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Cox shocks 'em after 19 years trying

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T&T's CURTIS COX and Poland's JOANNA GRONT show off their championship trophies following yesterday's 26.2-mile Clico T&T Marathon, near the finish outside Queen's Park Oval in Port-of-Spain.

Gront successfully defended the women's title in 2:53:16, while Cox won the men's crown in 2:24.21 from a field of more than 400 runners, who started outside Mid Centre Mall in Chaguanas. Photo: Anthony Harris

BY KWAME WILLIAMS

Curtis Cox finally captured the title that had evaded him for 19 years. He beat seven-time champion, Pamenos Ballantyne of St Vincent and the Grenadines, to win the Clico T&T Marathon yesterday, finishing to resounding applause at the entrance to the Queen's Park Oval on Tragarete Road, Port of Spain.

In doing so, Cox ended an 11-year drought for T&T, who has not had a male winner of the event since 1994, when Tobagonian Michael Alexander completed a beaver-trick of wins (four-in-a-row).

Cox, also from the sister isle and second in last year's run, completed the 26.2-miles journey from Mid Centre Mall in Chaguanas, in two hours, 24 minutes and 21 seconds, with Venezuela's Jefferson Rivas second (2:25:47) and dethroned champion Ballantyne third in 2:26:39.

After Ballantyne cruised to victory in last weekend's TTUTA 5k, in which Cox was a distant second, many people believed that the Vincentian's eighth Clico title was already in the bag.

This belief was compounded by the news that the Kenyan, John Muriuki, who dethroned Ballantyne in 2002, would not be competing after being denied a visa to travel by the British High Commission in Nairobi (Kenya).

This was not the case however. The 37-year-old Cox dictated the pace for

the majority of the race.

When the leading pack of Rivas, Cox and Ballantyne reached Curepe, the champion started to fade, allowing Cox to build a lead that turned out to be decisive.

Ballantyne said after the race that his loss of momentum was due to cramping in his legs.

Cox said: "I feel great. I feel like there's a monkey off my back. This is the 19th time I'm competing in this race and I've only been able to manage two third-place finishes (1991, 1992) and a second place. So this was really a big thing for me. I worked really hard for it. The people were wonderful too, because they cheered me on and kept me motivated throughout. It was just great," he added.

Cox also commented on his loss to Ballantyne in the TTUTA 5k, saying: "After the 5k, people were telling me that I would lose today, but I never took that on, because I trained for the marathon and not the 5k."

The beaten Ballantyne said:

"It's not everyday that your body will feel the way you want it to and, unfortunately, today was that day for me. When we were in Curepe, my legs started to cramp. I tried to push my body but it just wouldn't respond."

As expected, Poland's Joanna Gront easily retained her women's category title, finishing in 2:53:16. Adelaide Carrington, Ballantyne's compatriot, was second (3:33:42), while local girl Natalie Suite ran a strong race to end in third (3:38:40).

For the first time in her 22 years contesting the T&T Marathon, Lynette "Granny" Luces failed to finish the course, running into difficulty somewhere in the vicinity of the Croisee, San Juan.

She was later taken to hospital, but her condition is not yet known.

2005 RESULTS

Men

1. Curtis Cox (T&T) 2:24:21 (TT \$25,200)
2. Jefferson Rivas (Venezuela) 2:25:47 (\$19,000)
3. Pamenos Ballantyne (SVG) 2:26:39 (\$12,600)
4. Emiliano Rojas (Venezuela) 2:37:35 (\$5,000)
5. Brian Maynard (T&T) 2:40:56 (\$4,000)
6. Andrew Gutzmore (Jamaica) 2:42:49 (\$3,500)
7. Richard Jones (T&T) 2:45:32 (\$3,000)
8. Keith Cumberbatch (Barbados) 2:45:41 (\$2,500)
9. Richard Carbajal (Venezuela) 2:47:34 (\$2,000)

10. Laudric Maxwell (T&T) 2:49:08 (\$1,000)

Women

1. Joanna Gront (Poland) 2:53:16 (T&T \$19,000)

2. Adelaide Carrington (SVG) 3:33:42 (\$12,600)

3. Natalie Suite (T&T) 3:38:40 (\$6,300)

4. Karoline Schmid 3:45:35 (\$3,000)

5. Leisl Puckering (T&T) 3:48:32 (\$2,000)

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