

The Month That Was – February 2011

ROAD RACING

Mary Keitany

Earlier this month, Mary Keitany set a world record in the half-marathon, clocking 1:05:50 in the United Arab Emirates. Let that sink in for a minute.

1:05.50. For 21.1km.

Now, many of you may be wondering, “who’s Mary Keitany?” Unfortunately you likely aren’t alone, as many top African runners, especially women, are often not given the press they deserve here. So let me introduce you to the greatest women’s road racer of the last few years, in our *Spotlight on the Stars!*

Mary Keitany, unlike many other top women’s road racers, didn’t exactly have a storied career on the track before moving up. In fact, her lifetime 5,000m PR is “just” 16:29.4, which wouldn’t even make her the top high-school runner from the Redwood Empire. In 2007, she improved to a 32:18.07 10,000m, which, while better, didn’t exactly turn a ton of heads.

But when she hit the roads, she did big things.

In 2007, Keitany had the race of her then-career, placing 2nd at the World Road-Running Championships. There, she ran a 31:10 10km, significantly faster than her track best. O, but that was merely en route. Because she kept going, and ran a 15km pr of 47:01. Another 5km later, she crossed the 20km mark at 1:03:18. And finally, she crossed the finish line at the half-marathon distance (21.1km) in 1:06:48.

That’s right, the woman who’s best track 5,000m was nearly 16 and a half minutes ran a 1:06 half-marathon just a year later. The roads were good to her.

In 2009, she bettered her silver medal by winning the now-renamed World Half-Marathon Championships, clocking a PR 1:06.36. As she now had the 2nd and 5th best ever legal marks in the half-marathon, she tried her luck at the full, contesting the NYC Marathon last November. People were talking sub-2:20, one of the top times ever, future world-record holder. None of that came to fruition; instead she ran a disappointing 2:29:01, a time that is outside the top 1,000 ever.

But when she headed back down to the half-marathon earlier this month, there was no disappointment. She proved again that she’s one of the best road-racers ever, clocking a new world-record of 1:05:50 for the half-marathon, bringing the record down from 66:25.

To give you an idea of how much she’s improved, she ran her first 5km in 15:18. That’s right, 15:18. And back in 2006 her track PR was 16:29. While she slowed from the initial pace, she sill crossed 20km at 62:36, or roughly 5minute pace, and then was able to hammer home the last 1.09km at a scintillating 4:44 pace.

To recap: 1:05:50 half-marathon. 13.1 miles at 5:02 per mile. Yup.



Cross-Country

USATF Nationals

Matt Tegenkamp (sub-13 5,000m). **Max King** (multi-time Team USA for World XC). **Scotty Bauhs** (multi-time Team USA for World XC, sub-28 10,000m). **Robert Cheseret** (**Bernard Lagat's** brother). Some solid runners contending for that top spot

But the winner? **Brent Vaughn**.

What was Vaughn doing a week prior? O yea, DNF'ing at the USA Half-Marathon Champs. After dropping out at 8miles, he walked to his hotel and considered, likely mostly in anger, quitting the sport. But his coach wouldn't let him look down, and had him bounce back for the XC Champs. And it worked.

While not expected by most to win, Vaughn does have a 13:18 5,000m to his credit, in a race that saw him almost nip American Record-holder Bernard Lagat. But his credentials almost end there, as he's only a 1:54 800m guy and 3:43 1,500m runner. But Vaughn had stuck with it, plugging away with his old college coach **Jay Johnson**, and the work obviously paid off, as Vaughn will now lead Team USA at the World Championships in Spain next month.

Also representing the USA at Worlds will be club member **Julie Nacouzi**, who placed 5th in the junior (under-20) race.

•North American, Central American, and Caribbean (NACAC) Champs

The other event our harriers qualified for at USA XC's was the NACAC Champs in Trinidad. While some (such as Vaughn) chose to skip this meet, the USA still sent a solid quad. Cheseret led the US contingent, easily dispatching runners from more than 10 other NACAC countries, earning the individual gold. USA also easily won the individual title, with all 5 runners in the top 7.

Well, the women did one better, with all 5 runners in the top 6, though that number 1 spot went to Canadian **Kathryn Harrison**, who crossed the line just 2.4 seconds ahead of **Megan Duwell**. Helping the USA to the team gold and also earning herself and individual Bronze Medal was Santa Rosan **Kim Conley**, who was just 5.1 seconds off the overall win. Nice!

Indoor Track

Ashton Eaton

The world record-holder at the indoor heptathlon did it again this month, scoring 6,568 points in Tallin, Estonia, a good 69 points ahead of his mark at last year's NCAA champs. I can't really do him justice here, and I did focus a bit on him in my last Week That Was, so again I'll just say: don't be shocked if he comes home with a medal at the 2012 Olympics.

