

# The Empire Runner

USA's are in the books and the Diamond League circuit is heating up! Most every nation is finishing up their World's selection process, with many still chasing those elusive standards. Of course, this also brings out some awesome competitions, and with that oftentimes some surprise marks. With all that being said, it's time for another edition of *The Month That Was!*

## Paris Diamond League

### 1,500m men

The first weekend of July saw the Paris Diamond League Meeting, and key to many USA fan's was the men's 1,500m. Our top finishers at USA's were **Matt Centrowitz**, **Bernard Lagat**, **Leo Manzano**, and **Andrew Wheating**. With Lagat dropping to focus on the 5,000m, that made the top three – and the possible contingent for World's – Centrowitz, Manzano, Wheating. I say possible, because after USA's Manzano was the only one eligible.

Ya see, to run at World's, an athlete needs either an A or a B standard. Country's can send up to three athletes if they all have the A, or if two do and the other a B. Only one B can go per team.

The problem is that, after USA's, Centrowitz didn't even have the B. Manzano and Wheating did, but not yet the A. Standards are 3:35 and 3:38. With PB's significantly faster than both, Manzano and Wheating shouldn't be worried. And if they get the A, Centrowitz only needs a B. And we get our full team.

But things don't always happen as expected. They'd still have to run some of the best races of their lives, and we know how tough it is to get three men to put it all together on the same day.

Well, long story short, they did. 3:33.66 for Manzano, 3:34.39 for Wheating, and a huge PB of 3:34.69 for the American Champ Centrowitz. O, and Lagat was in the race too, as he ran 3:33.11. We have our A-team.

That's the big news for the American's, sure, but the race was pretty crazy itself. With 19 guys in the race, it went out faaaaast. Like WR pace fast. Guys were in lane two despite the scintillating pace, but it was just too bunched up for it to be otherwise. With a lap to go, Olympic Champ **Asbel Kiprop**, the favorite (for me at least) for the win, got boxed by the huge pack, as did American Record-Holder Lagat. And then **Amine Laalou** took off.

**Laalou**, who broke 3:30 last season and is the owner of a 1:43 800m PB, blew everyone out of the water, taking the W by nearly a second in 3:32.15. The Olympic Champ Kiprop closed as the best of the rest, finishing in 3:33.04, right ahead of the aforementioned Lagat. The top 8 all broke 3:34, with 12 under the World's A Standard of 3:35. Olympic Silver Medalist **Nick Willis** moved from last all the way up to 4<sup>th</sup>, just .11 off Lagat in the final straight.

### 5,000m women

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From the international standpoint, this race was all about Olympic Champ **Meseret Defar**. Her accolades are too long to list; let's just say that if I had to compile a top-10 about her, some World Titles would likely be left off.

Defar's goal was to run 14:20 and take the 2011 world lead below 14:30. Considering that she is the second fastest woman in history at 14:12.88, that seemed doable. But, then again, she hadn't cracked 14:35 in the last two years, so, there were doubts.

There were also doubts about who'd actually get then win. Also in the field was compatriot **Sentayehu Ejigu**, who boasted a 14:28.39 from Paris last season, as well as **Mercy Cherono** of Kenya, who was third at the Prefontaine Classic at 14:37.01 one month before.

As expected, these three quickly split the field, and the typical bunched-up style of 5,000m races never took place, as no one else in the pack could be comfortable. It was clearly a three-woman battle, though the pace lagged at halfway, making a sub-14:20 very unlikely. With a kilometer to go the question now was: could anyone break 14:30? The answer was: yes!

With all three at contention going into the bell lap, Defar unleashed her blistering kick, covering the last lap in right around 60 seconds, to squeak under, running a world-lead of 14:29.52. Ejigu held on to finish at 14:31.66, while Cherono couldn't find that last gear and clocked 14:35.13, which was a new PB.

From an American standpoint, the highlight was **Shalane Flanagan** trying to retake her 5,000m AR. If you remember, last season **Molly Huddle** just edged Flanagan's record, 14:44.76 down from 14:44.80. Flanagan had run a 14:49 earlier this season, so clearly was fit enough to go for it. All she needed was a 0.05 second PB.

But it wasn't to be. From the start, Flanagan clicked off a steady pace, putting her in contention. Originally in 12<sup>th</sup>, she moved on up as everyone ahead of her died from the blistering pace. But having to do all the work and essentially running solo the entire time must have taken that extra 1% needed, as she came home in a very respectable but just not quite enough 14:45.20 for fourth.

