

S
e
c
t
i
o
n

C

Outdoors	2C
Halfpipe Champs	3C
Cops Compete	4C
Soccer Shutouts	6C
Home Show	10C
Classifieds	13C

Wednesday, April 11, 2007

SPORTS



Corpus Callosum

Teton County residents attract politicians with promises of cash. See Page 10C.

Batchen top American at Sahara race

Frenchman's death mars grueling ultramarathon across desert.

By Michael Pearlman

For the second time in three years, Jackson resident Jay Batchen was the top American finisher at the Marathon des Sables, a six-day, 151-mile running race across the Sahara Desert that concluded April 2.

Batchen finished 88th overall in the 756-racer field. He posted a time of 28 hours, 27 minutes.

It was his fourth appearance in the famed event. In 2005, Batchen also was the top American finisher, but he dropped out of the 2006 race on the second day after separating his shoulder.

"I went into the race just wanting to finish," said Batchen, whose winter training schedule was slowed by a family move from Driggs, Idaho, to Jackson in January. "But when you get there and the first day starts that competitiveness comes out. If it's in your blood it's going

See **BATCHEN** on 6C



PHOTO COURTESY COLLEEN WOODS

Jay Batchen receives fluids after finishing the Marathon des Sables on April 2 in Morocco. Batchen both competed in and served as the U.S. organizer of the race.

BATCHEN

Continued from cover

to come out no matter what you're doing."

Founded by Frenchman Patrick Bauer in 1985, the Marathon des Sables has become legendary among the international ultrarunning community. Held in Morocco on a course that changes annually, runners endure temperatures that can top 130 degrees as well as howling winds and blinding sandstorms while running through sand dunes and rugged, rocky terrain during the weeklong stage race. Competitors are provided water at checkpoints along the course, but otherwise are required to be self-sufficient.

The difficulty of the Marathon des Sables requires organizers to staff the race with a medical team and racers' conditions are monitored by doctors at each checkpoint along the route. Sadly, those precautions weren't enough to prevent the

death of 49-year-old French runner Bernard Jule, who was found dead in his tent after finishing the 50-mile stage, the longest day of the race. It was the second death in the 22-year history of the event.

"All the competitors went from jubilation to complete shock and sadness," Batchen said. "I felt horrible for the guy's family."

Batchen and his wife, Lisa Smith-Batchen, serve as the U.S. organizers for the Marathon des Sables, providing entry information and daily support to 62 other racers during the event. When Lisa opted not to travel to Morocco this year in order to train for an Ironman triathlon, Jay found himself doing double duty as both a competitor and information source for his fellow runners.

"It made it more difficult for me because everything fell on my shoulders," Batchen said. "Something's always happening – either there's an injury or someone needs medical assistance or has

a question on the course.”

Batchen hovered around 100th place for the first four stages of the race, dropped to 121st after the fifth stage and moved up 33 places on the final stage, to top 27 other American entrants. After unusually hot temperatures and wind led to a record dropout rate in 2006, organizers provided runners with additional water this year. Though the weather was slightly more bearable, Batchen said, the running surface of this year’s course was more challenging.

“There were more and bigger sand dunes and deeper sand,” Batchen said. “When you run in that thick, heavy sand that you sink into, it’s more exhausting.”

Moroccan runner Lahcen Ahansal was the winner, claiming his 10th title by finishing in 17 hours, 25 minutes. Six of the top eight finishers in the race were from Morocco. Smith-Batchen was the top American finisher in 1999.