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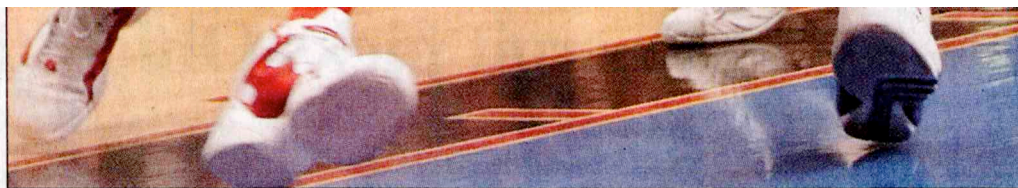
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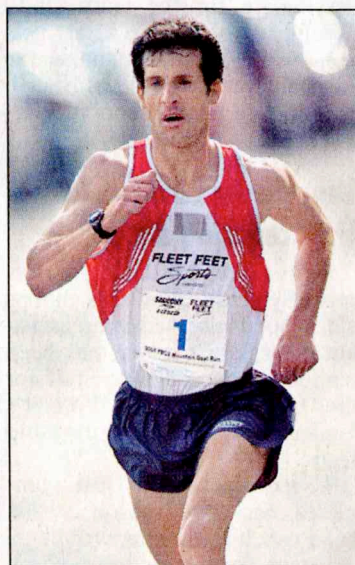
Iverson played one of the better playoff games of his nine-year career, scoring 37 points and handing out five of his 15 assists in the fourth quarter as the Sixers defeated the defending champions for the first time in their best-of-seven series, cutting Detroit's

IVERSON, PAGE D-6



The Associated Press

ALLEN IVERSON (left) of the Philadelphia 76ers drives past Chauncey Billups of the Detroit Pistons in the first half of Game 3 of the opening-round playoff series Friday in Philadelphia. Detroit leads the series 2-1.



File photo / John Berry, 2004

KEVIN COLLINS of Cicero will be trying to defend his two consecutive Syracuse Mountain Goat titles on Sunday.

Collins back in the running

After considering giving up on his passion, Kevin Collins realizes he can't let go now.

By Dan Friedell
 Contributing writer

The second place finisher at the 2003 U.S. National Marathon Championship just said he was not a gifted athlete.

“I was not a superstar high school runner, I was not a superstar college runner, but because I was passionate about that one thing and invested 20 years of my life, I was able to get results that landed me on the world team,” said Kevin Collins, the 34-year-old Cicero native who

will be trying to defend his two consecutive Syracuse Mountain Goat titles on Sunday.

But as recently as two months ago, Collins said, his passion for running was waning and he was seriously thinking about forfeiting his crown.

“I was going to move on and start my cartooning, which is something I've always wanted to do,” said Collins, who ultimately got his degree in medical illustration from the Rochester Institute of Technology in 1999.

Since he was a teenager, Collins wanted to make a career out of running, and he's done that. Sitting at a table upstairs in the Marshall Square Mall near SU on Tuesday, Collins laid out his

marathon-running life story, which began about 11 years ago while he was attending RIT. He became so serious about running that he had to give up school.

“It was actually my academic advisor who suggested I leave college. You imagine a guy running 20 miles a day around the college, it was becoming noticeable to the staff and they were thinking maybe there was something a little bit loopy going on up there,” Collins said while pointing at his head.

That was in 1994, when he began training full-time for the 1996 U.S. Olympic Marathon Trials, where he finished 18th. Aside from time off due to injuries and a return to school,

COLLINS, PAGE D-11

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The Post-Standard

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Saturday, April 30, 2005

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Collins didn't stop running for more than a decade. Late last year during a 16-mile training run along the shores of Oneida Lake, Collins talked about how he couldn't have been happier with where his career stood. He had a new girlfriend (Judy Johnson, a former runner at Georgia Tech) and was less than two years removed from running the fastest marathon of his career (26.2 miles in 2 hours, 15 minutes and 32 seconds.) Then he spent the winter training in Albuquerque, N.M., with a house full of Kenyan, Polish and French distance runners and he didn't have any fun.

"I thought it might be the last (chance) to revive my interest, as far as trying to compete at the Olympic level," Collins said. "And it didn't do anything for me. I knew that if being in such

a motivating environment wasn't going to revive my interest, then it was time to let go."

So Collins cut back his running from over 120 miles per week to 75-85 miles a week.

"I would do about 13 miles five days a week, and then to make sure I didn't completely lose sight of long distance, I would do a 20-miler. But then on the other day, I would just do weight work," Collins said.

Essentially, Collins was starting to ease his way into retirement. But a surprise was in store.

"My body got fresh after being so creaky for so long, and I said to Judy, 'You know what? I think I can race off of this.' "

So when Collins and Johnson, who work at Fleet Feet Sports on Erie Boulevard when they're living in Syracuse, moved back to town in early March, Collins tested his theory.

He finished second in two regional races, Johnny's Runnin' o' the Green, a five-miler in Rochester on March 12 and the Skunk Cabbage Classic, a 10k in Ithaca on April 3. He ran at a five-minute mile pace in both races and kept up with Anthony Gallo, a fast miler, in Rochester and finished ahead of Ryan Pauling, last year's Mountain Goat runner-up, in Ithaca.

Collins said he is planning to go all-out against what looks to be a tough field in Syracuse on Sunday. The men's start list includes Retta Feyissa, an Ethiopian who has a marathon personal best of 2:16, Scott Shaw, Mike Melfi, Bob Sweeny and Collins' colleague at Fleet Feet, Jason Meany.

"Do I want to win on Sunday? Absolutely. And I'm going to try to win," an animated Collins said.

But can he win?

"He's still the man to beat on Sunday," said Meany, who ran against Collins in Ithaca last month. "He may not be doing marathon training right now, but I think he's going to end up faster over the shorter distances."

And if he doesn't win, Collins won't pout. He said he knows that the Olympics probably aren't an option anymore, and he seems committed to pursuing a new career in illustration, which is something, unlike running, he said he has a natural aptitude for.

"You move on. And you start over at the bottom of a new mountain. It's like being a kid again, you can dream big," Collins said.

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