

GRANDMA'S MARATHON / ELITE WOMEN

MINNESOTA MADE



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Dakota Lindwurm of Eagan, Minnesota, is all smiles as she nears the Lester River Bridge on London Road Saturday, June 19, in Duluth. Lindwurm won the women's Grandma's Marathon with a time of 2:29:04.

Lindwurm brings Grandma's Marathon title home to the Gopher State

By Jon Nowacki

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Shortly after crossing the finish line at the 45th Grandma's Marathon, Dakotah Lindwurm's thoughts quickly drifted toward her beloved mother, who she was sure was right there in Canal Park with her, if not in body, certainly in spirit.

"She's a woman who didn't care what anybody thought," said Lindwurm, 26, of Eagan, Minnesota. "She would have been out there in front of the crowd, saying, 'That's my kid!!!' That was her famous line. She was always proud."

And the late Connie Bullen never would have been more proud than Saturday as her daughter became the first Minnesota woman to win Grandma's Marathon since 1987, winning the women's title by covering the 26.2 miles in 2 hours, 29 minutes, 4 seconds.

"I really wanted to win," Lindwurm said. "I lost my mom in May 2020 to cancer, and I know she would have loved to see me win this race, so to be out here and do that and know that she is watching me in heaven is amazing."

After seeing nearly an entire year of sport all but wiped out due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and last year's Grandma's Marathon turned into a virtual whatever, perhaps this year's event was heaven-sent.

Oh, and much of this was by design, but the field Saturday wasn't as large, the crowds lining the street not as big, the traffic not as jammed (hey, it wasn't all bad), but Grandma's was back, and back in a big way.

Lindwurm finished fourth at Grandma's Marathon in her marathon debut in 2019. She was asked if Saturday felt like Duluth being Duluth again.

"Yes, it did," she said. "I loved the crowd, I loved the energy. It felt like the



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Makenzie Patten of Kuna, Idaho, approaches the finish line of Grandma's Marathon on Saturday in Duluth.

pandemic never happened between now and 2019. I felt like the crowd was out, and they were here to cheer."

As soon as the starting gun went off Saturday, Lindwurm went off. It was a one-woman race from the get-go as the up-and-comer, who earned All-American honors while at Northern State in Aberdeen, South Dakota, didn't see the rest of the field the rest of the way.

Lindwurm's time is the fastest for a Minnesota woman in the history of the event, topping the 2:33:01 by Jennifer Houck in 2011. Lindwurm earned \$5,000 for the victory.

Katja Goldring, 30, of Flagstaff, Arizona, was second, 2 1/2 minutes back in 2:31:30, while Tristin Van Ord, 26, of Blowing Rock, North Carolina, was third in 2:32:55. All three set personal records.

"I could see her for a few miles, but she was really strong," Goldring said. "I know Dakotah is a great runner. If I was having an amazing day and reeled her in, that would be wonderful, but I had to run my own race."

Van Ord agreed. If you want

to go out like a gangbuster in a 5K, well, that's one thing, but if you want to do that in a marathon you could be asking for two hours of misery or dropping out altogether.

"When you're running 26 miles, you have to respect the distance; so if you're chasing someone, if you're going out too hard, too early, it's probably not too smart," Van Ord said, laughing. "I try to think of it as trying to maintain a tempo for 20 miles and then a race for 6 miles at the end."

While some of the elite men said afterward it wasn't a fast course Saturday, that only one in their group had set a PR, they must have been wimps, because you would have a hard time convincing the women otherwise.

The temperature topped out at about 60 degrees, there was a little tailwind and it was overcast ... what more do you want? Downhill the whole way and wheels?

The top three women were asked if it was fast, and they said, in unison, "Oh, yeah."

"I set over a seven-minute PR, so it was perfect, it was gorgeous," Van Ord said.

Lindwurm sure seemed to be enjoying it. She was all smiles and waves, happy-go-lucky all the way from Two Harbors to Duluth. You'll never find a runner happier while putting her body through 26.2 miles of torture, and you couldn't have picked anyone this side of Kara Goucher to be a better representative of "Fastest Minnesotan" for this event.

"If you've ever run a marathon you know what it feels like to be looking down the barrel of the gun on race day," Lindwurm said. "It can be something you dread, even though for months you were really excited about it, so I like to really take race day as a fun day. There's no reason to dread it, there's no reason to be afraid. The worst-case scenario, you run a bad race. So when I'm out there I enjoy cheering on with the crowd and getting them hyped up and kind of taking the energy from them and just having a good time."

It's no façade. She's the real deal. And if she ever forgets who or what she is about, she has her motto, her anthem, "Strong, fast, last," written on

her left hand on a race day as a reminder for "I am strong, I am fast, my speed will last."

"Nope, I love to run — racing is just the cherry on top," she said. "I enjoy the day-to-day grinds, and the race is just the fun part. That's where I get to really shine and just have fun with it. I don't think racing has to be super serious, especially in a race that's so long. You don't need to be out there elbow to elbow and be grumpy the whole time. Two and half hours is too long for that. You might as well have a good time."

Lindwurm looked like she could have run another 10 miles at the finish. She still looked fresh. She was asked just how fast she could be. She is, after all, still just a beginner in this sport, and nearly each time out, she keeps getting faster.

"I still feel like a small fish in the big pond of women's running," she said. "But now, instead of just being a minnow, maybe I'm a crappie."

Spoken like a true Minnesotan.

"My dad raised me right," she said.