

January 31, 2010

MIAMI -- Veteran marathoner Michael Wardian, who arrived in South Florida less than 24 hours before the race after working an 80-hour week as a shipping broker, outclassed the field in the ING Miami Marathon and Half Marathon Sunday.

Wardian covered the scenic 26.2-mile course in 2:28:39, which gave him a comfortable seven-minute, 24-second victory margin over 38-year-old Brazilian Cesar Martins. Columbia, SC clinical therapist Orinthal Striggles, 34, was third (2:38:43).

Brett Ely, a Natick, MA. native running under the umbrella of Team Strands, captured the women's title with a time of 2:45:36 that met the Olympic Trials marathon "B" standards for women. Belarusian Alena Vimitskaya was 2:26 behind at 2:48:02. Yolanda Mercado of Puerto Rico, was third (3:00:12).

In the half marathon, Bloomington, IN runner Justin Young (1:05:57) outfinished Team Strands teammate Michael Aish (1:06:38) of Arvada, CO while Meghan Armstrong of Richfield, MN totally outclassed the women's division with a time of 1:17:50.

The race was run under cloudy skies in Miami which gave the record 18,321 runners some relief from the typical South Florida heat. But humid conditions kept course records from being broken.

Wardian is a 35-year-old father of two who has completed more than 100 marathons. He finished fourth three weeks ago in the Disney Marathon. An international shipping broker for Potomac Maritime LLC, Wardian has been busy handling shipments to earthquake-stricken Haiti and was concerned he might not be in peak form for the race.

"I ran wire to wire," said Wardian. "I was able to dictate the pace, although it was a little humid and slowed down my time a bit. I was able to run a fairly good race given the conditions and having to work a lot. But I love my job a lot and what I do so it's a sacrifice that I can happily make. I was able to make a good showing for my sponsors and family and that's what it's all about."

Wardian's biggest client is the largest container carrier in the world. "It's been quite busy with trying to get cargo to Haiti. I've been working all weekend and we have to actually get back to the office tomorrow," he said.

Martins, the fourth place finisher in the 2009 Disney Marathon, recorded his best finish in the six marathons he has run. "I'm done for the year," he said. "I run one a year and my next is in 2011."

Ely, a research physiologist for the U.S. Department of Defense, struck gold Sunday in just her sixth career marathon. "I would love to see the photo of me coming across the finish line," she said. "I was so thrilled. When I saw that finish line tape come up, well, the feeling of the tape across my chest felt so good."

Vimitskaya, 36, traveled 14 hours by air to run the marathon, and equaled her finish in here in 2003. "I didn't feel good after the first half mile," she admitted.

Mercado, the Puerto Rican national record holder, has won two marathons. "I tried to run a better time but I don't know what happened," she said. "The cheering and the clanging bells at Mile 11 helped me and I felt like I was flying."

Teamwork among the Team Strands runners helped them dominate the half-marathon.

"We had a game plan coming in and we were trying to get under 65 minutes as a team," said Young, a 30-year-old who won his last half marathon in San Diego last year. "But the pace started to lag. We knew the humidity was going to be tough. The bridges in the beginning were challenging but the main thing was the humidity."

"We kept an even pace the whole way," added Aish, 33, a New Zealand native who lives in Denver. "We got to 12 miles on pace, but we realized that it just wasn't going to happen. There was too much humidity. Justin went for it and I started waving to the crowd."

Rizzo, 26, ran a personal best in the Chicago Marathon two weeks ago, but also felt the warmer weather immediately. "It was abrupt," said the Boulder, Colorado resident. "I've only been at altitude for two weeks. It's obviously a little bit different. When I left it was 32 degrees and a sun-shining blizzard."

It was a similar story for Armstrong, the former Iowa 4-time All-American who adjusted to the heat well after leaving temperatures of minus three degrees back home in Minneapolis.

"It's a 60 degree temperature swing and very humid," said the 24-year old who considers the 5K her best race.

In celebrating her first half-marathon win, Armstrong credited Brock Baker of Chapel Hill, NC with helping her to the win. The two ended up at the same pace, and agreed to trade leads each mile to share the burden of the wind. "I wish I could find him and thank him," she said in the media tent after the race. "He finished 20 meters ahead of me."

2007 Disney Marathon champion Gabriela Trana of Costa Rica, 29, was second in 1:22:20 while Marta Jimenec Portillo, a 26-year old from El Salvador who came to the United States for the first time Friday, was third in 1:24:06.

Michael Fradera, a 10-year Armed Forces veteran from Lakeland, FL who lost his legs to a roadside bomb in Iraq in 2007, won his first marathon in the men's hand cycle division. "My New Year's resolution was to come in first in a marathon," said the 32-year-old former Marine and Army staff sergeant. Fradera participated in his first marathon in Miami a year ago. Earlier this month, he won the Disney half marathon.

Columbian Orlando Cortez won the Men's Push Rim Wheelchair Division (1:53:08). Monique Van Der Vorst of The Netherlands (2:05:49) won the Women's Push Rim Wheelchair division and Kirstie Sykes of Celebration, FL won the Women's Hand Cycle division (1:59:01).