

# BATTLE OF THE BRIDESMAIDS

**WHEATON | Every woman in 5K was a contender — top 3 got the dresses**

BY HANK BECKMAN  
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Most women pick their bridesmaids from among their dearest friends. Not Mary Lee Seffrood.

Seffrood, 37, is a runner. So is her new husband, Daniel A. Milinko, 32.

So before the West Chicago couple walked down the aisle Saturday at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Glen Ellyn, Seffrood staged a "Battle of the Bridesmaids" during a 5-kilometer race in Wheaton. The top three female finishers got to be her bridesmaids.

"We're both runners, and we wanted it to be a part of our wedding day," Seffrood, who works in sales, said as about 75 runners got lined up for the start of the race, held on wedding-day morning at the Danada Equestrian Center.

"It's such an important part of our lives."

Elena Shemyakina, of Geneva, finished first, with a time of 19:48. Rachel Hegele (21:02) and Stephanie Mytych (21:14), both of Batavia, were second and third.

As luck would have it, Seffrood knew them. Some of the runners were strangers to her. But the winners were friends from past races and various running clubs.

With the wedding later in the day, the winners were fitted for their bridesmaid dresses on the spot — lightweight jersey knits whose color Seffrood called "fast red."

The top male finishers in the 5K race weren't invited to the wedding. But they did win a bronze, silver and gold garter, which they took turns sliding off the bride's leg.

Seffrood said she would have



The race begins (top left), and groom Dan Milinko cheers on runners at the finish line (top right). Hours later, Stephanie Mytych (from left), Rachel Hegele and Elena Shemyakina are in the wedding party. | COREY R. MINKANIC—SPECIAL TO THE SUN

been "totally fine" with a stranger as a bridesmaid. But she wasn't taking any chances when it came to her maid of honor, Beth Ryan, a friend

from Madison, Wis., who, not being a runner, didn't run.

"Being the maid of honor, I got a bye," Ryan said. "I was just worried

I'd run out of cigarettes before they got back."

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