

A big race to remember

BY NEIL WEINTRAUB
Special to the Daily Sun

Last Saturday, Aug. 9, nearly 400 runners, walkers and kid dashers participated in the 48th annual Big Brothers Big Sisters of Flagstaff (BBBSF) Dave McKay Memorial Half Marathon and 5K sponsored by Kinney Construction Services. While the racers got ready for their respective distance, I realized I have voluntarily directed this event for exactly half its life.

While many of my muddled memories of past races have faded, this year already felt unique for its “non-noon” weather, which led to an absence of the legendary monsoon mudhole obstacles that annually challenge runners. As a result, Flagstaff

Olympian Rachel Smith and 51-year-old Dan Kuch left all other half-marathon participants in a wake of their dust.

Hats off once again to Rachel, who outraced the entire field in 1:27.05 for the second time in three years. Rachel, once a Big Sister to her “Little,” Alyzabeth, in BBBSF’s community-based program (their match aged out after seven years when Alyzabeth turned 18) on this year’s race said: “I always love getting to be a part of Flagstaff’s iconic races. The community turnout, Neil’s passion for making the event so special, all paired with it benefiting an organization (BBBSF) dear to my heart,

See RACES, Page 2



COURTESY

Dan Kuch and Rachel Smith pose with their winner's plaques handcrafted by Flagstaff runner, Rod Horn, after the 48th annual Big Brothers Big Sisters of Flagstaff Dave McKay Memorial Half Marathon and 5K on Saturday, Aug. 9

RACES

FROM PAGE 1

makes this one of my favorite days of the year!”

Dan, escaping Lake Havasu City’s low elevation sizzling 110-plus degree temperatures for the weekend, showed no signs of oxygen deprivation as he became the first 50 and older runner to win the men’s title in 1:29.12. After the race, Dan told me: “It’s always difficult coming to elevation from sea level, but I look forward to the challenge. Congratulations to Rachel on her victory and still running at a high caliber while juggling family life.”

As a Big Brother volunteer for the past 24 years, BBBSF’s mis-

sion to create and support one-to-one mentoring relationships that ignite the power and promise of youth is close to my heart. After my parents divorced in 1976, my neighbor, Abe Simon, took me under his wing and convinced me to participate in the race he voluntarily organized, the Scarsdale 15K. From seventh through 12th grade, it became a spring tradition for me to train with Abe the week before the race. Each year I successfully lowered my personal best before heading off to college.

Just as the Scarsdale 15K became a ritual for me and Abe, the BBBSF 5K has become one for me and my Little Brother, Zach. He has set personal bests

at each of his five consecutive finishes. This year, thanks to Kinney Construction Services President Mike Thomas, who stepped in and paced Zach, he crushed his goal of breaking 30 minutes in a smoking 27.54. I couldn’t be prouder!

There are dozens of kids on the BBBSF waiting list who hope to have a mentor in the near future. Personally, being a Big is one of the most enjoyable and fulfilling things I have ever done. I want to encourage others to have the opportunity to help shape a child’s future for the better by empowering them to achieve their goals and being a positive role model. So, if you have a few hours a month, please

visit flagstaffbigs.org or call the office at 928-774-0649 to learn more. And be sure to mark your calendars for next year’s 49th annual race on Aug. 8, 2026!

Neil Weintraub wishes to thank the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Flagstaff staff, assistant race Chairman Jim Driscoll and our supporting cast of colorful characters from the current and past board of directors who keep this race fresh and lively for the participants and such a joy to direct year after year! Rachel Smith is the coordinating editor for the High Country Running column. You can email her at rachschneid18@gmail.com to contribute to this column!