

# The Empire Runner

January is an odd time of year for athletics. On one hand, you have your cross country runners, battling the cold, the mud, the hills, and anything else you can think of. On the other, you have your track & field of the indoor variety, with its controlled temperatures and set lanes, runways, and rings. And then you have your road racing, never dormant throughout the calendar. And all three provided some big-time excitement in

## *The Month That Was!*

### Indoors

#### Millrose Games



*Women's 1,500m:* In early 2001, a **Montgomery HS** senior named **Sara Bei** stormed away from current elite 1,500m runner **Erin Donahue** to win the Millrose Games High School Mile.

Now it's 10 years later. She has a new name: Sara Hall. She has a new logo on her singlet: ASICS. But one thing is the same: She won.

That's right, after three 2<sup>nd</sup>-place finishes in the prestigious Millrose Games 1.500m, Sara (Bei) Hall was able to finally get the win. As opposed to last year, where she lost by a painful 0.02 seconds, Hall pulled away in the last quarter to win by over a second in 4:15.35. Second to Hall was former Millrose Champion and World Indoor Silver Medalist **Carmen Douma-Hussar** of Canada.

*Men's Mile:* The **Wannamaker Mile** gave us exactly what was expected: A duel between "President of the Boards" **Bernard Lagat** and World Champion **Deresse Mekonnen**.

Some background on these studs. **Lagat:** 2007 1,500m and 5,000m World Champion, earned bronze and silver in those events in 2009, American Record-Holder in 1,500m, 3,000m, and 5,000m, and 8-time Wannamaker Mile Champion. **Mekonnen.** 2009 silver medalist in 1,500m (one place ahead of Lagat), and reigning World Indoor 1,500m Champion.

From the gun, the pacer was way out in front, so in effect Lagat was in the lead. The pack was bunched, but Mekonnen was right there. Around 1,000m into the race Mekonnen started getting antsy and tried to go by, and the pace started to quicken. Then my feed died because the internet was lame. It seems that Mekonnen



took the lead, with Lagat holding on in perfect striking distance, before twice trying to pass in the final 2 laps (160y each). But it was not to be, as Lagat could never get around on the short turns to get that edge.

*Men's Shot Put:* (I know this is the "Month that was in Running", but whatever. I'm covering Athletics, which includes road racing, cross country, track, and field. Deal.) The men's shot is always one of THE events at Millrose. Somehow, they always manage to get some of America's, and thus the world's, best throwers to compete in MSG in January. This year was no exception. You had reigning World Indoor and Outdoor Champion **Christian Cantwell**, former World Indoor and Outdoor Champion **Reese Hoffa**, and double-Olympic Silver Medalist **Adam Nelson**. Fourth competitor in the field was former NCAA all-star and new pro **Ryan Whiting**.



**Wolfman with Reese Hoffa, former World Indoor and Outdoor Shot-Put Champion**

The players:

**Bryan Clay:** Reigning Olympic and World Indoor (heptathlon) Champion

**Trey Hardee:** Reigning World Champion

**Ashton Eaton:** Reigning NCAA Champion and World Indoor (heptathlon) Record-Holder

**Jake Arnold:** Reigning USA Indoor and Outdoor Champion. (Also a 2002 graduate of Maria Carrillo HS)

**Curtis Beach:** Current NCAA stud and High School Record-Holder

And Whiting stole the show. On his fourth of four throws, Whiting powered a 21.31, to edge favorite Cantwell by .17m. To lose with a 21+m through is painful and very rare, but just goes to show how strong the USA is in the shot. While all four of these men will be medal threats in London, only three can make the team.

*Multi Challenge:* A new event for the Millrose Games was the Multi Challenge, in which the decathletes contested three events, the shot put, the 60m, and the high jump. To say the field was star-studded wouldn't do it justice.

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The event ended up as expected, in a tight three-way battle between Clay, Hardee, and Eaton. Eaton took the win on the final event, the high jump, as he edged Hardee 2,666 to 2,640. As with the shot put, USA Multi-Eventers are the class of the world, and the talent for multiple medals at the next World Championships and Olympic Games is there. If they can stay injury free.

## **New Balance Games**

The New Balance Games at the NYC Armory is largely a HS affair, with some of the top East-Coast talent competing. And while there were obviously some awesome marks (ex: Chad Noelle's 4:11.64 mile romp), you can find that all on Dyestat. So let's focus on the pros:

There were three elite men's races on the day: a 1,500m, a 400m, and a mile. As a distance runner myself, I'd normally be most excited for the mile. But, an indoor 400m is something far different from its outdoor counterpart. Often compared to a roller-derby, in the indoor 400m competitors actually cut it, so you have sprinters running at insane speeds jostling for position. Awesome!

In addition, one athlete's introduction jumped out at me: In one of the outside lanes was **Michael Courtney**, an indoor 400m All-American and many-time Southland Conference champ. But what makes this especially cool is who he was representing: **LOVE Athletics**. For those of you who don't know, that stands for **Law Offices of Vince Ewing**. That's right, our very own Empire Runner club member Vince. Sweet! And it was all the sweeter when Michael took led wire to wire to win by over a tenth of a second.

