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By LARRY PHILLIPS

- Leader & Times

Small but numerous snow flakes drifted slowly downward with not much wind disturbing their journey as Liberal Mayor Tim Long raised his arm with starter pistol in hand. Fifteen women (two honorary racers) leaned forward as if against an invisible rope, taunt with anticipation for the 64th running of the International Pancake Day Race.

Each wondered if she had what it takes to win the Liberal leg of the race against the women of Olney, England. And could she beat Olney's speedster, Devon Byrne, who captured the international crown last year?

Boom.

{youtube}Xqoas3FL6ss{/youtube}

Bolting off the line, the women headed north on Kansas Avenue and the first turn of the 415-yard course, with several of the women bunching up at the first right-hand turn. Leading was Caitlin Demarest, followed closely by an honorary racer and a large crowd right on both their heels.

As the leaders approached the second turn onto Lincoln Avenue, Demarest maintained her lead and the field was shuffling behind her, with Rene Boaldin moving into second about five yards off Demarest's pace.



About halfway down the final stretch, Boaldin made a run, but could only gain about two to three yards, as Demarest hit her finishing gear.

Behind Boaldin, last year's champ, Kaela Krueger, moved into third as Demarest crossed the line first, followed by Boaldin and Krueger.

Media surrounded Demarest, 27, an assistant women's basketball coach at Seward County Community College/Area Technical School. Then the top three stepped onto the winner's stand, and race official Al Shank announced Demarest ran the course in 64.3 seconds, which fell short of the international title.

Olney's Byrne, 19, finished her race six hours earlier in the day with a shattering world-record time of 56.0 seconds, besting the previous record owned by Liberal's Tasha Gallegos at 57.5 set in 2009.

Byrne's victory brings the total to 36 wins for Liberal and 27 for Olney since the competition began in 1950. (The race in 1980 didn't count as a media truck blocked the course in Olney).

Demarest and Liberal's women gave it a valiant try in conditions similar to those reported in Olney – cloudy and damp with temperatures in the low 30s. It had snowed 3-inches in Olney on Sunday.

Demarest was proud of her victory, as were her Lady Saints basketball players, who were screaming their approval in the crowd.

“Not being from Liberal, I didn't realize what a big deal the Pancake Race was,” she said. “But I'm just proud to be a part of it and a part of its history.”

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