

✓ Another first for Wharf Race

Clayton finds way to Capitola

By ED VYEDA
Sentinel sports editor

CAPITOLA — In a year of firsts for the Wharf To Wharf Race — first limited registration, first advance sellout, first drug testing — it should have come as no surprise that a guy running the race for the first time, and seeing the 6-mile course for the first time as he ran, would ... you guessed it, finish first.

"I was waiting in line before the race and was asking everybody, 'How does the course go?'" said Matt Clayton, 23, of San Diego, who found out quickly enough, winning Sunday morning's 16th annual Wharf To Wharf Race from Santa Cruz to Capitola in a course-record time of 27 minutes, 54 seconds.

Before the race, as the estimated field of 13,000 runners gathered along Beach Street in Santa Cruz, Clayton couldn't have felt more like an unknown unless he wore a brown paper bag over his head. But, not knowing the course, or the guys he was chasing the first half of the race, didn't phase him.

"I figured this was my first time here, so I would just take it as it comes," said the former San Diego State distance standout, who is living in Salinas this summer, teaching children with disabilities. "With the unknown, you can't be afraid."

When Clayton, who patiently moved up to the front pack, saw an opportunity to make his big move — on the uphill along East Cliff Drive, heading for 26th Avenue — he wasn't afraid to seize it. Near the 4-mile mark, Clayton surged past co-leaders Kevin Jones, a Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo track coach, and Kevin Ostenberg, a Cal Poly runner from Half Moon Bay, who had been pushing the pace the first three miles.

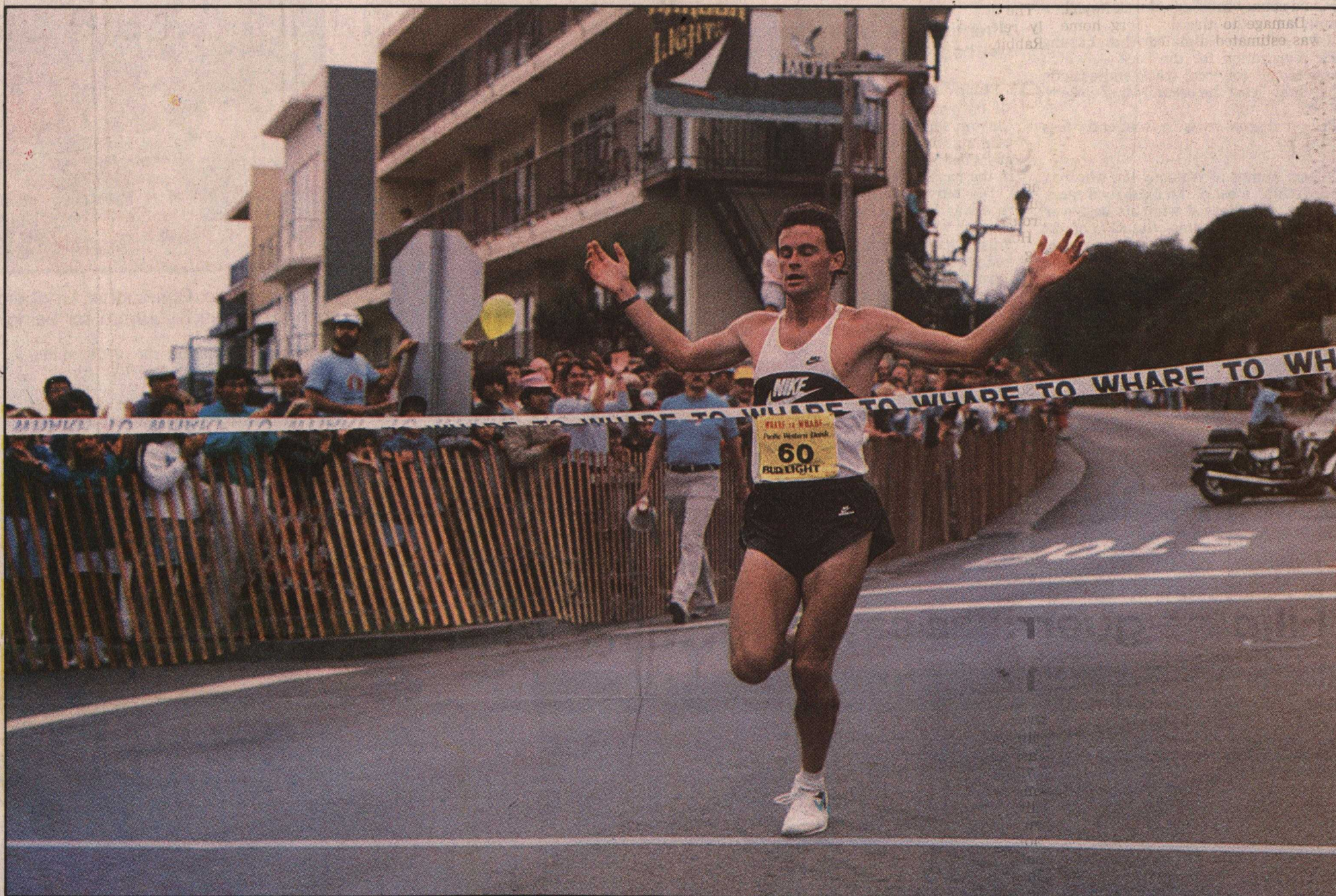
"After I had moved up, I saw the hill and thought to myself, 'I better move — now,'" Clayton said.

