



The Month That Was – Alex Wolf-Root

HS track is in full swing, college track is heating up, and the pro's are starting to hit the oval. But there's no question that the biggest news of the month happened on the roads, just one day and one ocean apart. I'm talking of course about the London and Boston Marathons.

London Women

Remember all the way back to the March newsletter and my Month That Was? We talked about an awesome half marathoner by the name of **Mary Keitany**. Here's a reminder if ya need it:

<http://www.empirerunners.com/newsletters/mar2011/articles/Article10.pdf>

Well, she's back!

The half marathon world-record holder only had one foray into the marathon distance, a 2:29 debut that she wasn't too happy with. But everyone knew it wouldn't be long before she got the distance down and popped a big one. Well, London was her chance.

The field, called "undoubtedly our strongest ever," by the race director, was teaming with talent. Short rundown:

Liliya Shobukhova (Russia): Defending London Champion

Constantina Dita (Romania): Reigning Olympic Champion

Bai Xue (China): Reigning World Champion

Edna Kiplagat (Kenya): Reigning NYC Champion

Aberu Kebede (Ethiopia): Reigning Berlin Champion

Irina Mikitenko (Russia): 2008-2009 London Champion

Zhou Chunxiu (China): 2007 London Champion

And those are only the runners with major marathon titles to their names. You still have the Netherlands **Lornah Kiplagat** who captured the 2006-2008 World Half Marathon Championships and 2007 World XC Championships and of course the aforementioned Mary Keitany. And there are some other 2:20-low women who don't even make the preview.

Yea, it's stacked. So we're going to see a bunch of women fighting over the last 10km, probably with a sprint finish with a few there, right? Wrong.

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Well, there was a pack through halfway, which they crossed at 70:37. Then the pacers dropped and, the pace started getting faster? Hm. They dropped a 5:13 mile, but many were still there. And then Mary Keitany dropped the hammer.

With a 5-minute mile. When there was still 10 miles to go.

After that Keitany was alone. While she certainly couldn't keep that 5 flat pace, it separated her enough to put pressure on all the other women. And she followed it up by running the next 3 miles under 15:30. This gave her over a minute lead with 4 miles to go. And while Shobukhova closed the gap slightly, no one was even in sight when Keitany crossed the line... in 2:19:19.

That time of 2:19:19 is the first sub-2:20 since 2008, and made Keitany the 4th fastest marathoner ever, in only her second marathon ever.

Hell, her second half split alone (68:41) is a world-class performance.

There's not much else to say; Mary Keitany is just an amazing road racer. It's painfully impressive.

But behind Keitany, there was still fireworks. A whopping 20 runners broke the 2:30 barrier (with 21st and 22nd running 2:30 flat). Both Shobukhova in second and Kiplagat in third broke 2:21, with six others between 2:23 and 2:25. Britain's next marathon hopeful, **Jo Pavey**, ran a 2:28:24 in her debut, something that really should be newsworthy, but was just overshadowed by the front of the field.

Amazing race. Where else can you run 2:30 and be outside the top 20? Wow.

London Men

Like the women's field, the men's race had some of the best runners to ever line up in a marathon. Let's break it down a little bit.

Seven runners had PB's under 2:06. Wait, seven? America's Ryan Hall, the great American hope, was a 2:06+ guy coming into this. That's right, seven runners in the field had better PB's than America's greatest marathoner. Yea, it was going to be a good one.

Ya know, the London website said it best:

"London will host a race featuring eight of the top 10 men from last year's contest, including all three medallists; three of the top five from the Beijing Olympics; all three medallists from the Berlin World Championships; the three 2010 European Championships medallists; the fastest man in the world in 2010; the third and fourth fastest men of all time."

Let's get to the race.



From the gun, the pack, aided by a slew of pace-makers, went out on near-world-record pace. The 10k was crossed in 29:24, with amazingly still 12 runners there. Included in that pack was reigning USA half-marathon champ **Mo Trafteh** in his marathon debut. But, Trafteh soon realized that the full and the half are quite different, as he dropped back, then stepped off, shortly thereafter.

The pace slowed slightly in the next stretch, though since the first 10k is a net downhill it was to be expected. The lead group of 9 hit 20k at 59:29. They then picked it up as the pace-makers dropped out, hitting 30k at 1:29:21. That's when the real racing started.

I mentioned before about how deep this men's field was. Well, let's look at just those runners who were still in the front with just 12.2km to go:

Tsegaye Kebede: Defending Champion

Abel Kirui: Reigning World Champion

Patrick Makau: 2010 #1 ranked marathoner

Jaouad Gharib: 2003 and 2005 World Champion, Reigning Olympic Silver Medalist

Martin Lel: 3-time Champion here, also 2-time NYC Champ

Emmanuel Mutai: 2010 London Runner-Up, 2009 World Silver Medalist

Marilson Gomes dos Santos: 2-time NYC Champ

James Kwambai: 2:04:27 man

Abderrahime Bouramdane: 4th here in 2010, 2:07:33 man

Someone had to make a move, or else this would be a huge sprint finish. And that someone was reigning champion Tsegaye Kebede.

