

Mike Sandrock: Running with the Buffalo

By Mike Sandrock, For the Camera Boulder Daily Camera

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Thom Richman grinned as he held up a bloody hand after finishing the Rocky Mountain Shootout on Saturday morning on the Buffalo Ranch cross country course in south Boulder.

There was dried blood down his right leg as well, but Richman, 53, did not seem to mind.

In fact, he wore the blood as a red badge of courage, evidence of the battle he had been in during the University of Colorado's annual 8K race, the Buffs' only home meet of the season.

The Shootout is unique in that locals, of any level, from Boulder Trail and Road Runners masters to promising post-collegiate elites, are welcome to come and line up shoe to shoe with the Colorado varsity runners, ranked seventh in the nation.

That is exactly what Richman did, and how he ended up with scrapes on his hands and leg, after taking a tumble onto the hard stones and dirt on CU's home course (no, the grass promised a decade ago has not yet sprouted, but, hey, there's always next year).

"It energizes you, running with college guys," said Richman, who placed 173rd in 31 minutes, 12 seconds, in explaining what he was doing sprinting off the line and getting tangled up with some of the best runners in the nation in the long, opening straightaway. "When I get immersed in the experience I admire these guys more.

"It is inspiring to be out here running with them and seeing them so close."

Indeed, that was the feeling of many of the several hundred spectators who lined the Shootout course, one of the more difficult in the nation. They were there to cheer on the defending Pac-12 men's and women's champs. Some of the spectators, such as Ted Kennedy, Danny Reese and Pablo Vigil, were once top collegiate runners themselves, three or four decades ago.

Others, such as Boulder Road Runner course marshals John Bridges, Carl Mohr, Dan Pierce and Don Hayes, are long-time runners who are part of the Colorado cross country and track community, always on hand volunteering at meets and raising money for a track scholarship named in honor of former BRR head Rich Castro.

"One of the beauties of competitive running is that it is, in a way, egalitarian," said head coach Mark Wetmore. "The Buffalo Ranch doesn't care how old you are, only how fit you are; or how tough you are."

One of those tough fan/runners out racing Saturday was Thomas David Kehoe, another masters runner who finished in 32:13, good for 183rd place. Said Kehoe, "This race is more competitive than the Bolder Boulder. It is totally cool to be out here. At least at the Bolder Boulder there were 49,990 people behind me. Here, there were only 17."

Watching a cross country race can be a blast, as you run from point to point, getting splits or finding the best viewing spot. And for those who have pushed their limits in racing, "you know what the (college) guys are experiencing, because you have done it," Richman said. "It is a more profound experience."

Many of the spectators understand the many years and thousands of hard miles the Colorado runners have put in. After the race, Wetmore said, in speaking of senior Martin Medina and junior Rachel Viger, "Each year they are

getting better and better. Martin and Rachel are always putting money in the bank; and there will be a big withdrawal available finally."

That statement, as much as any other, sums up Wetmore and assistant head coach Heather Burroughs' philosophy of training, and is something the rest of us can learn from. Be patient, look long-term, work hard and trust in your training.

We will see soon -- at the Pac-12 championships on Oct. 27 -- if the Buffs are ready to defend their conference crowns.

And if a "big withdrawal" takes place, Thom Richman can look at the scars on his hands and leg, and perhaps say to himself, "Yes, I know what they are going through."