The men's 1,500m was pretty much a blowout, as **Kyle Miller** crushed the field to run 3:41.99, with only one other runner going sub 3:45. The mile was quite a bit closer, as **Craig Miller** won in 3:59.10, with 2<sup>nd</sup> at 3:59.34, 3<sup>rd</sup> (**Garrett Heath** of the **Bay Area Track Club**) at 3:59.58, and 4<sup>th</sup> at 3:59.70. Six tenths of a second over a mile, one through four. Crazy!

The women's race (400m, 800m, and mile) had more star power in the lineups, and the races did not disappoint. **Natasha Hastings**, a gold medalist for the USA's 4x400m relay at the Olympics and World Champs, led **Mary Wineberg**, another team USA 4x400m relay runner, under the 53 second barrier, 52.29 to 52.61.

The 800m was touted as the **Maggie Vessey** show, as she ran one of the fastest times in the world last year, and has since appeared in tons of NB advertising. But Nike's **Phoebe Wright** controlled the race to win by over a second, nearly cracking 2 minutes. Vessey was fourth at 2:03. The mile saw **Jenny Simpson**, formerly **Barringer**, crack the 4:30 barrier at 4:28.60. While she won by over two seconds, four runners were between 4:30 and 4:32, so it was a very exciting finish behind the 2008 Olympic Steeplechaser.



## Cross Country

### **Bay Area Cross Challenge**

The Bay Area Track Club put on it's first ever BAXC in Golden Gate Park, providing a tune-up race for athletes heading to the USA XC Championships in February. While many club runners race cross country in the fall, it is very hard for American runners to find professional XC races during the international XC season, i.e. winter. This was a nice exception.

The women's field was highlighted by USA 5,000m record-holder **Molly Huddle**, who absolutely

dominated the 6km, three-loop race. She finished over 10 seconds ahead of USA indoor 3,000m champion **Renee Baillie**, who just inched out USA Olympic Marathoner **Magdalena Lewy-Boulet** and former NAIA XC champion **Alissa McKaig**, the three of whom were within two seconds of each other.

The men's 8km, 4loop race came down to the wire, with **Kevin Chelimo** (13:30 5ker) running 23:12. And with **Max King** (3-time team USA World Cross Country team member) running 23:12. And with **Ben Bruce** (2010 World XC and World Half-Marathon team member) running 23:12. Yes, three runners all crossed the line within a second for the win. Bruce was credited with the win, while King was 2<sup>nd</sup> and Chelimo third. Fourth was another 30+ seconds back.

In the girls' junior 4km race, ER club member (racing unattached) and **Casa Grande HS** star **Ashley Moffett** placed third, losing only to college athletes.

### **Great Edinburgh XC Race**

As always, the Edinburgh brought in a fantastic field for its Great XC race. Highlights were reigning Olympic Steeplechase Champion **Brimin Kipruto**, reigning Olympic 1,500m Champion **Asbel Kiprop**, and 2003 World 5,000m Champion **Eliud Kipchoge**. Plus European 5,000m and 10,000m Champion **Mo Farah**, 9-time European Champion **Sergey Lebid**, and USA 10,000m Champion **Galen Rupp**.

The one problem: They were in different races.



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For the first time, they broke this meet up into two races: a 4.248km race, and a 8.22km team race. The team race featured a USA team, a team from Great Britain, and a European team. So Kipruto, Kiprop, and Kipchoge didn't get the chance to race Farah, Lebid, and Rupp. Quite a shame.



Still, the open ~4km race was quite a race, as Kipchoge opened a gap about 2km into the snowy race, with Kiprop trying to hold on. But it wouldn't last, as on the second batch of hills Kiprop fell off the pace, being joined by Kipruto. But the 1,500m specialist showed his talents by outkicking the steepler by one second, though he was still a full 6 behind now-two-time Edinburgh champion Kipchoge.

In the team race, team USA's **Stephen Furst**, who just a week prior won the Emerald Nuts Midnight Run, took an early lead. About 4km into the race, on the first set of tough hills, Rupp took the lead, though the pack stayed in contact for a little while longer. But on the next set of hills about a km later, Farah started to pull away in what would be the deciding move of the race. Rupp went with him, but couldn't hold on, as he ended up 9 seconds back for second, though he was in no danger of placing worse. A surprise of sorts was **Ayad Lamdassam** of Spain, who beat Lebid by a full 5 seconds. In the team battle, where 6 of 9 runners score, team Europe took down team USA by just three points.

The women's race (there was only one), also carried lots of star power, with **Vivian Cheruiyot**, **Linet Masai**, and **Genzebe Dibaba**. Cheruiyot is the reigning 5,000m World Champion, while Masai won the 10,000m. Dibaba "only" has a pair of world junior titles to her name.