It was a good move.

Although Jones battled to stay within striking range the final two miles, it was Clayton's race, to win or lose, from Pleasure Point to the finish line at the base of Cliff Drive in Capitola Village. Once in the lead, Clayton relaxed a bit and couldn't be caught, in breaking 1987 champion Jay Marden's time of 28:14, set last year when the race distance was re-established at six miles.

Jones placed second, in 28:07, while former Boulder Creek resi-

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At the finish line in Capitola, Steve Clayton of Salinas was by himself, beating runner-up Kevin Jones by 13 seconds, 27:54 to 28:07, in the 6-mile race.

At the end

The top men's and women's finishers:

MEN

Pl.	Name.....	time
1.	Matt Clayton.....	27:54
2.	Kevin Jones.....	28:07
3.	Tom Wood.....	28:21
4.	Kevin Ostenberg.....	28:29
5.	Roger Soler.....	28:39
6.	Joe Nitti.....	28:41
7.	Stephen Barlow.....	28:42
8.	Jose Iniguez.....	28:32

WOMEN

Pl.	Name.....	time
1.	Nancy Ditz.....	31:52
2.	April Powers.....	32:07
3.	Patti Gray.....	32:44
4.	Linda Somers.....	33:07
5.	Jani Johnson.....	33:28
6.	Rosa Gutierrez.....	33:45
7.	Laurie Binder.....	33:55
8.	Patricia English.....	34:09

By BRENT AINSWORTH
Sentinel staff writer

CAPITOLA — Someone approached Nancy Ditz a few days ago to let the defending women's champion know that it was nice to have some "old veterans" like her in town to run the Wharf To Wharf Race.

"I was thinking 'old?'," the 34-year-old Ditz said. "Geez, I knew what he meant, but..."

Sunday morning, the only thing "old" about Ditz was her 1987 Wharf To Wharf record winning time of 31 minutes, 59 seconds, which grew quite stale after Ditz ran the course in 31:52 to win her second straight women's title, proving again that the not-yet-

codger is still in her prime.

Ditz, the favorite from Woodside and a regular Santa Cruz visitor, won by 15 seconds. Kentfield's April Powers, who usually runs 1,500- and 3,000-meter races on tracks, took second in 32:07. Last year's runner-up, marathoner Patti Gray, was third at 32:44.

Ditz is not known for her short-distance performances. In fact, she planned to run another eight to 10 miles later Sunday afternoon. For an endurance runner who covers more than 100 miles a week, it seems odd that she'd hoped to trim even more time off her course-record time of 1987, the first year the race extended its distance to an even six miles.

"I had hoped to run a little faster than this," said Ditz, barely winded from her morning jog. "It was cooler this year ... and the lineup of runners was really impressive. Whoever won was going to get pushed by some excellent runners. I'm ecstatic because I haven't been training for this distance."

Ditz earned a berth on the U.S. Olympic Team by taking second at the marathon trials May 1 in Pittsburgh. But she said her strategy for the Wharf To Wharf was to make it a sprint from the start. Taking the aggressive approach was an idea she avoided last year. Sunday, it was the only approach.

"I knew we were going to have to grab our positions right from the

gun," Ditz said. "There was no way we could ease into it. April is so much faster than me on the shorter distances, so the only way to have a chance is to go all out all the way."

There were no surprises in the race strategy category. Powers, who sometimes trains with Ditz when their schedules jive, said both knew each other's game plan.

"Nancy's strategy was to just run away from the field ... and I knew that," Powers said. "She knows how I run. I'm a speed demon. Whatever I had left at the finish was going to carry me."

Ditz, Powers and Gray ran together until the 1-mile mark. But

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16th Wharf To Wharf Race

Women/ Ditz dusts challengers

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near the base of the first hill, on East Cliff Drive, Ditz shifted into overdrive and created a 10-second gap on the other two by the second mile. Shortly after that, Powers made a move of her own.

"I said to Patti, 'Come on, let's go get her', but she didn't come with me," Powers said. "We both went out faster than we wanted."

