

Frenchman easily wins Half Marathon

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Viking Half Marathon winner Duncan Perrillat-Amede cruises down Grand Boulevard toward the finish Saturday in downtown Greenwood. The 26-year-old from Grenoble, France, via Chicago completed the 13.1-mile course more than 16 minutes ahead of the next closest competitor.

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On a beautiful spring morning that seemed designed for running, more than 320 people finished the Viking Half Marathon & 5K on Saturday, but nobody did it better than Frenchman Duncan Perrillat-Amede.

The 26-year-old from Grenoble, France, via Chicago outclassed the competition, finishing the 13.1-mile course in 1 hour, 14 minutes, 31.46 seconds, a pace of 5:41 per mile. That's nowhere near world-class speed, but in this race Perrillat-Amede beat the next runner, Ty Wamsley of Vicksburg, by about 16.5 minutes.

With Wamsley running at a 7:01 pace, he was about 2.5 miles behind Perrillat-Amede at the end.

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That means Perrillat-Amede could have had at least two plates of catfish, hush puppies and French fries from Larry's Fish House before Wamsley completed the course.

The young man with the rough beard and ponytail, wearing the white "Liking My Viking" singlet, had the lead from the first stride at 8 a.m. in front of the Leflore County Courthouse, and he never gave it up.

Perrillat-Amede works for The Middleby Corp. in suburban Chicago, where he designs and builds showrooms. Middleby owns Viking Range, the race's title sponsor. He learned about the race at work and told the Greenwood folks whose couch he slept on Friday night that he was going to win the race because his boss at Middleby had insisted he do so.

When it was over, Perrillat-Amede mingled among the finishers, volunteers and others at the picnic tables at the corner of Main and Front streets, drawing nods and smiles. Other runners didn't but might have bowed to him in a race where he was so dominant.

When his name was announced as the winner and he was presented with the first-place painting, Perrillat-Amede displayed his Frenchness as he leaned in for the cheek-and-cheek kiss, a tradition for European sports champions, only to get a hug in return from the young Delta woman presenting the award.

Perrillat-Amede only recently moved to Chicago from France, arriving in the middle of winter, which sounds like a bad idea until you consider he left winter in the French Alps. He's looking forward to running along the lakefront this summer.

Because of his recent relocation, he admitted he hadn't run much in the past three months or so. "No, no, but I walk a lot," he said. He started running about a week before the half marathon, but the only training he's had is when he took the City of New Orleans to Greenwood for the race.

To make the rest of the half marathon runners question themselves even more, Perrillat-Amede had never run a half marathon before, or a marathon. He said he ran one 10K in his young life, used to run in 5K races — less than 2 miles — and was a miler with a running club at one point.

His LinkedIn profile shows he ran as a member of the cross-country and track teams when he attended California Baptist University, a Division II school in Riverside, California, from 2015 to 2017. Perrillat-Amede was the Pac-West champ in the 3,000-meter steeplechase in 2016 and 2017. Earlier than that he came in 14th in the Junior French International cross-country trial in 2012.

So, while he's never run a half marathon before, he has run before. And while he made it look easy, it wasn't.

"It was hard," Perrillat-Amede said. "I think I can do better." He said he was running out of steam in the last couple of miles and his legs began feeling heavy.

"If I can stay in America, I will come back next year," he said. Perhaps Greenwood can fish around at the local colleges to see if it can come up with some competition for him.

The Greenwood race, which is organized by the Greenwood-LeFlore County Chamber of Commerce, has apparently become a favorite with out-of-towners, although Perrillat-Amede is certainly the first Frenchman to win the race in its eight-year history. Of the five top finishers in the half marathon for both men and women, none of them were from Greenwood, or the Delta for that matter.

Emily Frith of Oxford was the top female finisher with a time of 1:37:18.56.

Danny Vargas of Greenwood came in first in the 5K with a time of 18:28.6. Katie Jones of Greenwood was the top female finisher with a time of 23:02.08.

Announcing the winners on the beautiful Delta spring day, Greenwood Mayor Carolyn McAdams told everybody, "Two weeks ago, y'all would have been in kayaks," referring to recent flooding the area had experienced. She encouraged the visiting runners to shop and leave all their money in Greenwood.

Complete results are available online via the race's official website:

vikinghalfmarathon.racesonline.com/results

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