## 3,000m Steeplechase men

This is Kenya's event. They have won every global gold ever. Let that sink in. Every Olympic Games. Every World Championships. Each time the men's steeplechase winner was from Kenya. But may things soon change?

**Mahiedine Mekhissi-Benabbad** may be thinking just that.

The Frenchman broke up the sweep in Beijing by snagging the Silver waged a war with Kenya's **Patrick Langat** and **Ezekiel Kemboi**. If Kemboi's name doesn't ring a bell you don't follow the steeple. One World Champs gold medal, one World Champs Silver, one Olympic Games gold, one all Africa Games gold, and a sub-8 to his credit, the list goes on and on. But it will not include Paris Diamond League Champ.

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**Mekhissi-Benabbad** was trailing slightly with a k to go, but on the second-to-last water jump started to close the gap. Suddenly, he's up on their shoulders, and at the bell made the move. Instantly, Langat goes backwards (ended up 6<sup>th</sup>). Well, Kemboi didn't really go backwards, but it may have looked that way. Over the last lap, he lost nearly 5 seconds on the Frenchman, who's last two laps were right around 2flat, as he crossed in 8:02.09.

## 110m hurdles men

People complain that the big-three of sprinting – **Assafa Powell**, **Usain Bolt**, and **Tyson Gay** – often duck the competition. Well it's anything but that for men's short-hurdlers.

Two of the three fastest men in history gladly lined up (against other top-athletes as well) in what was arguably the event of the night. There was the Cuban World-Recordholder in **Dayron Robles**, versus the American Record-Holder in **David Oliver**. Robles PB: 12.87. Oliver's: 12.88. O, and the other of the Big Three: **Liu Xiang** at 12.88.

Well, it was Oliver and Robles, flanked by some of the best hurdles in history – including double-Olympic Silver Medalist **Terrance Trammell** – who went head to head for exactly 110m. The full 110m.

Robles got out hot, instantly with a lead on the much larger Trammell. Around hurdle six it looked like Trammell started to pull even, certainly was there by hurdle eight, just edging in front by hurdle nine, and looked to maybe have a lead at the line, but Robles was the better leaner, getting his shoulder out faster. At the line, it was anyone's to win.

At the end, they both recorded a 13.09, with Robles getting the W. Throw Liu Xiang in there and it looks to be a very, very exciting event come Worlds.

## Long Jump men

With the 2012 Olympic Games coming to London, the Brits are looking for everything they can to earn some coveted T&F medals. One rising star may be **Chris Tomlinson**, who put together a fine showing in the long jump. Starting with an 8.10m jump into a headwind, he improved on his next two attempts to set a British Record of 8.35m (0.9m/s) and to take the lead over **Irving Saladino**. But of course the former Olympic and World Champ had one more response, leaping 8.40m on round five for the W.

## Birmingham Diamond League

### 1,500m women

**UCENY!** Reigning USA 1,500m Champion **Morgan Uceny** has got to be one of America's best bests for a mid-distance/distance medal at the World Champs. First, she runs a perfect race to win her first Outdoor USA Title,



then wins the Lausanne Diamond League Meet in the final 200m, and then here in Birmingham she pulls away from a stacked field to win another Diamond League Meet.

In case you're wondering, "stacked field" refers largely to the following two ladies: **Maryam Yusuf Jamal** of Bahrain and **Kalkidan Gezahegne** of Ethiopia. Gezahegne is the reigning World Indoor Champion, who boats a PB of 4:00.97 (and 8:37.41 indoors). Jamal is the two-time defending Outdoor World Champion, who's PB is a blistering 3:56.18, plus 1:57.80 speed and 8:28.87 endurance. (Uceny had a 4:02.40 to her credit).

The race itself played out much as expected with so many studettes; slow opening, jockeying for position midrace, and a crazy burst with about a lap to go. Like in her last Diamond League outing, Uceny stayed right off the front until the final ~200m where she dropped a 29point for the W (4:05.64) over Gezahegne (4:05.96) and Jamal (4:06.39).

