

66th Annual Butte American Legion MERDI/MSE Veterans' Day Race

Tuesday, 11 November 2003 - Ryan Kearney Wins as recapped by Pat Kearney for The Montana Standard



Runners react to the explosion of the starter's rocket.

A third generation member of the Kearney family from Butte won Montana's oldest road race on Tuesday, the Veterans' Day race. Butte Central senior Ryan Kearney pulled away from two-time defending champion Ray Hunt in the final half mile to capture the event. Kearney's winning time for the 5.2 mile course was 28:34. He beat Ray Hunt by 17 seconds. A former three-time winner of the event Patrick Judge of Helena was third in a clocking of 31:09. Kearney's grandfather, Martin, won this same race back in 1940. Martin Kearney's brother, Jim, also won top honors in 1937. In more recent times, Ryan's uncle Bill Kearney took the first place trophy in the race in 1976 and 1980. Ryan became the first male winner from Butte in the 5.2-mile race since 1992 when Ray Matteson won the race. He also is the first high school student from Butte to win the event since 1976 when his uncle took the top spot while competing for Butte Central. Kearney received the C. Owen Smithers trophy. The award is named after one of the co-founders of the event back in 1934.

The women's open division title went to former two-time champion Nicole Hunt. She won with a time of 32:28. Hunt, a winner in 1996 and 2001, beat defending champion Casey Campbell of Lincoln, who finished second with a clocking of 35:04. Nine-time winner Susan Kaluza of Butte was third, while 2000 winner Jennifer Thomas of Helena was fourth. Hunt received the Mary Whelan trophy named after the first open division women's winner in 1976.

Butte Central won the boys' team trophy for the second year in a row. Butte High, behind the 5th place of senior Marnee Worley, took the girls trophy.

The 2.5-mile race for kids went to Ryan Kearney's first cousin, Brandon Kearney. The freshman from Butte High won the race with a time of 16:50. Kearney edged defending champion Hobie Biegler, another freshman at Butte High. Brandon Kearney won the trophy named after his grandfather Martin Kearney, who was the 1940 winner of the race and an organizer of the race from 1947 through 1969.

The 2.5-mile girls' race was the closest one of the day. Defending champion Keli Dennehy nipped Butte High freshman Kaci Hockaday at the line for the victory. Dennehy's winning time was 19:04. She beat Hockaday by one second. Dennehy received the Liza Merrifield Trophy named after her mother who was the first winner of the junior high race back in 1973. Seventy-Seven runners braved fierce winds and cool temperatures to race.

Finishers	2.5 M	5.2 M	Total
Female	8	19	27
Male	11	39	50
Total	19	58	77

2.5 Mile Females:

0-14: 1, Keli Dennehy, Butte, 19:04; 2, Kaci Hockaday, Butte, 19:05; 3, Melissa Bogert, 20:45; 4, Valeria Kilmer, Butte, 22:27; 5, Elena Kilmer, Butte, 29:39.

26-35: 1, Karen Byrnes, 23:53. **56-64:** 1, Carol LaRoux, 25:22. **65⁺:** 1, Virginia Sutphin, Great Falls, 29:54.

2.5 Mile Males:

0-14: 1, Brandon Kearney, Butte, 16:50; 2, Hobie Biegler, Butte, 18:13; 3, A.J. Leyba, 18:28; 4, Sammy Leyba, 18:28; 5, Dylan Griffin, 22:20; 6, Brandon Barnett, 22:25; 7, Nick Dodge, 22:36; 8, Sam Byrnes, 26:53; 9, Will Kilmer, 29:50.

46-55: 1, Gary Dietrich, 18:28. **56-64:** 1, Kent Webber, 36:29.

5.2 Mile Females Overall: 1, Nicole Hunt, 32:28; 2, Casey Campbell, 35:04; 3, Susan Kaluza, 35:24.

15-18: 1, Marnee Worley, Butte, 40:15; 2, Meaghan Schulte, 42:15; 3, Mandi Arntson, 44:49.

19-25: 1, Casey Campbell, Lincoln, 35:04.

26-35: 1, Nicole Hunt, Deer Lodge, 32:26; 2, Jennifer Thomas, Helena, 35:39; 3, Lisa Wood, 58:00; 4, Dawn Butler, 58:01.

