

## Eric Blake Named USA Track & Field – New England Athlete of the Month for September



*Photo: Cheryl Senten*

BOSTON – **Eric Blake**, age 29 of New Britain, CT, who runs for the Boston Athletic Association, has been named USA Track & Field – New England’s Athlete of the Month for September 2008. Competing for the U.S. team at the 24<sup>th</sup> World Mountain Running Trophy championship in Switzerland on September 10, Blake was the 3<sup>rd</sup> American and the 23<sup>rd</sup> finisher overall. The U.S. men’s senior team finished third for a bronze medal, the first medal ever for a U.S. men’s team at the world mountain championships.

Blake said his individual goal at the championships was for a top 15 or even top 10 finish. Accordingly, he went out fast and was near the leaders in the early going. However, he found the course unexpectedly difficult and varied. There were places where the course reduced to a single, narrow track and there were sharp downhill sections as well as the steep uphills. Eric felt his advantage was on the uphill sections, so he blasted every hill, pulling away from competitors near him. Unfortunately, his speed-ups started to take a toll and he drifted from 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> place all the way back to around 30<sup>th</sup> at

the halfway mark of the 12K course.

At that point, he was the fifth American. He continued to drop back, but knowing that he was running for the American team and not just individually, he made an effort to re-gather himself. He managed to stop his backward drift and then, surprisingly, mounted a comeback, picking off about ten competitors before finishing. Toward the end, he passed his 41-year old teammate and longtime elite mountain runner, Simon Gutierrez, of Colorado, who urged him on.

Blake said that about ten minutes after the race, unofficial tallies showed that the U.S. men had placed 3<sup>rd</sup> behind Italy and the host nation, Switzerland. Once it became official, Eric said his disappointment at his individual placing “went out the window.” He celebrated with his teammates and felt especially happy for Gutierrez, who had waited so long to win a world championship medal.

Eric is the men’s distance coach for track and cross-country at Central Connecticut State College. On June 21 this year, he won the rugged 7.9 mile Mt. Washington Road Race (in 1:00:39) for the second time against a very strong field. Looking to the future, he plans to run the 2008 B.A.A. Boston Marathon. He says he would like to break the one-hour barrier at Mt. Washington, but acknowledges that everything will have to go right to achieve this goal.