

# All Hell Breaks Loose, Sun Also Rises

by John Farrow

The two armies came together in this peaceful Virginia town, each seeking the high ground and the upper hand. Troops were deployed with care and precision -- not a tactic was overlooked. Bull Run 1861? Fredericksburg 1862? Chancellorsville 1863? Cold Harbor 1864? No, this was Norfolk 2002.

The skirmishing began early during the meeting of state representatives as a powerful storm moved through the area. However, the rolling thunder outside was no match for the booming *basso profundo* of Virginia State Rep Dan Hawley, expressing his extreme displeasure with the secrecy surrounding the way the proposed bylaw revisions had been brought before the membership. And the lightning flashing from the eyes of Colorado State Rep Lisa Paige was every bit as real as that out over the harbor. Yes, emotions among those in attendance at the 2002 annual convention of the Road Runners Club of America were highly charged as members debated issues affecting the foundation of the organization.

No one could remember a convention quite like this one. Most years, the only convention controversy might be whether to go 4 or 6 miles on the morning fun run. This year, however, it seemed to many that nothing less than the future of the RRCA and how to preserve it was at stake. The issues underlying all of this were the RRCA's poor financial condition (it had posted huge losses the past three years) as well as the role of the new executive director.

On the one hand, the RRCA board of

directors felt that the solution was to turn over the keys to an all-powerful, paid executive director who would also sit on the board and control 5 of the 13 seats. This, it was said, would demonstrate to the outside world that the RRCA was ready to change its way of doing business and make it attractive to potential sponsors. To many, though, it also seemed to give the executive director enough power so that when he wanted the board's opinion, he would give it to them.

All of this was heresy to the opposition who viewed the problem as nothing more than poor management in the national office as opposed to one of organizational structure. And this view seemed to be confirmed as several board members quietly admitted that the existing bylaws already conferred sufficient power on the executive director to do whatever was needed to run the organization. As Alaska State Rep David Epstein observed, the proposals were tantamount to using a hatchet when a nail clipper would do.

Add to all of this the fact that the proposed bylaws would eliminate the clubs' traditional right to elect the officers of the RRCA (those officers would essentially be appointed by and serve at the pleasure of the executive director) and the revolt was in full swing. The two camps were about as far apart as world marathon record holder Khalid Khannouchi and Wanda Jean Krautmueller of Peoria, Illinois, would be at the finish of the Chicago Marathon. Everyone else was somewhere in between trying to find a way to

avoid the impending train wreck.

At one point during the debates, at-large board member John Calotta, one of the principle architects of the proposed bylaws, told members that while he could not guarantee that the new bylaws would improve things, "at some point you have to go on trust."

That argument rang hollow as members recalled that the proposals had been kept secret from them for almost three months as some board members quietly solicited proxies without disclosing the true nature of what was to come up for a vote. Also, attempts by the board to prohibit the use of proxies faxed from the clubs (illegal under Virginia law, it turned out) and to enforce a restrictive proxy deadline didn't help, either.

Saturday afternoon's business meeting lasted much longer than expected as first the debate and then the vote-counting dragged on. *Runner's World* editor Amby Burfoot reported that one member remarked to him that he was worried about where everything was headed. "If the bylaw changes are defeated and someone gets nominated from the floor to run against Freddi, this whole organization is going to be split wide open."

Finally, the results were in. A motion to indefinitely defer action on the proposed bylaws passed 427-405. Most of those in attendance breathed audible sighs of relief. When there were no nominations from the floor to oppose President Freddi Carlip, the remainder of the business meeting was quickly concluded. Not surprisingly, there were long lines for drinks prior to the Awards Banquet.

"It's been memorable and interesting," said Carlip afterwards. As if Virginian Dan Hawley's great-great-grandparents might have viewed the clashes between the armies of Lee and Grant as "memorable and interesting."

Sunday morning saw dozens of runners

hitting the Boardwalk in Virginia for the Tidewater Striders' Beach Run. It didn't seem to matter that the sky was overcast or that the wind was blowing. What mattered was that the events of the business meeting were behind them. Upon entering the lush greenery of First Landing Park with its soft trails, the clouds parted and the sun came out. Yes, it had been a good convention. □

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