

BY NEIL WEINTRAUB
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Earlier this year while researching the Arizona Daily Sun archives, I discovered an Aug. 23, 1978, sports section headline that read: Big Brothers Set Marathon. As the current Big Brothers Big Sisters half-marathon/5K races' longtime voluntary director, I finally uncovered questions I had about the colorful history of Flagstaff's longest-enduring race.

This Aug. 9, the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Flagstaff (BBBSF) Dave McKay Memorial Half Marathon and 5K Run or Walk sponsored by Kinney Construction Services marches into its 48th straight year with more than 500 participants expected.

In that 1978 column previewing the inau-

gural Sept. 2 marathon and half-marathon, Big Brothers race Chairman Steve Pomgracz said: "This will probably be the most physically challenging marathon in the country, aside from the Pikes Peak Run."

Two days after the inaugural race, the Arizona Daily Sun reported: "Last minute decisions to run resulted in first place trophies for two Flagstaff men in the first Flagstaff Marathon."

According to the paper, Nat White (who is attending this year's run) took the title in 2:46:21, remarkably after racing the day before at the Northern Arizona University Invitational Cross Country Run. Don Perry won the men's open division.

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COURTESY

Two of Big Brothers marathon's original and top competitors, Nat White and Paul Baltutis, reminisce about their glory days at last year's Soulstice Mountain Trail Run. Both are registered for the race this year.

HIGH COUNTRY RUNNING

Big Brothers Big Sisters races set for nostalgic 48th year

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Both had registered for the marathon the night before the race. Susan Kieffer of Flagstaff won the women's race. A total of 67 runners finished the full marathon while 45 tackled the half.

The following year, the race garnered national attention when the Arizona Daily Sun boasted on Aug. 31, 1979, that: "Runner's World magazine has called it the toughest marathon in the country."

Over the first couple of years, marathon participation faded in favor of the half-marathon. After the 1982 fifth annual edition of the race, when my friend Paul Baltutis took third place in 2:42:40, the Big Brothers board of directors dropped the marathon course and had the event become solely a half-marathon

race. Decades later, the Big Brothers Big Sisters half-marathon (and now 5K) runs on — although it has changed course from originally starting and ending at Fort Tuthill to now being located at Thorpe Park.

Thanks to Paul, he sent me photos of artifacts from his 1981 and 1982 races, including a photo of him with his race shirt, his brass belt buckle prize and an entry form with the race course map.

We are especially excited for this year's race, as Paul plans to line up to tackle our even more challenging half-marathon course that climbs 800 feet onto Observatory Mesa.

Because the race is organized by volunteers from the BBBSF board of directors and past board members, many who have been involved with the race since its origins in 1978, 100% of the proceeds benefit BBBSF mentoring

programs.

While much has changed in Flagstaff since 1978, BBBSF continues its mission to create and support one-to-one mentoring relationships igniting the power and promise of youth as it has done since 1967. We hope you will join us by registering on RunSignUp.

Neil Weintraub joined the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Flagstaff board of directors in 2001 and has voluntarily directed the half-marathon for the past 24 years. He is also a Big Brother to his Little Brother, Zach, who will be racing the 5K for his fifth straight year. Neil wishes to thank the Big Brothers Big Sisters office staff and his course crew who help pull the race together year after year. Rachel Smith is the coordinating editor for the High Country Running column. You can email her at rachschnaid18@gmail.com to contribute to this column!