## 5,000m men

Double—European Champ **Mo Farah** of GB. USA Distance Darling **Galen Rupp**. Australia's Big Mizunga **Craig Mottram**. Bekele-slayer **Alistair Cragg** of Ireland. World XC Champ **Imane Merga** of Ethiopia. These and more toed the line of what looked to be a phenomenal 5,000m. And it was. But none of these are the subject of this month's *Spotlight on the Stars!*

That honor goes to Rupp and Farah's coach, **Alberto Salazar**. Love him or hate him, he's a huge player in American distance running, past and present.

Salazar started his athletic career as a prep runner in the 70's, earning Massachusetts's XC State Championship in '75. From there, he went on to Oregon, winning both Team and Individual NCAA XC Titles, as well as earning many All-American honors. Shortly there-after he earned a spot on the Olympic Boycott Team in the 10,000m, and broke the AR in the indoor 5,000m. After moving up to the marathon, he won many majors, including three straight NYCM titles.

Over the course of his career he set AR's at 5,000m, 10,000m, and 10km, plus nearly broke the WR in the Marathon, won USA XC and Track titles, and a silver at the World XC Champs in 1982. Solid, solid career.

But perhaps one of his more storied races was the 1978 Falmouth Road Race, where he lost. Battling it out with American All-Stars **Bill Rodgers** and **Craig Virgin**, Salazar pushed his body truly to the limit. With about 2km to go, he started going backwards. Vision blurred, memory got hazy, and before he knew it, he woke up in a tub of ice.

Turns out, Salazar pushed his body to the point that his temperature reached a shocking 108 degrees, and medical personal on staff didn't think he'd make it. He was read his last rights as doctors did everything they could to get him to normal. They did, then he got too cold, then they fixed him up again. But yea, he's that badass.



Anyways, why am I talking about Salazar now? O yes, because he's the coach of the **Oregon Project**, that group up north with the badass Skull and Wings logo, where he coaches, among others, Galen Rupp and Mo Farah.

As with the 1,500m on the women's side, a hot pace never materialized due to such a studded field. They didn't dilly-dally, but no world lead's were going to be set. All the key players were there through 4km, which was passed in a tick over 10:40, or 13:20 pace. And then, as normal, things took off.

But everyone was still there as they started to drop to 60low laps. Going into the bell lap, there were about 7 men, with Mo Farah and 2005 World Bronze Medalist Craig Mottram sharing the lead. But while Mottram hung on for a solid 13:11.51, Farah showed that he may be the favorite for worlds with a blistering 54-second final lap. On the home straight, he pulled well clear of Merga, who looked to be set for second. But then, Farah's training partner in Galen Rupp stormed by, edging his way to a second place, 13:06.86 PB.

The top 10 finishers all bettered the World's A standard of 13:20, but this will most likely be remembered as the day Farah put himself as a double-threat for World Gold. (First threat: 10,000m as shown at Pre.)

## Monaco Diamond League

### 5,000m men

As was the case in Birmingham, this race featured **Mo Farah** and **Galen Rupp**, though also a slew of other top 5,000m men. Included in that list is American 10,000m Record-Holder – yet member of 2009 and 2011 World's 5,000m squad – Chris Solinsky, as well as American 5,000m Record-Holder **Bernard Lagat**. **Craig Mottram** of Australia was back, as was **Imane Merga**. Add in American **Matt Tegenkamp**, himself a sub-13 runner and 4<sup>th</sup> placer at the 2007 World Champs, and this was sure to be a barn burner.

All in all, there were 13 men under 13 minutes, with another at 13-flat, going into the race.

Unlike in Birmingham, though, Rupp failed to impress, though through no fault of his own. With only 4-5 laps to go, Rupp got shoved to the ground, missing out on any chance to show where his fitness really was. Then, just a lap later, Solinsky was pushed inside the track. And with that, two American medal hopefuls lost their best chance for a fast time – and possibly American Record – before the World Championships.

Still, all was not lost from an American point of view. '07 World Champ Lagat was in a large lead pack of about 6 as the pace quickened in the final laps. At the bell, Lagat was trailing only Farah, though with Kenyan National Champion **Isaiah Koech** and **Imane Merga** among the others within two steps.

But Farah and Rupp had something else in the tank, and the two started to pull away with 300m to go, and at 200m these two were neck and neck. For a moment it looked as though Lagat – the second fastest 1,500m man in the history of the world – would get the best of Farah, but it was not to be. The Brit cemented his place as World's favorite, pulling away to win 12:53.11 to 12:53.60. Both set National Records.