Boston Indoor Games

This was looking like one of the best indoor miles in a long time, and it did not disappoint. You had Olympic Silver Medalist **Nick Willis**, American Record-Holder in the mile **Alan Webb**, 3:33 guy **Leo Manzano**, and even HS Phenom **Lukas Verzbicas**.



Like I said, it didn't disappoint. But none of these men won.

Nope, that honor went to **Russell Brown**, a former All-American from Stanford. While he did have some solid credentials (3:36.89 1,500m, 6th at USA Nationals), no one expected it. Brown put it best himself: "I had no idea this was going to happen. Even when I heard the announcer saying, 'Russell Brown, he's going to win it,' I still didn't believe him."

For more, check out Letsrun.com: <http://www.letsrun.com/2011/brown-1205.php>

2-Mile Challenge

Brown was back in action the next week at a special 2-mile challenge in New York. Well, sort of. He was helping pace Bernard Lagat to break **Doug Padilla's** 21 year old indoor 2-mile record of 8:15:02. Also in the race was Verzbicas, going after the HS record of 8:40.0, set by **Gerry Lindgren** in 1964!

While Verzbicas went out way too fast at 4:15 or so and just missed the record (8:43), Lagat patiently opened in 4:08 or so before dropping the hammer to finish at 8:10.07, lapping Verzbicas just before the line.

Husky Invite

At The Dempsey at U. Washington, there were fast times all across the board. No shocker. The 307m indoor track is consistently one of the fastest in the country, and top runners flock from all over to hit PR's and qualify for various championships. Possibly the most talked about event there was the mile, where American 10,000m record-holder **Chris Solinsky** clocked 3:54.52, to break his own facility record in the mile. Arguably more impressive, though, was collegian **Miles Batty** of BYU, who stuck with Solinsky until the final straight to clock 3:55. His PR before this meet? 4:00. Wow.

The men's 3,000m was incredibly deep, as you had Webb, NCAA XC Champ and 10,000m record-holder **Sam Chelanga**, and former NCAA 1,500m Champion **German Fernandez**, though it was won by Solinsky's training partner **Tim Nelson**, who just edged out the field in 7:49, with 5 others within 2 seconds!

USATF Indoor National Championships

The Indoor Nats was again held in Albuquerque, New Mexico, so while the altitude didn't exactly help the distance times, there were some awesome races.

On the women's side of the distance events, **Jenny (Barringer) Simpson** scored the 3,000m-mile double. On day one, she outkicked **Sara (Bei) Hall** 9:02-9:03, with third place WAY back at 9:35. Yea... She had an even bigger margin of victory on day two with a 4:34-4:36 win in the mile. Hall was 4th there at 4:38, capping a solid double herself.

Possibly the biggest news of the meet was **Jenn Suhr's** American indoor Record in the pole vault. Suhr cleared 4.86m, a full 3 cm higher than the previous record, which she set two years ago at the same meet. This mark also makes her the second highest jumper EVER indoors, though the world mark of **Yelena Isinbayeva** is an astounding 5.00m.

There was also an American Indoor Record in the women's shot put, but I don't know anything about this event on the women's side. New record: **Jillian Camarena-Williams** threw 19.87m. Old record was from 1987.

But for me, by far the most exciting event was the men's 3,000m. Newly-crowned USA XC National Champion **Brent Vaughn**, versus former-and-now-again-current indoor 5,000m national record-holder **Galen Rupp**, versus reigning World Indoor 3,000m Champ **Bernard Lagat**. (Not to mention their countless other accolades.) And the race sure stood up to the hype.

The Empire Runner

After few circuits on the 200m track, Vaughn found himself in front, controlling the pace. Hot on his heels were Lagat and Rupp as expected, but also former NCAA DII stud **Aaron Braun**. While Vaughn let the pace lag slightly after the mile, Lagat seemed to decide enough was enough, and shot to the front, immediately injecting some speed into the race with about 1k to go. Rupp, Vaughn, and Braun all went with him, making this into a 4-man race. Two circuits later, and Rupp, donning his new black **Oregon Project** singlet, surged ahead of the reigning world champ, trying to burn Lagat with 600m to go. Lagat and Braun stayed on this tail, while Vaughn began to fade (he'd finish a comfortable 4th). After splitting back-to-back 28-points, Rupp lost his lead as Lagat shot to the front, absolutely demolishing the field. In the final circuit he put nearly 3 seconds on Rupp, with Rupp putting another 2.5 on Braun. The results – with over 5 seconds between 1st and 3rd – do no justice to how close the race was with a lap to go. There is a reason Lagat is the world champion, a very, very good reason.

Man I'm pumped for track!

Alex Wolf-Root