36-45: 1, Susan Kaluza, Butte, 35:24; 2, Mary Crowe, Butte, 41:24; 3, Becky Agamenoni, 45:42; 4, Melissa Messmer, Butte, 48:45; 5, Cheryl Peterslie, Butte, 53:13; 6, Susan Patton, 55:44; 7, Connie Feist, 56:10.

46-55: 1, Eddi Walker, Butte, 46:27; 2, Sheila Franey, Butte, 51:12. **56-64:** 1, Donna Sims, Great Falls, 46:44; 2, Marie Cook, Butte, 56:10.

5.2 Mile Males Overall: 1, Ryan Kearney, 28:34; 2, Ray Hunt, 28:51; 3, Patrick Judge, 31:09.

15-18: 1, Ryan Kearney, Butte, 28:34; 2, Matt Curran, Butte, 46:02.

26-35: 1, Patrick Judge, Helena, 31:09; 2, Don Foley, Butte, 39:22; 3, Bill Foley, Butte, 45:45.

36-45: 1, Ray Hunt, Deer Lodge, 28:51; 2, Marvin Speece, Butte, 31:50; 3, Phil Dean, Butte, 33:43; 4, Mike Agamenoni, 36:17; 5, Mike Kelly, 40:32; 6, Dan McGee, 41:06; 7, Bob Whelan, Butte, 41:31; 8, Tim Saylor, Anaconda, 43:16; 9, Dave Cashell, Butte, 43:21; 10, Jim Ryan, Butte, 43:21; 11, Doug Sexe, 44:10; 12, John Willard, Butte, 44:16; 13, Jeff Janaczski, 46:10; 14, Phil Patton, 53:44.

46-55: 1, Bob Eide, Clancy, 35:14; 2, Pat Kearney, Butte, 38:55; 3, Don Sundberg, Butte, 38:58; 4, Joe Griffin, Butte, 41:50; 5, Paul Riley, 43:13; 6, Cliff Kindt, Butte, 43:36; 7, Dave Wing, Butte, 44:35; 8, Mike Patterson, Butte, 46:50; 9, Gary Rillema, Butte, 47:42; 10, Butch Gerbrandt, 49:24; 11, Jay Bishop, 49:25.

56-64: 1, Leon Shearman, Bozeman, 41:13; 2, Dean Hersey, Helena, 42:38; 3, Dave Mueller, Butte, 43:25; 4, Bob Sims, Great Falls, 43:38; 5, Bruce Robinson, Butte, 43:51; 6, Carl Clark, Great Falls, 49:24; 7, John Wulf, Butte, 54:38.

65⁺: 1, Ed Foley, Butte, 39:27; 2, Pete Madison, 52:07.

Ray Hunt's 2010 Retrospective: A glimpse at the racing Kearneys of Butte.

Today, I feel familiar with the Kearney family tradition at the Veterans' Day Race. Seven years ago I had no real idea.

A mother's caution is to "beware of the 'carnies'" when visiting the fair, and anyone intending to win Butte's historic Vets' Day Race should heed a same-sounding warning with regard to the Kearneys. The Kearney family has been deeply involved with the race since the early days when old Martin Kearney and his brother James each won the race on separate occasions as young men, around 1940. Martin went on to become a long-standing Vets' Day Race organizer, and he instilled in his children a passion for the race before his untimely death in 1970.

Son Bill twice succeeded his father as race champion, and son Pat is perhaps most dedicated in caring for his father's race. My first images of the Vets' Day Race came while watching Pat during his days as Butte's TV newsman about 1980. I remember Pat reporting about a frosty Vets' Day Race shortly after he had run in it. My adolescent thoughts at the time were that the whole affair looked too darn cold for running. Pat is now the Vets' Day Race Director, a role he appears to relish for the opportunity to honor war and race veterans, alike. Pat has also personally completed more Vets' Day Races than any other runner (31!). I also remember Pat in his racing prime saying one of his goals was to win the Vets' Day Race. That goal ultimately remained unfulfilled as it passed along with his youth, but he did come close on several occasions.

Martin Kearney's daughter Linda, and his other sons Tim (aka "Chile" as in chile con carne), Bob, Mike and Marty also have run the race many times over the years. Those Kearney kids spent a lot of time racing with passion over the streets of Butte, and of course all of their love for the race has bled down to their next generation. Many Kearney grandchildren have frequented the race, celebrating an occasional victory in the event's 2.5-mile kids' race. One of those grandchildren is the Kearney who I am most familiar with. Marty's son Ryan grew up in various locations around the western United States, but I remember Ryan regularly staying for extended summer visits in Butte during his growth-spurt years around the turn of the century.