His resulted not only in trimming the pack, but to a DNF by Kwambai. Things were heating up. But that wasn't enough. Mutai then took it to another level.

Dropping a 4:30 for mile 21, the race was effectively over. Kebede trimmed the field, Mutai obliterated it. To squash all doubts, his 22nd mile was a 4:31, making this a race against the clock. He continued on this insane pace, crossing the 40km mark in 1:58:05. Doing a little math, we see that's a 28:44 10k, which is the pace for a 2:01:14 marathon. It's no wonder he was alone.

While he did start to feel the effects of this incredible push, his final 2.2km didn't slow too badly, as he still found the tape in 2:04:40 (and a 61:58 second half).

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Behind him Makau and Lel were fighting for second, as they were the only ones to really try to stick with Mutai as he tried to pull away. Coming down the home straight, they were seemingly jogging, waiting each other out for a final push. Lel was sitting on Makau, both unwilling to go, until with about 30 meters to go Lel geared up and flew by, though both received the same finish time of 2:05:45.

Yes, 2:05:45 is amazing, but that also means that they lost over a full minute in the last 6 miles. Incredible! The finishers trickled in after that, with Dos Santos PR'ing at 2:06:34 for fourth, and Defending Champion Kebede well beaten at 2:07:48. Three others broke the 2:10 barrier, with the top US finisher being **Jason Lehmkuhle** at 2:13:40.

Boston Men

The other big race of the weekend was Boston. While you may or may not have heard recaps of London before today (I hope so!), I'd be shocked if you didn't hear a ton about Boston, so I won't recap this like normal.



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We all know that **Geoffrey Mutai** and **Moses Mosop** ran the fastest marathons in history, 2:03:02 and 2:03:06, and that **Ryan Hall** ran the fastest marathon by an American ever at 2:04:58. And we all know that these won't count as records.

Now, the times are incredible, the performances jaw-dropping, but there should be no hard feelings that these don't count as records, and no shenanigans like Boston is now doing trying to get them certified.

For a road record to count, it can only lose 1 meter for every kilometer run, and the finish and start can only be something like 10% apart from each other. Boston fits neither of these, and everyone knew that going in. The reason for the first makes obvious sense (net downhill=faster), and the second should be clear. If it's point to point, as is the case for Boston, then there can be situations like this one where there is extreme wind helping out.

In fact, while the mainstream media which only cares about running once a year at Boston (and once every 4 at the Olympics) seemed shocked and appalled by this "fiasco," the whole situation was predicted by many in the sport beforehand: <http://www.letsrun.com/2011/bostonweather-0416.php>

What do we take from all this? These were awesome performances, but the World Record still belongs to **Haile Gebrselassie** and the American Record to **Khalid Kannouchi**.

So, other highlights from the race: 2nd placer Moses Mosop. This was his marathon debut. I repeat: he had never run a marathon before Boston. And now he's run the second fastest marathon in the history of the world. ...



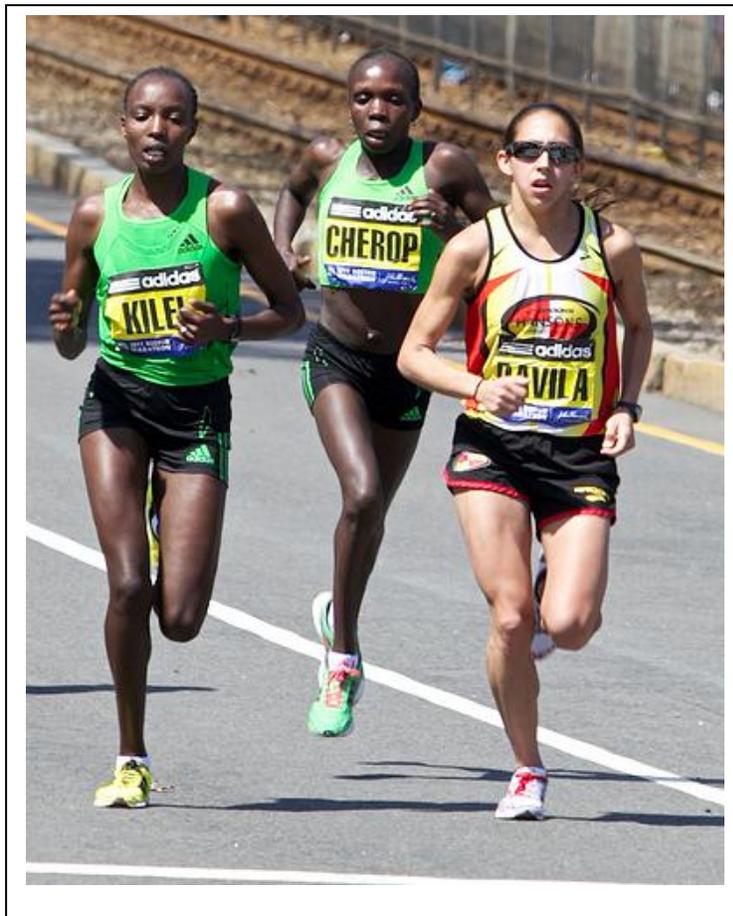
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Ryan Hall knows how to keep his head, run his race. There were times in the race when Hall was leading. Other times he fell off the pack. In fact, it seemed like he was yo-yoing quite a bit in the early and mid stages. But in fact he was the one running event. While there were surges mid-race put in, Hall let them go, knowing he'd reel them back in. When the pace slowed, Hall went to the front, keeping his rhythm, knowing this was what was needed for a fast time. Indeed, Mutai thanked Hall for the fast time, comparing him to a pacemaker. Are these the tactics needed for Hall to finally win a big one? I don't know, but it certainly resulted in a fine performance.

