting to run again and finding that they enjoy it," he said. "So I don't think running is ready to fade back into the dark ages."

Long distance running is climbing the fashion world in swift form. Hype has gotten hold of a natural, difficult and noble sport. Hairy chested Adonis models and Hollywood sirens pose in expensive, colorful jogging wear as the advertising world tries to glamorize the sweaty drudgery and hard work of running.

But leave it to the distance runners of Vermont and New Hampshire to keep running on the right course. The NCAC and all the other road racing clubs within the twin states run because they want to run.