



PHOTO: Sara Hall of Redding, Calif., wins the 2017 USA Marathon Championships women's title at the California International Marathon in Sacramento, Calif., in 2:28:10 (photo by David Monti for Race Results Weekly)



PHOTO: Tim Ritchie of New Haven, Conn., wins the 2017 USA Marathon Championships men's title at the California International Marathon in Sacramento, Calif., in 2:11:55 (photo by David Monti for Race Results Weekly)

HALL, RITCHIE TAKE USA MARATHON TITLES AT CAL INT'L MARATHON

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SACRAMENTO (03-Dec) -- In sunny, windless and cool conditions, Sara Hall of Redding, Calif., and Timothy Ritchie of New Haven, Conn., clinched the 2017 USATF Marathon titles at the California International Marathon here this morning. Hall, 34, bounced back from a 2:27:21 personal best performance at the BMW Frankfurt Marathon five weeks ago, to run away from the field here in 2:28:10, the second fastest winning time in the 35-year history of the race. Ritchie, 30, scored a come-from-behind win in a tactical race, running a career best 2:11:55 and winning his first-ever national title at any distance. Both athletes earned \$20,000 in prize money plus time bonuses.

HALL GOES IT ALONE

Hall immediately made her intentions known from the 7:00 a.m. start at Folsom Dam, scooting away from the field in the early kilometers. Aided by the downhill in the opening stages of the race, Hall hit the 10-K mark alone in 34:44, one minute and 12 seconds ahead of her nearest chasers. Hall said she felt comfortable and had the course record of 2:27:33 on her mind.

"I just wanted to run the right pace for me," Hall told Race Results Weekly. "I thought, maybe I could get the course record if everything went well. I wanted to put myself in a position to do that."

Hall was still under course record pace at the halfway mark (1:13:38), but only just. She had the race well in hand (her lead had swelled to two and a half minutes), so she continued to focus on the record. But, by the time she got to the 20 mile mark (1:52:37) the arithmetic was against her. She'd need to run the last 10 kilometers in 34:56, and that wasn't possible. With the course record out the window, she shifted her thinking to what really matters at a national championships: winning.

"I'm really pleased with how I ran," Hall observed. "I wouldn't have been able to lead gun to wire in a marathon a couple of years ago. So, I feel like that was, for me, what I needed to get out of this race, just continuing to work on running it different ways."

With her victory, Hall becomes the first American to win USA road running titles at both the mile (2011) and the marathon, showing her unusual range.

"I tried to follow what I was passionate about at the time," Hall explained. She continued: "It's really fun to feel rejuvenated in my career. I think this is my favorite year so far."

Behind Hall, 39 year-old Roberta Groner of Randolph, N.J., had a breakthrough race, dropping her personal best by six minutes to 2:30:38. Third place went to another veteran, Carrie Dimoff, 34, of Portland, Ore., who also landed a personal best of 2:30:54. Samantha Bluske, 26, of Toledo, Ohio, was fourth in 2:31:56 PB, and Kaitlin Goodman,

30, of Providence, R.I., 2:32:08 PB, rounded out the top-5. Goodman grew up in nearby Davis, Calif.

Remarkably, 13 women finished under 2:37:00, the "A" qualifying standard for the 2020 USA Olympic Team Trials Marathon, while another 37 ran under 2:45:00, the "B" standard. All "A" standard athletes were given a \$1500 bonus in addition to their prize money, while the "B" qualifiers received \$500.

RITCHIE TAKES PATIENT APPROACH

Unlike Hall, Ritchie did not seek the lead in the early stages of the race. Instead, he stayed at the back of the main pack while marathon debutante, Parker Stinson of Boulder, Colo., forged his own path up the road. Stinson, 25, wearing a black fleece hat pulled low and black gloves to ward off the early morning chill, pushed through the first mile in 4:56, and the second mile in 4:53, leaving the rest of the field well behind. His lead grew with every stride. He hit 10-K in 30:26, halfway in 1:04:41, and put a minute and 22 seconds ahead of his nearest chaser, Jon Grey of Louisville, Colo., and more than two minutes ahead of Ritchie and the main field.

Stinson said that his pace felt comfortable, especially because he had just come down from altitude. He admitted that it might have felt too comfortable.

"Sometimes when you come down from altitude that's the way of it, though," Stinson told Race Results Weekly. "I felt so good, I felt so good breathing, felt so comfortable."

Ritchie couldn't see Stinson, but could see Grey up the road. Nonetheless, he wasn't focused on either one of them. He was just trying to stay within himself and run his own pace.

"Honestly, for the first 20 miles I was only thinking of myself," Ritchie told Race Results Weekly. "It was just like, try to stick to my game plan. I've had some rough last 10-K's in my last two marathons, but I wanted to be patient and get to 20 miles knowing I had more to give."

By mile 18, Stinson had slowed to a 5:08 mile pace, and Grey was making up ground. At the 19-mile mark, just past 30-K, Grey was 44 seconds behind Stinson. But like in a bicycle race, the main pack had awakened and they were just nine seconds down on Grey and closing fast. Grey was quickly overtaken, and later admitted that he probably committed too early to catching Stinson. He would fade to 45th place at the finish in 2:20:08.

"I committed," Grey told Race Results Weekly. "For better or worse, my coach and I agreed, that I'm the type of person where I'm a committer. I'm not going to back down. I knew Parker at some point was probably going to come back. Yes, he eventually did, but I didn't get to reap the rewards of that."

In the 22nd mile, disaster struck for Stinson. He got a serious pain on the right side of his abdomen, and was forced to stop. He tried to rub it out and was able to resume running, but he knew his chances for a good result today were over.

"My legs started to catch up to me," Stinson said. "My legs started to get really tight." He continued: "Around mile 14 my right calf got really tight. I tried to ride it out, but it kept getting worse and worse. At 20 or 21, I got this really bad ab pain for a second. I had to stop and walk for maybe 20 or 30 seconds. There was barely anything I could do. I just wanted to finish at that point."

Ritchie, with Tyler McCandless of Boulder, Colo., and Kiya Dandena of Flagstaff, Ariz., shot past the struggling Stinson at about the 23 mile mark, then Ritchie stepped on the gas to try to put away McCandless. He split 4:51 for mile 24 to take control of the race.

"At 20, 21 where the race really started to happen, I just put my head down and made it happen," Ritchie said. "I had to do something to really break it open. You know, you make those moves and you don't know if you can do it again for 25 or 26, but you've just got to trust that you'll find the strength when the time comes."

Ritchie strode confidently to the finish line in Downtown Sacramento, punching the finish tape with his right hand as he broke it. His time of 2:11:55 was a nearly three-minute improvement over his previous best (2:14:50). McCandless got second in 2:12:28 and Dandena got third in 2:12:56, both personal bests. Fourth place went to Anthony Costales, 29, of Salt Lake City, Utah, in 2:13:13, and fifth place went to Samuel Kosgei, 33, of Colorado Springs, Colo., in 2:13:25. Stinson finished 31st in 2:18:07.

As in the women's race, there were 2020 Olympic Trials qualifiers in spades. Ten men broke the "A" standard of 2:15:00, while another 27 got under the "B" standard of 2:19:00.

While the California International Marathon has a gently downhill course which is not eligible for record-setting (it drops by 2.45 meters per kilometer, two and one-half times what is allowable for record-setting), it was probably the near-perfect weather which contributed most to today's performances. It was 44F/7C at the start, warming up to about 55F/13C at the finish with no wind and low humidity.

"It was immaculate conditions," remarked Stephanie Bruce the 10th place finisher from last month's TCS New York City Marathon.