The first time I saw Ryan he was a pipsqueak who showed up at the Butte track for a running club workout. All that I remember about his personality from that day was that he wanted to be the fastest runner there. He didn't say it, but I saw it in his eyes. Each summer Ryan returned to Butte with new growth and with new running ability. I met the boy a few more times in small road races over the years and he always gave the same feisty appraisal after those outings... "I almost beat you today. Wait until next time."

Ryan's father Marty came within a sprint-finish of a Vets' Day Race victory in 1990, and over the years Marty placed near the front many other times, including two other second place finishes ('83 & '84). During the summer of 2003, Ryan had physically developed into an impressive athletic specimen who was ready to surpass his father. Ryan's visit to Butte that year became more permanent while he stayed with his uncle Pat and took his senior year of high school at Butte Central, where he regularly decimated the local high school runners in cross country races. Ryan's move to Butte also provided his first opportunity to run in his grandfathers' race ... the Vets' Day 5.2-mile ... the coveted race of his ancestors that his own father could never quite win.

Of course, I lacked a full appreciation of Kearney lore, at the time, and I needed someone to warn me to "Beware of the Kearneys." I had won the 2001 and 2002 Vets' Day runs without full effort, and despite that lack of stimulating competition, I became motivated to run it again with an honest effort designed to match some of the faster winning times from the past. I felt that my running condition was good, and I was confident to the point that I gave too little thought to the need for tactical racing to ensure victory. On race-day, I saw Ryan at the start, but I still devoted little thought to anything other than my tactically weak idea to run hard from the start. As I learned shortly after the traditional rocket explosion sent us racing, Ryan had prepared himself supremely well in physical, tactical and emotional respects. Ryan also had the Kearney clan out for mass support.

During the general period of our 2003 Vets' Day Race, Ryan's running ability was rising quickly while mine was on a slow, controlled descent, and it was that day when our paths met and then sharply crossed.

Pictured here from left: Me with Ryan, a couple years later, posing together as teammates in the Wolf Creek Canyon Relay.



The fact that it was a windy on Vets' Day in 2003 did not dissuade me from 'burning rubber' from the start, and Ryan was ready to take full advantage of the situation. He tucked in tightly behind and matched my every step. I remained unconcerned about my tag-along for the first 10 minutes, but then I started to realize that I was matched with someone who was not going to fade. By then it was too late for me to adopt a tactical strategy. Metaphorically, I had drawn a speed loan from the pace bank, and now I had to pay it back with interest.

At many corners and crossroads along the route, the two of us raced by one or more of the Kearneys who were leapfrogging along the course in cars as a mobile cheer squad. I heard numerous excited encouragements shouted for Ryan, and I am sure he was riding effortlessly on a wave of positive emotion. The one cheer that stands out in my memory from the race is "Ryan, remember all those training hills you ran!"

It was exciting to be engaged in an unexpectedly tough battle, and I was determined to execute my flawed race plan to its fullest extent. I surged and surged again, but I gained no ground and I soon began to sense what was going to happen when Ryan finally took nerve to go to the lead. At about 22 minutes in, Ryan did veer around me and he continued to pull away. I struggled to match his tempo but all my systems were already 'red lined' and I could not prevent him from putting more distance between us all the way to the finish line.

Ryan stopped the clock in 28:34, and when I got there 17 seconds later, I found him mobbed by his ecstatic entourage. Ryan was clearly out of his mind with joy. Tears streamed his eyes, his arms were waving energetically skyward, and I heard his delighted yelps rising above all others. I remember him shouting something unintelligible about his "grandfather's race," and then he momentarily broke free from his admirers to embrace me with shared perspiration. I am not exaggerating. Ryan was as happy as anyone I have ever seen. I've led a happy and fulfilling life, but I can honestly say I have never felt as happy as Ryan looked at that moment.

A few years later I had the opportunity to hear Ryan proudly pronounce, in a public setting, that the greatest running achievement of his life was winning the 2003 Veterans' Day Race in Butte. Ryan came to that race highly trained with an effective plan of attack, and he executed his plan with focused enthusiasm. Ryan was clearly the best runner in the race, and he would likely have beaten me even if I had employed a more proven race strategy. There was a lot of Kearney energy or 'mojo' floating magically on the wind that day!

Take my word, when running the Veterans' Day Race, "Beware of the Kearneys!"

- Ray Hunt, Deer Lodge