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[Back to Home > Sports](#)

Monday, Dec 31, 2007

## Sports

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  - MCC Lancers
  - Miami Hurricanes
  - South Florida Bulls
- Columnists
- Golf
- High School
- Hockey
- Horse Racing
- Motorsports
- Other Sports
- Outdoors
- Recreation
- Youth Sports

#### Entertainment

#### Business

#### Living

#### Opinion

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#### Online

#### Archives

#### Forums

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#### Awards

#### Newspapers in

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By JOHN LEMBO

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**PALMETTO** -- A smile creased Darren Brown's face as he crossed the finish long before anyone else did Saturday morning.

Clad in black shorts and black running shoes, and with a pair of sunglasses wrapped around his eyes, Brown looked completely in his element during the 7th Annual Manatee River Run 5 Miller at Emerson Point Park, presented by the Bradenton Runners Club.

Brown, 22, ran like it, as well. He finished first overall - winning the race for the second straight year - by more than a minute, and his time of 24:43.84 set a new course record.

But the fifth-year senior at the University of Texas, whose parents live in Lakewood Ranch, and who was born in Gainesville, never liked to run when he was kid.

In fact . . .

"I hated running," said Brown, whose father is a running coach.

Brown was a soccer player. But approximately eight years ago, his career was derailed by an Achilles' tendon injury. He couldn't play soccer again.

During post-surgery rehabilitation, however, Brown began to run. And he began to like it. Having lived in upstate New York, California, Arizona and Houston, he graduated from Klein (Texas) High, where he helped set two state relay records and placed third in the state cross country championships as a senior. After earning All-America honors as a junior during indoor track and field season, Brown helped the Longhorns clinch their fourth consecutive top-20 finish during the Division I cross country championships.

Brown will head back to Texas after the New Year and hopes to run professionally after he graduates.

On Saturday, Brown beat the runner-up, 16-year-old Mohammed Ahmed (25:53) by more than a minute. Nathan Krahn, who is Brown's workout partner, placed third (27:04).

"I just wanted to run well enough to win," Brown said. "It was a good time (on Saturday)."

Thomas Lentz, 40, won the masters division (27:30), while Jose Alvarez, 53, won the grand masters (30:10) and Tony Shelbourn, 62, won the senior grand masters (32:20).

Records didn't just fall on the guys' side, however. Eighteen-year-old Sara-Ann Brault set a new course record for women (29:31) and finished 14th overall. She won the women's title over second-place finisher Melanie Peters (30:07) and third-place runner Esther Vermeer (31:38).

Denise Skinner, 51, won the masters division (34:07). Sandy Meneley, 60, won the grand masters (37:41), and Bonnie Theall (44:40) won the senior grand masters.

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