

Heidi Westerling Named USATF – New England’s Athlete of the Month for May



Photo: Arthur Gaines

BOSTON – **Heidi Westerling**, age 28 of Walpole, NH, who competes for the Boston Athletic Association, has been named USA Track & Field – New England’s Athlete of the Month for May 2009. On May 24, Westerling won the women's division at the KeyBank Vermont City Marathon in a course record of 2:35:02. This lowered her previous personal best for the marathon by more than 6 minutes.

Westerling has won several regional marathons in recent years and has continued to set personal bests. Earlier this year, on March 15, Westerling won the New Bedford Half Marathon in a fast 1:11:35. Asked about her continued improvement, Westerling cited her high weekly training mileage, stating that she has been training regularly at 150-170 miles per week. Before the New Bedford race, she went up to 200 miles for two weeks, before dropping back. She does little speed work in training, explaining that “racing is my speed work.” A typical training day for Heidi begins with a 13-14 mile treadmill run in the morning and a 10 mile road run in the afternoon.

Heidi takes an unusual approach to her races. Most runners have a time goal and try to maintain a pace that will achieve or exceed their goal. Heidi says, “I run by feel rather than by plan,” and elaborates by stating, “I go in trying to run as hard as I can for as long as I can.” She believes that going after a specific time is more likely to limit her than help her. For example, at the New Bedford Half Marathon, she ran the first mile in a blistering 5:18. Initially, she got nervous and wondered if she had gone out too fast, but soon pushed aside her doubts and kept up her strong effort all the way to the finish.

Westerling is a 2004 Magna Cum Laude graduate of the University of Rhode Island where she was an Atlantic 10 champion in both the 5,000 and 10,000 meters, and also starred in cross-country. She also has a masters degree in education and teaches fifth grade. With improvement, Heidi notes that she faces a conflict between running familiar regional races where she receives lots of recognition and support, versus going to major national events where she has the opportunity to race against elite competitors. This August, she will compete in the New York City Half-Marathon, where she will face a high quality field.

For the future, Westerling says that she's wants to run faster every time she takes the line. Looking ahead to the marathon trials for the 2012 London Olympics, Heidi says that she knows she can qualify, but wants to be competitive at the trials with hopes of making the U.S. team.