

WORLD LEADING MILE FOR CONLEY AT NEW BALANCE GAMES

By David Monti, @d9monti

(c) 2016 Race Results Weekly, all rights reserved

Reprinted at pausatf.org with permission from David Monti, RaceResultsWeekly.com



PHOTO: Kim Conley poses with the girls track team of West Seneca West schools (West Seneca, N.Y.) after winning the 2016 New Balance Games invitational mile (*photo by David Monti for Race Results Weekly*)

NEW YORK (21-Jan) -- The big snow storm which dropped over two feet (57cm) on this city yesterday may have forced the organizers of the New Balance Games to push the professional section of the meet back a day, but that move did nothing to knock Olympian Kim Conley off her game. Appearing in her second indoor meeting of the year --and her first in a middle distance event-- Conley overcame a shaky start to win the women's invitational mile in 4:27.88, an early world-leader.

"I would say the first half was pretty stressful because I had a terrible start," Conley told Race Results Weekly, looking both happy and relieved. "Once I felt like I was back in the mix, I relaxed a little bit."

Pacemaker Stephanie Herrick took the field of 12 women through the first quarter in 66 seconds, and the half-way in 2:15 before stepping off into the infield. Conley was running in fourth place at that point, following world championships steeplechase finalist Stephanie Garcia, Conley's own NorCal Distance training partner Kate Grace, and 2014 SEC 1500m champion Cory McGee.

Garcia and Grace had a few steps on Conley at the bell, then Grace surged around Garcia on the backstretch in her bid for victory. The Oiselle-sponsored athlete had her shoulders back, head up, and looked strong. She was clearly running to win.

"I actually felt really calm even when it was starting to hurt," said Grace who recently finished an altitude training stint in Flagstaff.

Behind her, Conley had worked through a brief confidence crisis and was gathering herself for one more push.

"With 300 to go I started to have a lot of doubts again," Conley admitted.

Lowering her head and pumping her arms into the final turn, Conley swept wide, ran around both Garcia and Grace, then angled down the homestretch for the finish, only taking the lead with about 30 meters to go. Breaking the tape with both outstretched arms and a big smile, she beat Grace (4:28.30) and Garcia (4:28.97) comfortably. McGee held on for fourth (4:30.93) and Rachel Schneider took fifth (4:33.85).

Conley, the 2014 USA 10,000m champion who represents New Balance, won the mile here last year in a much faster 4:24.54. But today, she said she was happy to have competed well and successfully defended her title. She now has two victories in this very young indoor season.

"That finish was really fun," she said. "I love exciting races. It's fun to run fast, but I think it's more fun beating a great field, compete hard, and be able to come out with a win."

Today's race was a victory of sorts for Grace, too. She barely competed in 2015 due to a foot injury she suffered last February, then switched coaches to Drew Wartenburg of NorCal Distance, who happens to also be Conley's husband. Her time to today was an indoor personal best.

"I'm happy to be back," said Grace, whose 1500m en route time of 4:09.76 was a world-leader. "It felt like a rust-buster." She continued: "It's been a long time coming; I'm happy to be out there again."

In the men's invitational mile, Canadian Olympian Taylor Milne made a strong move at the bell off of a slow pace to win going away in 4:01.18.

"I haven't raced in a while, so the first three laps I thought I might be in trouble," Milne told Race Results Weekly. "I kind of sat around, and almost got shot all the way to the back." He added: "I got lucky and it opened up."

Jamaica's Kemoy Campbell took second (4:02.59) and Steve Mangan of Northeast Distance took third (4:02.92).

ENDS

Sponsored by RUNNER'S WORLD / BURNS COMPUTER SERVICES / SALMINI FILMS