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CHELIMO SETS 5000M RECORD AT USA CHAMPIONSHIPS

By David Monti, @d9monti

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SACRAMENTO, Calif. (23-Jun) -- Olympic silver medalist Paul Chelimo said he came to these USATF Outdoor Track & Field Championships to test himself. His grade? A+.

Chelimo, 26, destroyed the field in the 5000m here tonight at Hornet Stadium, bolting away from the field at the gun, laying down steady 63 and 64 second laps, then cruising home alone in 13:08.62, handily breaking Tim Broe's 2005 championships record of 13:12.76, and winning his first national outdoor track title.

"It's like I'm going to war today," said Chelimo who runs for the U.S. Army's World Class Athlete program. "I was prepared. I was ready with my tactics, and I'm happy about it. I wanted to make it an honest race."

Chelimo announced his intentions early by running 61-flat for the first full lap from the finish line, then settling in to his rhythm. His rivals wanted to at least keep him within striking distance, and that chore fell to Saucony's Ben True who led the chase pack for nearly the entire race. He was running 64's and 65's with Eric Jenkins, Ryan Hill and Lopez Lomong on his heels. Chelimo's lead remained steady at six to seven seconds, lap after lap.

"I wanted to test my fitness," said Chelimo. "As I told you at Pre I wasn't happy with my performance." He added: "I wanted a race to test myself again and see where I was, see how well my fitness is."

While Chelimo was getting ready to enter the homestretch for the final time, Jenkins was on the backstretch, calling on the leg speed that won him this year's Wanamaker Mile at the NYRR Millrose Games. The Nike Oregon Project athlete sped away from True, Hill and Lomong and ran to a clear second place finish in 13:15.74 on the strength of a 54.1-second final circuit.

"I felt fantastic," Jenkins said of his final lap. "I'm just counting down the laps trying to stay relaxed and not get antsy. When I started to open the legs up, I felt great."

Third place went to the 2016 IAAF World Indoor Championships 3000m silver medalist Ryan Hill in 13:16.99. True was a close fourth in 13:17.94, and for the second year in a row did not qualify for the national team for either the Olympics or World Championships.

"I just didn't have the last 200 that I needed," said True.

In the women's 5000m, 2016 Olympian Shelby Houlihan showed the speed which inspired her Twitter handle, @Shelbo800, calling on a huge kick in the last 120 meters to defeat both USA 5000m record holder Shannon Rowbury and defending champion Molly Huddle.

Houlihan, who runs for the Nike Bowerman Track Club, closed the race off an honest, early pace set by Natosha Rogers in 61.7-seconds to take the win in 15:13.87. Rowbury outkicked Huddle to take second, 15:14.08 to 15:15.29, while NCAA 5000m champion Karissa Schweizer of Missouri took fourth (15:18.69). Rogers, who also ran the 10,000m, faded to 11th.

"I was thinking that I had to make a huge move to drop them because I know how tough they are," a smiling Houlihan said as she told reporters about the final meters of the race. "So, I was just trying to give it everything I had the last hundred and hopefully hold them off."

Huddle, who won last night's 10,000m, confirmed to Race Results Weekly via text message that she plans to take both the 5000m and 10,000m world championships team spots she earned at this meet.

"We plan to run both in London," she wrote. Rowbury will be running tomorrow's 1500m final, and may also take two team spots.

In the 800m semi-finals Erik Sowinski of Nike (1:45.48) and Abraham Alvarado of Brigham Young University (1:46.62) were the two heat winners. Sowinski was a clear winner from the front, while Alvarado just edged Brooks Beast's Drew Windle in a blanket finish.

"The plan was to sit in second through 400 if someone made it honest," Sowinski explained. "No one wanted to take it. I felt good, so the strength was there." He added: "It was an easy 1:45.5."

Clayton Murphy, who is doubling here in the 800m and 1500m,

finished behind Sowinski in 1:45.70 and also advanced, as did 2016 NCAA champion Donovan Brazier, who now runs for Nike.

In the women's two-lap event, adidas training partners Ajee' Wilson and Charlene Lipsev finished 1-2 in the first semi, running fast times of 1:58.94 and 1:59.56, respectively. Brenda Martinez of Team New Balance and Raevyn Rogers of the University of Oregon took first and second, respectively, in the closely-contested second semi in which both women were given the same time: 2:00.93.

Martinez, who fell in the 800m final of last summer's Olympic Trials, didn't want to leave anything to chance this year.

"Just the pressure of going through the semi-finals is probably the hardest one," Martinez told the media. "I think going into the finals you feel a little more relaxed." She continued: "It's never easy going through the 800's."

Five-time national steeplechase champion Evan Jager easily won the first of two qualifying heats, finishing unchallenged in 8:38.19. For the Olympic silver medalist, it was only his first steeple of the year, and he was satisfied with how smooth he felt over the barriers.

"It's good to get the pre-race --the steeple nerves-- out of the way since this is, like, my event," Jager told reporters. "It's my specialty; I get a little bit more nervous for this than 1500's." He added: "I know what's on the line."

The other favorites for the podium who advanced include Hillary Bor, who posted the fastest time of the day (8:32.68); Stanley Kebenei, who finished just behind Bor (8:32.80); Andy Bayer (8:32.94); Mason Ferlic (8:38.68); and Donn Cabral (8:38.91). Jager's training partner, Dan Huling, did not finish and was seen later limping in the fan area adjacent to the track. The final is on Sunday.

Action continues here tomorrow for the third and penultimate day of these championships. Both the men's and women's 1500m finals will be contested tomorrow, along with the women's steeplechase final.

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