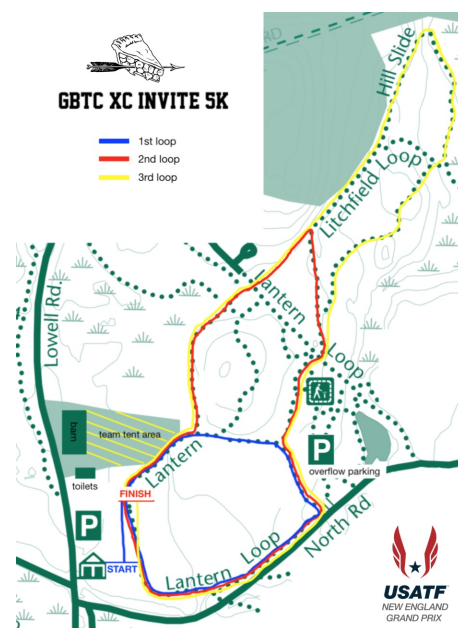


## The Door Opens to the House of Harriers with the Kick-Off of the USATF NE XC Grand Prix

Ohhh, it's good to be back home. Home to where it all began so long ago - roots, rocks, and running. It's time for cross country. Sunday September 11 was the official start of the USATF NE cross country season, with the gracious hosts at the Greater Boston Track Club feting our Association harriers on the rolling grounds of Great Brook Park in Carlisle. Our members came out to do some damage, and the course was indeed victimized by almost 170 competitors in the three 5k races. Humidity, though increasingly uncomfortable, could not dissuade the masses from completing the loopy trek under the watchful eyes of teammates and competitors alike. Backslaps, nods, and handshakes abounded at the finish line, symbolizing the true spirit of community and competition that is cross country. 'Twas great to see the usual faces, the new faces, and all of the inspired faces at this splendid kick-off. It's just the beginning, with our next Grand Prix race, the Brown Bear Invitational, coming up on Saturday October 1. [Get registered now.](#)<sup>1</sup>



The start of the day's story was the Men's Masters race, which followed the spirited 3k romp by the next generation of runners. The starter's announcement hung in the air as 52 Masters runners burst off the line. Quickly a lead pack emerged, which slimmed down even quicker after the preliminary lap. The familiar Greater Lowell singlet with an unfamiliar face blazed to the lead, followed by HFC's TJ Unger at his heels. The gossip amongst the cognoscenti noted that the Lowell rookie was Abde Bouramdane, the Moroccan marathoner who placed second at Boston in 2008. Abde lengthened the lead on each lap, winning it going away in a tight 16:36.9, with TJ and Strider teammate Lee Danforth crossing next. CMS owned the next two spots with Arthur Besse, first 50+, and Iain Ridgeway popping their bib tags à la' Macklemore. Tracksmith's master hare Dave Dugan claimed the sixth spot and second 50+ athlete with a rugged effort.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.directathletics.com/meets/xc/19430.html>

With five teams repped in the Top 10, the Team competition was decided by the next ten finishers. It's depth that wins the Team competitions, and the sea of green that is HFC XC flooded the start lines at all of the day's races, particularly the Master's Men. The *chemise verte* took home first Men's 40+ Team, with Tracksmith snaring second, CMS third, and GLRR fourth. In the 50+ Team slugfest, HFC also took the gold, led by the ever cranky Jason Cakouros, edging Lowell who reversed the finish in the 60+ group. John Barbour slammed the door on the HFC Team sweep with a strong finish just behind 60+ age-group leader CMS's Dan Verrington. Huge respect for our super seventies runners, numbering five from five different clubs, in the Masters competition. HFC's Bob Ruel took age group individual honors with a tidy 7:04 pace over the course, age grading just short of a decile mark at 79.48. Many of these names are inscribed on the Grand Prix Masters yardstick, the all important season long Age-Grade scoring, now led by our Olympian Abde Bouramdane.

