

Eric Blake Named USA Track & Field - New England Athlete of the Month for September



Photo: Nancy Hobbs

BOSTON – **Eric Blake**, age 27 of New Britain, CT, who runs for the Boston Athletic Association, has been named USA Track & Field – New England’s Athlete of the Month for September 2006. Competing for the U.S. team at the 22nd World Mountain Running Trophy championship in Bursa, Turkey on September 10, Blake was the 2nd American and the 11th finisher overall. The U.S. men’s senior team ran to 5th place, its best ever finish.

Blake was 23rd at the World Mountain Trophy champs last year and said his goal this year was to finish in the top 10 and hopefully contribute to a top 3 U.S. team finish. He indicated that Simon Gutierrez of New Mexico, who was the 1st American finisher and 10th overall, went out fast from the start. Blake caught him at the mile mark and from that point they worked together. With approximately ten runners in front of them, they found themselves at the head of the second pack. Blake lead the way, pushing the pace as they wound up the 12 kilometer course, climbing 4300 feet as they moved from paved road to dirt road to trail. At key points Gutierrez surged to the front, relieving Blake from his relentless pacesetting. By the end, they had shaken loose from their rivals, finishing 1-2 in the second pack.

Blake has enjoyed a summer of peak performances. On June 17, at the 46th annual Mt. Washington Road Race in New Hampshire, Blake won the rugged 7.6 mile race up the auto road in a time of 61:09. Just seven days later, Blake took on a very different challenge, an attempt to break the world record for a marathon on a treadmill – a feat that is tracked by The Book of Alternative Records. The existing record was 2:24. Blake ran 1:12 for the first half, then increased pace and found he was able to speed up even more over the last few miles to finish in 2:21:40, a new world best and an average of 5:24 per mile for the 26.2 mile distance.

Blake notes that, at age 27, he is relatively young for a mountain runner and can reasonably expect improvement over the next few years. Although he is looking forward to next year’s World Mountain Trophy champs, he is more focused on the U.S. Olympic Men’s Marathon trials that will be held in New York City in the fall of 2007.

There was a strong New England presence at the World Mountain Trophy Champs in Turkey, as **Paul Low** of Belchertown, MA (USATF-NE athlete of the Month in September 2004), rounded out the U.S. scoring as the 4th American and 67th overall, and **Kevin Tilton** of Conway, NH was 6th American and 87th overall. New Englanders, **Rich Bolt** and **Dave Dunham** also served as the men’s and junior team managers respectively, for the event.

Athlete of the Month is a program for USATF- New England and is designed to recognize outstanding performers at all levels of the sport. USATF-NE will name a new honoree each month and feature the athlete on the USATF-NE website.