Behind these two came a slew of sub-13's, with the top 7 under that magical mark. To put that in perspective, previously this season only three runners had run that fast.

## 3,000m Steeplechase men

**Paul Koech** is angry. The 7<sup>th</sup> fastest steepler in history, multi-time Olympic and World's finalist, was not selected to the Kenyan team for the 2011 World Champs. Koech says he's terrible at altitude, which is where the Kenyan trials are held. He's never finished better than 4<sup>th</sup>. Yet he has a multitude of medals for Kenya at international competitions. With their system, the first two at the trials go, with the third being picked. This was Koech's chance to show the selectors they made a big, big mistake.

Thus, it was no surprise that from the gun this race was hot. American fans had **Billy Nelson** and **Dan Huling** in the race, but honestly, they weren't even on the video half-way through. (Nelson did run a nice 817.27 PB).

Master pacer **Haron Lagat** took the race out for the first kilometer, dogged by Koech, 2004 Olympic Champ and reigning World Champ **Ezekial Kemboi**, and 2008 Olympic and 2007 World Champ **Brimin Kipruto**. And once the pacer dropped the pace really didn't slow, seemingly a rarity in these events. And that's all thanks to Koech.

Taking the lead, Koech tried to put the hurt on his competitors, but also to make a show for the officials back in Kenya. And what a show it was! These three put themselves in a completely different race than the rest of the field, which included the Silver and Bronze medalists from the World Champs.

At the bell, Koech still led, but that was about to change. Kemboi made the first move, and Koech couldn't quite hang as Kemboi then Kipruto flew by. On the home straight Kipruto began to pull even, then took over going into the turn. And suddenly, it was all Olympic and World Champ Brimin Kipruto.

Somehow opening a second-plus lead out of nowhere, Kipruto flew down the home-straight, on his way to a sub-8 clocking and a huge win.

And the second fastest time in the history of the world.

Completely unexpected to everyone, Brimin Kipruto roared home in 7:53.64, a mere 1/100<sup>th</sup> of a second off the World Record. Kemboi came home in 7:55.76, with Koech still dropping an impressive 7:57.32. That is his 9<sup>th</sup> sub-8 performance, out of only 27 ever. He may have been beaten here, but he's still the man when it comes to steepling.

## Stockholm Diamond League

### 3,000m Steeplechase men

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Wait, I just said that, didn't I? O yes, Koech was back, ready to put on another show. Unfortunately for him, there really was no competition this time around. True, **Benjamin Kiplagat** of Uganda, with his 8:03 pb, sat on Koech for the first 5 or so laps, the result was never in doubt. With two laps to go, Koech started to race, finishing at 8:05.92, a full 8.5 seconds ahead of Kiplagat.

Should Koech go to World's? That's not up to us. But, if he does, watch out!

## **5,000m women**

Olympic, World, and World XC Champ **Vivian Cheruiyot** is going to make Defar work very, very hard come Daegu. Heck, she made the rabbit work so hard that she couldn't do her job! That's right, at 2km Cheruiyot passed the rabbit who was supposed to go the first 3km. Turns out, it was necessary, as that first 2km pace was significantly faster than her overall run.

Really, it was a time-trial then a race for second. Cheruiyot got up to a 100m+ lead, winning in 14:20.87, a new Kenyan National Record, and over 20 seconds ahead of second. O, and it was the 4<sup>th</sup> fastest time in the history of the world.

Fighting for second was **Shalane Flanagan**, as well as Kenyan 10,000m runner-up **Sally Kipyego**, whose agent is none other than our very own **Vince Ewing**.

Shalane was moving her way up the large chase pack for much of the second half of the race, but with less than a km to go Kipyego took off, finishing at 14:43.87. Flanagan came home in a respectable 14:46.80, just behind **Sylvia Kibet**. That's the third time this year she's run under 14:50 but missed the AR of 14:44.76.

Also of note for American fans was Olympic Marathoner **Magdalena Lewy-Boulet**, who dropped her PR under 16 for the first time to 15:14.25. Just behind was **Jenny Barringer-Simpson**, the American Record-Holder in the steeple, as she continues to struggle after leaving her longtime coach **Mark Wetmore**.

Well, I'm exhausted. For more (and better) coverage of the world of athletics, go to Letsrun.com and TrackAndFieldNews.com. Better yet, go to Universal Sports and buy their T&F package. Support the sport you love!

Till next time,

**Run More, Think Less**