Commenting on his first cross country race in a while, Abde said "the race had very good competition, and I like the challenge of the terrain. But I was prepared with 100 mile weeks. I'm also prepping for my marathon in Morocco next month, but should be back for the XC Championship". The gauntlet is thrown down. Will Abde compete in three races, including the Franklin Park jaunt, to qualify for GP cash? Time will tell.



The Men's Open race was next on the dance card. Tracksmith's Ben Drezek led wire to wire, running faster than a truck drivin' man and legged out a 16 second win over Eli Moskowitz of Battle Road, who had three top 10 finishers. The Old Goat's Daniel Stevens finished in sixth, ahead of the GBTC doublet of Dylan Souder and Michael Creedon. And those were the teams that copped the first three spots in a very competitive Men's Open Team clash. The strength and depth of Battle Road prevailed, followed by host GBTC and the Old Goats with their platinum finish, Bud. Rounding out the Open Team standings was XC GP newcomers Cambridge Running Club, with their numero uno Matthew Pennock, and HFC with lead runner Eric Greenspan. Kyle Coffee of CRC, who brought 15 competitors to Great Brook, quipped "we are here to compete, all five races. Coming for the



competition, leaving with some cash". It's going to be a very fierce season across all divisions with the breadth of participation we saw in Carlisle.



Managed a quick chat with the Men's Open winner, Tracksmith's Ben Drezek, to talk about his day at the GBTC Invitational. Fresh off a nice career at UMass Lowell, where he bagged a 14:22.77 5k, Ben cruised to a 15:09.2 finish in Carlisle. "I wanted to run hard from the start and break the field. Then, just take it out from there" was Ben's strategy, and it worked to perfection. A small group tried to keep pace only to be shut down by the River Hawk alum. Very similar to his recent record setting 10M performance at the Blessing of the Fleet in Rhode Island where he crushed the field by the midpoint, taking it home with a 49:28, dismantling the 2005 benchmark. And guess who was first Male 40+ at the Blessing of the Fleet? None other than Abde Bouramdane. Many thanks to the Narragansett race director for warming up our harriers for the 2022 Cross Country Grand Prix.

As the sun rose higher in the sky and the dew point increased, the Association ladies gathered for the ultimate race, the combined Women's Open and Masters match. Sixty one women, seven scoring teams, and a rainbow of singlets unfurled across the start line ready and ripped for the start. But first, a stirring rendition of the national anthem by Mr Cross Country, Mike Mahon<sup>2</sup>, got the final dose of adrenaline into the field. The feature contest was a genuine battle royale to the very finish. Tenths of seconds separated first and second, with Tracksmithian Reilly Kiernan literally one step ahead of Sarika Temme-Bapat of Battle Road. Reilly, an Ivy League standout while at Princeton, ran a determined race with Sarika on her shoulder through all three arcs. The finish could not have been closer. A two-time qualifier for the Olympic Trials in the marathon, Kiernan intensely tore the tape at a 6:01 race pace. Former U Chicago Maroon XC captain Temme-Bapat dueled with the leader at every twist and turn, but just could not close the gap. Sarika's performance did help Battle Road nail down second place in the Women's Open Team competition, pushing Tracksmith to third.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.letsrun.com/news/2017/12/meet-mr-cross-country-sports-biggest-fan/>

Discussing the course and her preparation, Reilly relayed that she has cut down her training as of late, reducing her normal ~70 mile weeks to a mere 50. While her regular focus is the marathon and half marathon, the shorter races in cross country are helping as life evolves, since Reilly is four months pregnant. A 'smitty since 2019, she was pleased with "the great course at Great Brook and host, GBTC. I've always loved cross country, and, especially for me right now, there's something really pure about worrying less about splits and times and instead just showing up and racing with your team. It's also great to be getting out more and more after two years of COVID, and I am very excited about the team performance today"



No stranger to RWP (racing while pregnant), two-time mother Christina Campbell of the HFC Striders grabbed third overall and first Women's Master, outdistancing fellow 40+er Ginger Reiner of Craft Concepts. Augmented by Top 10 finishes by teammates Lauren Tarvin and Hallie Armstrong, the Striders copped the top step of the podium in the Open division. The emerging ladies teams from CRC (Maggie Peard - 8th) and the Old Goats (Sydney Packard - 14th) finished fourth and fifth respectively, displacing the cagey vets of GLRR and Liberty. That's seven women's teams scoring in the first race of the USATF NE XC Grand Prix, an exciting harbinger for 2022.