The tempo was too brisk for Gray, who ran with Ditz at the Olympic Trials in the marathon. "I can hold a good pace for a long time, but not that kind of pace," said the 1988 San Jose Mercury News 10K winner.

Powers slipped past Gray near the 3-mile mark, at about the distance she is used to crossing a finishing line. For the rest of the race, Ditz stretched her lead on Powers, and Powers stretched her lead on Gray. A tighter bunch followed, including Linda Somers and Jani Johnson, who finished fourth and fifth, respectively.

Though Ditz won easily, she said she felt the other runners were very much in contention to catch her. "I never quite got all the way away from them," said Ditz, who is accustomed to the larger leads found in longer distance running. "April can out-kick me any day of the week, and Patti is very strong. If there was any way I was going to beat them, it was to run as fast as I can at the start and get a lead. The last thing I wanted was for it to come down to a footrace."

The 6-mile distance was semi-awkward for all three of the top finishers. For Ditz and Gray, it wasn't much more than their regular warm-up runs. Powers said she does little distance work, running primarily on tracks.

Ditz is the most experienced



Nancy Ditz is congratulated after winning the women's race for the second year in a row.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel

marathoner on the Olympic team, with five major wins, including the 1986 and 1987 Los Angeles Marathons and the Bay to Breakers. Her personal best over the 26.2-mile standard is 2:30.14, set at the Trials

in Pittsburgh.

The timing of the Wharf To Wharf jived well with Ditz's schedule. "This fit perfectly into my tuneup for the Olympics," said the Seoul-bound Ditz, who leaves Sept.

8 to train in Japan before heading for the Olympics, which begin Sept. 17.

Ditz is unsure of her Olympic chances, but if somebody calls her an "old veteran," look out.

First/ Clayton runs to Wharf Race record

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dent Thomas Wood was third in 28:21. Ostenberg was fourth, at 28:29, with Roger Soler, a Peru Olympic team runner who lives in San Antonio, fifth in 28:39.

In the women's race, U.S. Olympic marathoner Nancy Ditz of Woodside defended her Wharf To Wharf title, winning in 31:52.

The top local finisher was former Cabrillo College distance star Jose Aispuro, of Aptos, who was 12th, in 28:58. Gilbert Munoz of Watsonville, who has had a successful road-race season locally, was 27th, with a Wharf To Wharf personal best of 29:49.

The race, which sold out its allotted 12,000 entries June 28, went as smoothly as any of the race directors could have hoped. In a year when there seemed to be more of a watchful community eye on the event and its impact on the area, any problems during the day were minor.

"The race has really matured this year," Race Director Kirby Nicol said. "We went through some growing pains. But, if you take the numbers from this year, and add in the increase in safety systems, then up and down the line everything will be all right."

Indeed, it went all right for Clayton. He was about 20 yards behind the lead pack at the start, as Australian Steve Barlow, Ostenberg, Jones, Wood and Soler headed the lead pack of 10 runners through the first half mile. Jones took the front at the 1-mile mark, with a split of 4:22, and held it at mile two, in 8:40.

By the time the leaders reached Schwann Lagoon, Jones and Ostenberg looked like they wanted to run away from everybody, slipping out to a 15-yard lead, as Soler and Wood dropped back, and Barlow fell out of contention.

"I didn't know who those (first) two guys were," Clayton said. "But

I feel confident in my fitness level right now. I knew I was running a good pace. It was a waiting game. I had to be patient."

As he waited, Jones and Ostenberg kept pounding. "I didn't want to go out that hard," Jones said, "but sometimes you get caught up and sell yourself on something."

By the time the leaders hit the 4-mile mark, Jones was hanging onto only a thread of hope of catching Clayton; Ostenberg had faded; Wood and Soler maintained their pace, although they were too far behind to affect Clayton. Jones couldn't even do that.

"He's one step above me in competition," Jones said of Clayton, who recently beat the top Wharf To Wharf runners in the Oakland TAC 20-Kilometer (12.4-mile) Race. "But, sometimes, my strength pays off," Jones said, "so I stayed with him. You never know. The guy may come back."

"Once I caught them, I relaxed a little," said Clayton, who got up at 5 a.m., left his residence in Corral de Tierra (between Salinas and Laguna Seca), and got to Santa Cruz in time to jog a warm-up mile. Clayton was ready to take it easy the last mile of the race, "Then some guy yelled, 'You have a chance to break the course record,'" Clayton said. "So, I turned in on at the end."

Even before the start, Wood knew Clayton was going to be tough — having told fellow competitors at Saturday's pre-race get-together about him. "I was worried about Mike Clayton," said Wood, who has moved to Truckee, since running in the U.S. Olympic marathon Trials earlier this year. "I told them about him, but nobody knew him."

They know him now.

"This is a big race," Clayton said. "It has a good reputation and is a lot of fun. I'm glad I came, obviously."