Boston Women

There were two big stories circling going into the women's race.

From the "mainstream" running media: Could **Kara Goucher**, within a year of having a baby, take the win (or at least compete up front)?



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From the “letsrun.com crowd”: Would Goucher even be the top American, or would **Desiree Davila** take that honor?

The big story was Goucher. Just a few months after having a baby, she went out and ran a 73 minute half marathon, nowhere near her best. But just a few months later, she got back to Goucher-shape, dropping a sub-70. Her rise back to world-class was incredible, and everyone knew she was eyeing Boston. If she could bounce back that quickly to run such a fast half, could she be ready to contend on the Boston hills? Maybe.

The smaller story on the national scale was that of Davila. Who’s Davila you may ask (if you were to read this before Boston...). Well, fortunately for you, she’s the subject of this month’s *Spotlight on the Stars!*

Davila graduated from Arizona State University with solid credentials, but nothing Goucher-esque. She had some All-American awards in cross country and track, but nothing crazy. Many athletes would pack it in after that, say they had a good college career, and go do a “real” job. Davila was not one of those athletes.

Hooking up with the **Hanson-Brooks Distance Project**, Davila trained with some of our country’s B-tier athletes. The Hanson-Brooks has done a great job of turning good-not-great runners into great runners (exhibit A: **Brian Sell**), and Davila was becoming the next project.

Shortly after graduating she represented the USA at the World Road Racing Champs over 20km. No stellar performance, no head turns, after all she was 43rd, but it was an international appearance, and made her hungry for more.

She kept improving, and her first big-time race was at the 2009 World Championships, where she placed 11th in the marathon, one place (and 5 seconds) behind Goucher. This put her on the map, big time.

But her credentials go down to the shorter distances as well. At least year’s USATF Indoor Nationals, she placed a solid 4th, but due to two runners dropping she earned the chance to go to Doha for the World Indoor Champs, making the final at 3,000m. Certainly couldn’t contend for a medal, but making the finals over



3,000m for a marathoner is sick range. (Aside: The great **Haile Gebrselassie**, the current WR holder at the marathon, also won a World Indoor 1,500m title. Sick)

Davila now had some solid credentials: 8:51.08 3,000m indoors, sub 15-30 5k, 32low 10k, 1:10 half, and 2:26:20 marathon at Chicago. (That puts her #4 all-time, just behind Goucher.) She was ready for Boston.

Early on in the race, it wasn't Goucher or Davila, but another former NCAA star in New Zealand's **Kim Smith**, who pushed the early pace. Pretty early on Smith separated herself from the pack, seemingly want to run away with the race from the get-go. Everyone let her go, later saying the pace was just too fast. Smith found that out too, as she ended up getting caught and going way backwards.

The whole last second half it seemed like Davila was getting dropped, then coming back, then in the front, then getting dropped. Hm, sounds like Hall in the men's race. But when the pack started falling apart, it was Davila who stuck up front with Kenya's **Caroline Kilel**.

With about a kilometer to go it looked like Davila could win this. She pulled ahead with about 800m to go, only to be caught by Kilel. Fading backwards, it looked like Davila would do no better than 2nd, but she found another gear with maybe 400m to go, flying by Kilel to open what appeared to be a huge (~10 meter?) lead. And then she faded as Kilel flew by. That was the last move, as Davila was finished, losing by two seconds in the final ~400m. But she put up a fight.

Kilel broke the tape at 2:22:36, then fell to the ground. Most reports say she "collapsed," and maybe so, but it looked like she was just overjoyed and relieved (and okay, exhausted too). Davila got a 2:22:38 PB.



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Keep your eyes out for Davila, and don't be shocked if you see her wearing the Red White and Blue come London. Though of course, there's still Goucher. While she wasn't in the fight for the win, Goucher still took home her own PB at 2:24:52 for 5th. No question that US Women's Marathoning is in a very good place right now with these two leading the way. Expect more great things to come.

Thanks for reading, and look forward for some fun track action in the next edition of *The Month That Was!*