HFC continued to flex, this time in the 40+ group, displacing GLRR by a mere two team points. Key to the Masters Team scoring results was two gals scoring down, with HFC's Mimi Fallon almost offsetting Greater's Lowell Kara Haas' sprint finish to 50+ individual and Team supremacy and second place in that tough 40+ Team contest. Splitting Kara and Mimi in the Masters results was another outstanding effort by Liberty's Mary Cass, scoring down for her torch holder's 40+ (3rd Team) and 50+ (2nd Team) and anchoring the 60+ Team to a victory over their nemeses at the Liane Pancoast led Greater Lowell RR. It's very important to note that in many cases the difference in Team scoring was due to the final runner or displacer, because it takes a village, or at least a full team plus some, to compete in the dash for cash that is the USATF NE XC Grand Prix. Shout outs to the women from Liberty and GLRR, as well as the men from HFC for scoring in all four Team divisions, and further to Greater Lowell for scoring in seven of the eight brackets overall. Perhaps a name change to the *Greatest* Lowell Road Runners?





On to the Grand Prix points for the Women's Masters utilizing Age Grading - the great equalizer. We use the 2020 standards based on 5k **road** times as none exist for the tougher cross country distances. With humidity and a tough course as the challenge, Mary Cass threw down and delivered an Age Grade of 86.31, closely followed by Mim, Kara, and Christina, all registering an AG greater than 80. Up next was a hearty and hale Jennifer Hegarty of Battle Road. Rounding out the Top 10 were Julie Craig and Alda Cossi of Liberty, Ginger Reiner of Craft Concept, Liane Pancoast of GLRR, and Sue McNatt of the other Cantabrigian racing club, *THE* Cambridge Sports Union. All finished under the appreciative gaze of recent (and multiple) world champion Jan Holmquist. Last month Jan set the World Record for 8km roads in her age group, earning her fame, glory, and the USATF NE Athlete of the Month. Hoping Jan can squeeze an upcoming XC GP race into her busy schedule.

Just before noon, the curtain came down on a busy day of cross country competition and community. Many thanks to the race directors at the Greater Boston Track Club, the smiling scions of Coach Squires. A race well run in many ways. We had an Olympian, several Olympic Trials qualifiers, world champs, record setters, and a whole lot of heart out there. Great participation and enthusiasm for the Grand Prix kickoff with the highest number of scoring teams in recent memory. Here's hoping that some of the partial teams from the good folks at Greater Springfield, Gate City, the Western Mass Distance Project, Notch (where's my beer?), Greater Derry, and others fill out in the near future. Preach. To be eligible for cash and some of that sweet swiggity series swag, ya gots to run at least three races including Franklin Park, so there is still time to get on the XC express train. The USATF NE XC Grand Prix will next be at Race #2 - The Brown Bear Invitational on the challenging Coogan Course in Attleboro on Saturday October 1, followed by Race #3 - The Wayland XC Festival on Sunday October 9 in Wayland MA. Registrations are open. Be there or be square. Full GP results and information are posted on the [USATF NE GP web page](https://newengland.usatf.org/events/2022/2022-usatf-ne-cross-country-grand-prix).<sup>3</sup> If you have pictures from this race, like the one below, please pass them along or post on the USATF NE Facebook account.



*Street toughs itching for a fight. Are we gonna do this? Hell, yeah!*

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<sup>3</sup> <https://newengland.usatf.org/events/2022/2022-usatf-ne-cross-country-grand-prix>