But the early leader was none of these, as **Allessandra Aguilar** of Spain, a 2:29 marathoner, took the early pace. But once Masai decided she wanted to go, it was all over. Masai, who had won silver at the last too World Cross Country Championships, won by 8 seconds over the 5.775km course. Cheruiyot, though, didn't give up early on, and did try to chase down Masai, but all that came from this was that a fresher Dibaba was able to take her down in the final stages for second. Early leader Aguilar finished 49 seconds back of Masai.

## Joseph Ebuya

For those of you not in the know, Ebuya is the reigning World Cross Country Champion. He won a close battle last year, with the top four all within 10 seconds. But he won. And this year, he started his XC season in amazing fashion. His races since November:

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- November 22<sup>nd</sup>: 2<sup>nd</sup> to World Silver Medalist **Teklemariam Medhin** on November 7<sup>th</sup> by two seconds
- November 29<sup>th</sup>: 29 second win over 5,000m star **Imme Merga**
- December 6<sup>th</sup>: 19 second win over Medhin
- January 6<sup>th</sup>: Win over World 10km and 15km record-holder **Leonard Komon**, World Junior 10,000m Champion **Dennis Masai**, and Olympic 10,000m Bronze Medalist **Micah Kogo**
- January 10<sup>th</sup>: 40 second win.

But when Ebuya raced in Seville, Spain on January 16<sup>th</sup>, things took a turn. Toeing the line was again Komon (won here last year), who last year set world road records for 10km and 15km. The first 2km of the 10+km race were run comfortably in a pack, before Komon and last year's 2<sup>nd</sup> placer **Matthew Kisorio** took over. Going with them was Medhin and Ebuya, but about 4.5km through the race Kisorio made a surge. Medhin quickly lost contact, with the great Ebuya falling back shortly thereafter. About another km later he was 15 seconds back, and finished up well-beaten, 31 seconds back of Komon in 5<sup>th</sup>.

One week later, Ebuya raced again, this time at the Kenyan Armed Forces Championships, which is arguably the third toughest distance race in the world (first being World Cross Country Champs, second being Kenyan National Championships). This would be a huge test for Ebuya, to see if the last race was just an off day, or to see if he really did race too much or peak too early.

Well, the 12km race seemed to be too much for Ebuya. True, at the start of the race he was in the front pack, with reigning champion **Mark Kiptoo**, 2010 world 10,000m leader **Josephat Menjo**, and others, the pace wasn't anything crazy yet. There was still a strong pack at 8km, when the pace began to take its toll with the runners. Ebuya was one of the first to fall off, with just three runners left at the last km: **Vincent Chepkok** (former world junior silver medalist), **Alex Oloiptip**, and **John Chepkwony**. The unheralded Chepkwony was able to find a final gear, and while Oloiptip was able to hold on long enough to dispatch Chepkok, Chepkwony took the title home by a tiny 2 tenths of a second.

And how did Ebuya fair? Not so good. He faded all the way back to 23<sup>rd</sup>. But still, he is looking at retaining his world title, and whatever may happen, it will be a phenomenal race.





## Road Racing

### **USA Half-Marathon National Championships**

We started the article with a Hall, and we'll end with a Hall, this time USA Half-Marathon Record-Holder and 2008 Olympic Marathoner **Ryan Hall**. Discussions Hall's recent decision to split with his coach and club to go solo and be coached by God (that's who he put down on his USADA form) have been spreading like wild-fire on the message boards. Would he be in the shape of his life, and shatter the American Record like he did here 4 years ago? Would he be a shell of himself, fading home and proving that you can't do it alone?

Nope, neither.

In the end, Hall ran a solid race. Nothing great, nothing awful, but solid.

From the start, the race was broken into a small pack, with Hall, reigning USA 15km champion **Mo Trafteh**, **Patrick Smyth**, **Brent Vaugh**, **Jason Lehmku**, **Fasil Bizunah**, and others. All seemed to settle comfortably for the first half of the race, until the 9<sup>th</sup> mile or so when, at a water station, Smyth tried to break away from the pack and the real racing got started.

Shortly thereafter, it was down to just Hall, Smyth, and Trafteh. Only in the 2<sup>nd</sup> to last mile did Hall start to surge on the pace, and he was quickly rewarded with Smyth falling off the pace. Trafteh as well started to fade, but only slightly, as he was able to hold on just a couple of meters back. In the final couple hundred meters, though, Trafteh found another gear and started to surge on Hall, catching him with just over 100m to go, and pulling away for a 62:17-62:20 win.

Despite the loss, Hall seems pleased with his performance, as he's shooting for the Boston Marathon in April. Both Trafteh and Smyth, who finished 3<sup>rd</sup> in 62:32, are heading to London to try to make some noise on the big stage. So I promise you in April you'll have some more exciting stuff to read in "***The Month That Was!***"

**...Wolfman**

### **Photo credits:**

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[http://www.universalsports.com/mm/Photo/Sports/General/46/52/99/465299\\_M23.jpg](http://www.universalsports.com/mm/Photo/Sports/General/46/52/99/465299_M23.jpg) Ebuya World Champion

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